

**“TRANSITION, OPPOSITION AND ENGAGEMENT IN THE  
CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVES OF CENTRAL AMERICAN  
FEMINIST AND REVOLUTIONARY WOMEN”**

by

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## Acronyms

|                   |                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>AFG:</b>       | Alianza Femenina Guatemalteca (Guatemalan Feminine Alliance).                                                                                                                                |
| <b>AMNLAE:</b>    | Asociacion de Mujeres Nicaraguenses “Luisa Amanda Espinoza” (Association of Nicaraguan Women).                                                                                               |
| <b>AMES:</b>      | Asociacion de Mujeres de El Salvador (Salvadoran Women Association).                                                                                                                         |
| <b>AMIS:</b>      | Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas Salvadoreñas (Association of Indigenous Women).                                                                                                              |
| <b>AMPES:</b>     | Asociacion de Mujeres Progresistas de El Salvador (Association of Progressive Women of El Salvador).                                                                                         |
| <b>AMPRONAC:</b>  | Asociacion de Mujeres ante la Problematica Nacional (Association of Women confronting the National Problem, Nicaragua).                                                                      |
| <b>ARENA:</b>     | Alianza Republicana Nacionalista (National Republican Alliance, El Salvador).                                                                                                                |
| <b>BPR:</b>       | Bloque Popular Revolucionario (Revolutionary Popular Bloc, El Salvador).                                                                                                                     |
| <b>CEMUJER:</b>   | Centro de Estudios de la Mujer “Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera” (Center for Women’s Studies Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera).                                                           |
| <b>CEPAD:</b>     | Consejo de Iglesias Evangélicas Pro Alianza Denominacional (Evangelical Committee for Aid and Development, Nicaragua).                                                                       |
| <b>COAMUGUA:</b>  | Coordinadora de Agrupaciones de Mujeres Guatemalteca (Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Women Groups).                                                                                    |
| <b>CODEFAM:</b>   | Comité de Familiares de Víctimas de las Violaciones de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador (Support Committee of Families for Political Prisoners and the Disappeared of El Salvador).           |
| <b>COMADRES:</b>  | Comité de Madres de Reos y Desaparecidos Políticos de El Salvador Monseñor Romero (Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated of El Salvador). |
| <b>COMAFAC:</b>   | Comite de Madres y Familiares Cristianos de Presos, Desaparecidos y Asesinados (Christian Committee of Mothers and Families of Prisoners, Disappeared and Murdered, El Salvador).            |
| <b>CONAMUS:</b>   | Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (National Coordinating Committee of Salvadoran Women)                                                                                          |
| <b>CONAVIGUA:</b> | Coordinadora Nacional de Viudas de Guatemala (National Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan widows).                                                                                         |
| <b>CUC:</b>       | Comite de Unidad Campesina (Committee for Peasant Unit, Guatemala)                                                                                                                           |
| <b>CUMS:</b>      | Comite Unitario de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Unified Committee of Salvadoran Women)                                                                                                              |
| <b>DRU:</b>       | Direccion Revolucionaria Unificada (Unified Revolutionary Directorate, El Salvador)                                                                                                          |
| <b>EGP:</b>       | Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor , Guatemala)                                                                                                                  |
| <b>EPS:</b>       | Ejercito Popular Sandinista (Sandinista Popular Army, Nicaragua)                                                                                                                             |
| <b>ERP:</b>       | Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo (Revolutionary Army of the People, El Salvador)                                                                                                           |
| <b>FAL:</b>       | Fuerzas Armadas de Liberacion (Armed Forces of Liberation, El Salvador)                                                                                                                      |
| <b>FAPU:</b>      | Frente de Accion Popular Unificada (Unified Popular Action Front, El Salvador)                                                                                                               |
| <b>FAR:</b>       | Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (Rebel Armed Forces, Guatemala)                                                                                                                                     |

|                       |                                                                                                                                                                       |
|-----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>FARN:</b>          | Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional (Armed Forces of National Resistance, El Salvador)                                                                         |
| <b>FECCAS:</b>        | Federacion Campesina Cristiana de El Salvador (Federation of Christian peasants of El Salvador)                                                                       |
| <b>FENASTRAS:</b>     | Federacion Nacional de Trabajadores Salvadoreños (Salvadoran National Federation of Salvadoran Workers).                                                              |
| <b>Co-FENASTRAS:</b>  | Comite Femenino de FENASTRAS (Women's Committee of FENASTRAS)                                                                                                         |
| <b>FLP:</b>           | Fuerzas Populares de Liberacion (Popular Forces of Liberation, El Salvador)                                                                                           |
| <b>FMLN:</b>          | Frente Farabundo Marti para la Liberacion Nacional (Farabundo Marti National Liberation Front, El Salvador).                                                          |
| <b>FPL:</b>           | Frente Popular Libertador (Popular Libertarian Front, Guatemala).                                                                                                     |
| <b>FSLN:</b>          | Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front, Nicaragua).                                                                           |
| <b>GGM:</b>           | Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres (Guatemalan Group of Women).                                                                                                            |
| <b>GRUPEPROMEFAM:</b> | Grupo femenino pro mejoramiento familiar (Women's Group for the Betterment of Family Life).                                                                           |
| <b>MUES:</b>          | Mujeres Universitarias de El Salvador (United Women of the University of El Salvador).                                                                                |
| <b>LAS DIGNAS:</b>    | Asociacion de Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida (Association of Women for Dignity and Life, El Salvador).                                                             |
| <b>LAS MELIDAS</b>    | Movimiento de Mujeres Melida Anaya Montes (Womens Movement Melida Anaya Montes).                                                                                      |
| <b>LESBIRADAS:</b>    | Colectiva de Lesbianas Liberadas (Collective of Liberated Lesbians, Guatemala).                                                                                       |
| <b>ONUSAL:</b>        | Mision de Observadores de las Naciones Unidas en El Salvador (United Nations Observer Mission in El Salvador).                                                        |
| <b>ORDEN:</b>         | Organización Democrática Nacionalista (National Democratic Organization, El Salvador).                                                                                |
| <b>ORPA:</b>          | Organizacion Revolucionaria del Pueblo en Armas (Revolutionary Organization of Armed Citizens, Guatemala).                                                            |
| <b>PCN:</b>           | Partido de Conciliacion Nacional (Party of National Conciliation, El Salvador).                                                                                       |
| <b>PCS:</b>           | Partido Comunista Salvadoreño (Salvadoran Communist Party).                                                                                                           |
| <b>PGT:</b>           | Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (Guatemalan Labor Party).                                                                                                            |
| <b>PRS:</b>           | Partido de la Revolucion Salvadoreña (Salvadoran Revolution Party).                                                                                                   |
| <b>PRTC:</b>          | Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos                                                                                                           |
| <b>PRUD:</b>          | Partido Revolucionario de Unificacion Democratica (Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification, El Salvador).<br>(Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers). |
| <b>UMS:</b>           | Union de Mujeres Salvadoreñas (Salvadoran Women Union).                                                                                                               |
| <b>UNSITRAGUA:</b>    | Union Sindical de Trabajadores de Guatemala (Union of Labour and Popular Action, Guatemala).                                                                          |
| <b>UNO:</b>           | Union Nacional Opositora (National Opposition Union, El Salvador).                                                                                                    |
| <b>URNG:</b>          | Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit).                                                                                 |

**Abstract**

Second wave feminism in Central America has been directly connected with the participation of thousands of women in the revolutionary wars of the 1980s in El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. After these wars ebbed away, former combatant women's involvement as radical feminist activists took on new forms sometimes in conflict with previous revolutionary roles and identifications. Seemingly, these women had to re-define their identities going from "combatants" to "feminists" to "NGO activists" in less than ten years. Though it is expected that radical activisms change in post-conflict societies, there is little knowledge concerning how these women "reconstructed" their identities in order to reconcile the conflictual demands of these different roles. The objective of this study is to explore how Central American feminists –and former revolutionaries- from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, make sense of their identity by exploring instances of *identity transition* in their lives, as well as looking at how they "construct" a sense of 'who they are' through their personal narratives. On one side, this study aims to look at how these women dealt with identity transition; but also, how these transitions eventually informed ideas of opposition and engagement to the state and their revolutionary organizations. In addition, the study identifies those instances of transition that have yielded identity change. This research draws upon narrative psychology and narrative analysis as a way of looking at the process of change. Though the study is concerned with exploring and analyzing individual stories, it positions itself in the intersection between individual and group meaning creation by identifying 'inter-subjective meanings' that emerge from these women's life story narratives. Methodologically speaking, it relies upon methods used to analyze narratives drawn from narratology, socio-linguistics, philosophy and life course research. These methods yield results that are not frequently seen in studies concerning revolutionary women. One of the most conclusive results of this study is that almost all the women interviewed constructed the feminist life period as a progressive narrative. Another contribution expands on Karen Kampwirth's idea of "family traditions of dissidence" and looks at how particular family constellations regarding mother-daughter relations may influence a daughter's decision to join a dissident movement. Finally, another result pertains a connection between feminist activism and psychological resilience. The relevance of this project is that it attempts to shed light in the construction of radical identities in Central America, and in addition, it has implications for peace-building processes as well as the strengthening of women's leadership in post-conflict societies.

*"Narrative is present in myth, legend, fable, tale, novella, epic, history, tragedy, drama, comedy, mime, painting ... stained glass windows, cinema, comics, news items, conversation . Moreover, under this almost infinite diversity of forms, narrative is present in every age, in every place, in every society; it begins with the very history of human mankind and there nowhere is nor has been a people without narrative... narrative is international, transhistorical, transcultural: it is simply there, like life itself"*  
(Roland Barthes, 1993)

*"We have wanted to show this struggle through a woman and the woman through this struggle"*  
(Margaret Randall, 1977)

*„The book was for me like an ephiphany... the title, „Born Female“, resonated and gave me a coherent answer: I wasn't crazy. The problem was not mine. The problem was collective...I realized that my mother went through the same; her mom did it to her, now she does it to me..., and there goes the chain... "*  
(S. from Nicaragua, 2008)

## 1. Introduction

In October 2008, a protest carried out by Nicaraguan feminists against the Sandinista President of Nicaragua reached international news. The case raised concerns throughout Latin America and caught world-wide reader's attention. For those familiar with the history of Nicaragua, the opposing parties portrayed in the story seemed unlike enemies... in fact, not so long ago, they were allies in the revolutionary quest for a better, more egalitarian Nicaragua. Now, their positions reflected deeply felt divisions that had deep implications for Nicaraguan women's citizenship rights. In an article called "President Ortega vs. The Feminists", 'TIME World' presented the feud as follows:

"President Daniel Ortega, Nicaragua's macho and mustachioed Sandinista commandante of the 1970s and '80s, may claim the mantle of revolutionary "new man," but Latin America's feminists insist Ortega is a dirty old man. Throughout the continent, Ortega is being hounded by feminist groups over his alleged sexual abuse of stepdaughter Zoilamerica Narvaez during the 1980s. The allegation first surfaced in 1998, but was eventually dismissed by a Sandinista judge without investigation or trial — despite an investigation by the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights, which determined that the case had merit. In most democracies, the furor would have been enough to sink any political career. But not in Nicaragua, where Ortega — protected by legal immunity and a judicial system stacked with Sandinista judges — has not only survived but thrived, returning to the presidency in 2007 and amassing more power than ever before. But now that Ortega is trying to reclaim his place in the international pantheon of revolutionary heroes, the feminists are crying foul. Unable to pursue him through Nicaragua's legal system, they are instead subjecting the Sandinista leader to the tribunal of public opinion. Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo, who has long been accused by feminists of being a silent accomplice in her daughter's alleged abuse, are fighting back with a Sandinista inquisition.

Ortega has used all his tentacles — Sandinista media outlets, government ministries and fanatical party structures — to investigate, slander and harass Nicaragua's feminist movement, which is being informally accused of everything from money laundering and conspiring with the CIA, to "illegally" promoting abortion, pornography and "assassinating children". Now the Sandinista inquisition is escalating from threats to actions. Last Friday, state prosecutors and police raided the central office of the Autonomous Women's Movement (MAM) and another local NGO that has helped finance the feminist movement and removed all the files, computers and bookkeeping from their offices. The local opposition press denounced the raid as a "Gestapo" tactic, and women's rights activists from across Latin America released a joint statement from Guatemala denouncing the Ortega government's "institutionalized misogyny" and his "campaign to criminalize feminists".

"The case of Nicaragua has become super emblematic in Latin America because there was a revolution here and it was supposed to bring social change" a feminist leader said. "If this was Pinochet's Chile, no one would expect differently, but with Ortega, it's doubly hard."<sup>1</sup>

Undoubtedly, Nicaraguan feminists expected a different treatment from Sandinistas; after all, many of the women who called themselves 'feminists' in 2008 had been their 'Sandinista' comrades in the 1980s. The case of Zoilamerica Narvaez is paradigmatic of the deep-seated differences that surfaced between feminist women who fought for revolutionary change in the past, and the former revolutionaries and Sandinista party of the present. As a response to those differences, most Nicaraguan feminists established political autonomy and distanced themselves from their political past as revolutionary Sandinistas, while the Sandinistas launched what has been defined as an 'antifeminist campaign'. According to Kampwirth (2008, p. 2) "The emergence of Nicaraguan antifeminism can be explained in terms of both domestic and global politics. From a domestic perspective, the movement is a reaction against the Sandinista revolution, especially against its mobilization of women and young people, and against the feminist movement that was an indirect consequence of the revolution". Thus, current antifeminist trends can be considered a paradoxical reaction from Nicaraguan Sandinistas against the women who in the 1970s joined them in their transformational project and had the same aspirations that led them to power in the first place. More interestingly, this was not just a local phenomenon, but I would argue, a regional one, as women from El Salvador and Guatemala<sup>2</sup> experienced similar (though not so extreme) processes in their guerrilla organizations turned now political parties, as they went from former revolutionaries to feminists in the last twenty years.

<sup>1</sup> From the article „President Ortega vs. the Feminists“ published in TIME Online on October 15, 2008. Downloaded from: <http://www.time.com/time/world/article/0,8599,1850451,00.html> on October 19, 2011

<sup>2</sup> See Luciak (2001) and Smith-Nonini (2010)

This study is concerned with the life stories of these women. More concretely, with *transition* experiences and with *identity transition* in the lives of these women. As the 'Ortega protest' showcased above suggests, transition from seeing and presenting oneself as a revolutionary and later, as a feminist is not a conflict-free exercise in Central America, but rather –it could be argued- a very difficult and challenging one, particularly when this process may involve conflict at the internal and external levels, as it may imply confronting members of a group where one has derived a sense of belonging, and a particular social identity.

Thus, the objective of this study is to conceptualize how Central American feminists from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, make sense of their identity or perhaps, conflicting identities by exploring instances of *identity transition* in their lives and how they “construct” a sense of ‘who they are’ through their discourse. On one side, this study aims at looking how Central American former revolutionaries and feminists have dealt with identity transition; but also, how these transitions have informed ideas of opposition and engagement to the state and to their revolutionary organizations, as they have carried on with their activisms. In addition, the study attempts to identify what are those instances of transition (for the purposes of this research, these are considered ‘turning points’) that have yielded identity change. The study takes on a comparative perspective highlighting similarities and differences across the constructed experiences of the women from these three countries.

This research project takes a particular standpoint in the exploration of identity transition, by drawing upon narrative psychology and narrative analysis as a way of looking at this process of change. Briefly put “narrative psychology” refers to a viewpoint within psychology interested in the “storied nature of human conduct” (Sarbin, 1986), which focuses on how human beings deal with experience by both constructing and listening to stories. From this perspective, narratives (the stories told by ourselves and others) are not just ways of seeing the world, but they in fact construct the world –as we perceive it- and it is through these stories that we create a sense of continuity in our lives. In addition, narratives bring order to the constant changing flux of our experiences, by giving meaning and self-defining our actions and ultimately, who we are (Ricoeur, 1984; Murray in Smith, 2003).

Though this project is concerned with exploring and analyzing individual stories, it positions itself in the intersection between individual and group meaning creation by unveiling the ‘collective out of the individual story’ identifying those ‘inter-subjective

meanings' that emerge from the women's life story narratives. Ultimately, this study is concerned with the relations and interactions between the construction of narrative identity on one side, and participation in revolutionary movements as well as involvement in feminist action as a transformational force, on the other.

Methodologically speaking, the study draws upon a series of methods that have been used to analyze narratives coming from different academic traditions; ranging from narratology (with methods such as 'analysis of plot development' and 'storied themes'); socio-linguistics ('actantial analysis'), to philosophy ('deconstruction') and life course research ('life story charts'). These will be explained in more detail in the Methodology chapter.

The following sub-section introduces background elements and positions the experiences of revolutionary and feminist women in the larger context of Central American revolutionary processes.

### **1.1- Background of this Research Project**

The emergence of Second wave feminist movements in Central America cannot be understood without looking at the influence of the socio-historical context in which they emerged and evolved, namely, the revolutionary periods between 1960-1980 in which armed leftist organizations attempted to seize power in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, challenging a socio-economic and political status quo established since the late 1920s.

More concretely, feminism in Central America has been directly connected with the involvement of thousands of women in the revolutionary experience of El Salvador, Nicaragua, and Guatemala. It has been argued that their participation in revolution and social unrest became intertwined with the development of a particular type of feminism (see: Kampwirth, 2002; Golden, 1991; Luciak, 2001; Stephen, 1997). According to Karen Kampwirth (2004:7) "The vast majority of the leaders of the feminist organizations of the nineties were active in the revolutionary struggles of the seventies and eighties...Central American feminists were created by decades of armed and unarmed social struggle for reasons that had to do little with gender interests. In general, the reasons women gave for joining the Guerrilla struggle were similar to those given by men: to end dictatorship, to end exploitation of the poor or indigenous, or to create more just countries for their children." But as peace agreements from Guatemala and El Salvador acknowledged the disadvantaged

position of former combatant women (Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready; 2000) peace negotiations and the support of the international community provided conditions for the creation of women organizations aimed at vindicating women's rights, and many of these organizations soon embraced the label of "feminist". As a consequence, large groups of poor women in Central America redefined their identities and re-wrote their stories in the context of their national discourses by going from "combatants" to "feminists" to "NGO activists" in less than ten years. Due to structural conditionings (economic, political and social), feminist organizations that emerged in the late 1980s continued in the 1990s to re-define their roles and strategies in order to cope with an increasingly hostile atmosphere and assure their existence. Therefore, it can be argued that after the revolutions ended, women's involvement as radical activists took on new forms and mechanisms, sometimes in conflict with previous roles and identifications. Though it is evident that mechanisms and roles for radical women had to change in post-conflict societies, it is not known how these women "reconstructed" their identities in order to subscribe to some of these possibly conflictual subject positions in which they found themselves located.

An academic interest on the experiences of Latin American women who have joined revolutionary organizations has produced an enriching literature that draws from political science, sociology, anthropology, social psychology, feminist and cultural studies which attempts to shed light on the experiences of thousands of women who joined radical social and political movements in Central American countries such as Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua during the 1970s and 1980s. Bringing women's subjective positions to the forefront of the study of revolution and social transformation in this region has contributed to the flourishing of large amounts of literature focused on testimonials, personal accounts and biographies of ordinary women who became political activists, combatants and revolutionaries<sup>3</sup>. These testimonials rescue the individual experiences of Central American women out of the "grand-narrative" of revolution and highlight the uniqueness and particularity of the different moments and circumstances that shaped how women went

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<sup>3</sup> Among the many examples of this kind of literature are: "The Hour of the Poor, the Hour of Women: "Women and Revolution in Nicaragua" by Hellen Collinson (Ed.) (1990); "Guatemalan Women Speak" by Margaret Hooks (1991); " "They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation" by Claribel Alegria (1983); "From Grandmother to Granddaughter: Salvadoran Women Stories" by Mike Gorkin et al. (2000); "My Name is Rigoberta Menchu and this is how my conscience was born" by Elizabeth Burgos (1994).

about organizing and becoming politically active, and, in some instances, radical revolutionary militants.

Furthermore, a group of social scientists interested in the case of Central American revolutionary women (Stephen, 1997; Kampwirth, 2004; Luciak, 2001) have argued that their radical activisms cannot be fully understood without looking at the specific historical contexts in which these women situated their activism; and in these contexts, it is through their grassroots actions which take on formal/informal; engaging/oppositional forms that these women try to transcend such dichotomies. Their stories, shared in the form of 'testimonials', challenge meta-explanations and visions of identity that cannot account for the diversity and the complexities of their subjective positions (Stephen, 1997).

Traditionally, these revolutionary women's testimonials have served the purpose of illustrating how macro-social phenomena –such as oppression or revolution- are experienced by marginalized individuals or groups of women whose lives are transformed by these processes, and how these have informed their activisms. Many of these testimonials are presented as stories that stand on their own, in which further analysis of the life stories is not provided. In other cases, the researcher offers her/his view and interpretation of the testimonial, for the most part from a sociological or political science standpoint, as a way of unmasking unknown aspects of macro social phenomena. For the most part, these testimonials are concerned with the revolutionary experiences of these women's lives, or in some cases, with instances of transition from the pre-revolutionary to their revolutionary periods. When post-revolutionary periods are discussed, it is mostly to make a point concerning macro social processes in the region such as democratization or the impact of neoliberal trends. An exception is of course, the story of 'unique individuals' like poet and writer Gioconda Belli<sup>4</sup> or former Sandinista 'comandante' Doris Tijerino<sup>5</sup>, who inform us about exceptional qualities such as courage and passion in the face of adversity, or perhaps, in the search for adversity.

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<sup>4</sup> Gioconda Belli is an internationally acclaimed Nicaraguan poet and writer who, despite her upper class background joined the Sandinista cause. She has written in her memoir „The Country Under My Skin“ (2002) about her personal saga and how these revolutionary experiences shaped her sense of self.

<sup>5</sup> Doris Tijerino is one of the earliest women to participate in the Sandinista struggle, and also widely known as a courageous military commander. Margaret Randall (1978) wrote about her life story in a book called “Doris Tijerino: Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution“.

## 1.2-Focus of the Study

Psychologists studying narratives are challenged by the notion that human activity and experience are filled with "meaning" and that life stories, rather than logical arguments or lawful formulations, are the vehicle by which that meaning is communicated. This dichotomy is expressed by Jerome S. Bruner (1986; 1990; 1991) as a distinction between 'paradigmatic' and 'narrative' forms of thought, which, he claims, are both fundamental and irreducible one to the other (Bruner, 1986, p. 11)<sup>6</sup>. Whereas, the paradigmatic mode is associated with the development of models, as in positivist science, the narrative one, is regarded as biological and implies a preordered ability innate to all humans. Bruner considers that narrative provides a cultural form of social stability, and it is in the act of narrating that humans construct social realities through language and the use of other signs, which Bruner calls "semiotic needs" (1990, p. 68). Paraphrasing Saari (1991, p. 43), it can be argued that through narrative construction it is possible to create a "tapestry of meanings" that rely on episodes involving plots, goals, scenes and characters which are complexly interrelated and developed. From this perspective, narratives can convey a much more extensive body of information and make explicit connections between various dissimilar elements in a way that is not possible by hierarchies. Thus, experiencing the self as a well-functioning unit is highly dependent upon the ability of the individual to construct an integrated and coherent self-narrative, which is called identity.

This study is concerned with the above mentioned narrative constructions; and just as the previously mentioned researches and testimonials, this project is also focused in the life stories of Central American 'revolucionarias' turned feminists, but it attempts to take a step further from the existing literature in the subject, which tends to be either focused on macro-social phenomena or in the singularity of 'unique cases'. In this study, the idea is to explore how these revolutionaries turned feminists have come to self-knowledge and self-understand their experiences of transition, opposition and engagement in the process of constructing a life story narrative. From this perspective, the project looks at the women's self-reflexivity and meaning creation concerning both identity and identity transition. In addition, it is interested in exploring the women's personal understandings of how change has taken place in their lives and under what circumstances they experienced it, by looking at significant 'turning points' that shaped and re-oriented their lives in unexpected directions. In addition, this study is concerned with looking at how culture –in the broader

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<sup>6</sup> Retrieved from <http://web.lemoyne.edu/~hevern/nr-basic.html> on April 26, 2006.

sense- is integrated into the women's own sense of identity, by looking at 'inter-subjective meanings' shared by the participants in this study.

I argue that, despite the fact that the prevailing literature concerning revolutionary and feminist women in Central America offers us a window to their experiences, it tends to fall short in analyzing self-reflexivity and meaning creation in radical women, which is a gap in the existing literature in the field<sup>7</sup>. An additional contribution is that this study uses narrative analytical methodologies as a framework from which to unveil the meanings from these life stories, which, to my knowledge, have not been applied by any other researcher in the broad field of 'gender and revolution in Central America'. These methods pursue a deeper understanding of how transition is constructed, by looking at complexity, conflict, underlying meanings and the different forces involved in processes of transition.

Informed by this narrative standpoint, the main question that has guided this study is:

How did feminist and revolutionary women from Central America experience the process of radical identity transition as they perform new forms of activism in their post conflict societies, and in which way was their radicalization linked to the national contexts in the cases of women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala?

And the subordinate questions are:

- a. How are current notions of 'opposition' and 'engagement' sustained by radical feminist women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, given the existence of contradictory meanings that date back from their revolutionary periods? And, are there any similarities and differences concerning how this process takes place across women from the different countries?
- b. What are the key turning points that influenced the process of political radicalization in the lives of revolutionary and feminist Central American women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and are there any similarities and differences concerning the factors that influenced these turning points across women from the different countries?

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<sup>7</sup> Although, recent or upcoming publications reflect a growing interest in the exploration of subjectivity and emotion in the protagonists of revolutions. For examples, see: Reed, Jean-Pierre. (2004) „Emotions in context: Revolutionary accelerators, hope, moral outrage, and other emotions in the making of Nicaragua's revolution“; Kruijt, D. (2008) „Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America“ and Reed, Jean Pierre: „A Content Analysis of Emotional Engagement for Revolution“ (Article MS) and „Sandinista Narratives: Culture, Ideology, and Revolutionary events in the Making of Insurgent Actors“. (Book MS). Furthermore, the contributions of the field „Sociology of Emotions“ in social movement research has been advanced by publications such as: „Passionate Politics“ (2001) edited by Goodwin, Jasper and Polletta and the special issue of the International Journal of Social Movements, *Mobilization* (2002) edited by Aminzade and McAdam (Flam and King, 2005, p. 2).

In addition to answering these questions by drawing upon data from the life stories of all the women interviewed, in the discussion section, a comparison across countries is presented. In this comparison, the objective is to make explicit similarities and differences across women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, based on the exploration of aspects that pertain the specific cultures and contexts of these countries.

The relevance of this project is that it attempts to shed light in the psychological construction of a radical identity in Central America. In her book, “Women and Guerrilla Movements. El Salvador, Nicaragua, Chiapas”, Karen Kampwirth (2002) addresses the question of what kind of women joined revolutionary movements, acknowledging that structural factors touched many women, but it is in the ‘personal factors’ where the explanation of why some women joined revolutionary organizations, whereas others did not, ultimately lies (Kampwirth, 2002, p. 10f) and even though this author refers to personal factors such as accidents of birth; early childhood experiences of resistance to authority; social networks that became politicized, and year of birth, these factors are presented as information that is the result of data aggregation, depleted from the narrative meanings that ultimately defined their transformative potential.

I argue that the ‘academic’ narrative account of revolutionary and feminist women in Central America is an incomplete one without the exploration of these narrative meanings, and that it is not possible to fully tell a story of dissidence and radicalism without addressing them, and unveiling how these ‘personal factors’, as Kampwirth calls them, are woven and interconnected with a broader cultural discourse. The challenge of this project is to finally bridge these ‘personal’ and ‘social’ factors through the study of these life story narratives, in order to understand how revolutionary and feminist women made sense of significant transitions and managed to maintain a ‘coherent–self narrative’ that continues to define themselves –and possibly their feminist movements- to this day.

Furthermore, I believe that women’s narratives talk to other women; and that circulating stories where veteran feminists are able to explore and disentangle the past from the present, can generate a deeper, richer understanding of the experiences that defined a generation of dissidence that to this day continues to have a significant impact in young women that come from a region that desperately needs –at times radical- women’s activisms and women’s dissidence.

Concerning the focus of this study, it is also important to establish here what is the scope of this research, and what is beyond it, as this delimitates the choices pertaining the literature from which I have drawn as well as the methods selected for narrative analysis.

Thus, this project is concerned with the study of narrative identities of Central American revolutionary women turned feminists, as well as the process defined here as 'narrative identity' transition. In order to do so, this research explores and analyzes life story narratives of a group of participants in order to identify and unveil inter-subjective meanings that have influenced instances of transition in their lives. Particularly important for this purpose is to identify key 'turning points' that the women have undergone and understand how these have shaped their life directions. In addition, this research is concerned with the narrative constructions of opposition and engagement to the state and revolutionary organizations. Furthermore, the analysis of the narratives has unveiled experiences and instances of trauma in these women's lives, as well as ideas concerning healing and recovery during the post war period. Ultimately, the narrative methods used attempt to uncover deeper meanings concerning both revolutionary and feminist affiliations in these women's lives.

This study is not concerned and I will not be looking at mobilization strategies and processes used for guerrilla organizations in order to recruit women into the guerrillas<sup>8</sup>; or combat reaction and post-traumatic stress<sup>9</sup>; or post-war reconstruction in Central America<sup>10</sup>. It will also not look at the outcomes of revolution in terms of democratization and gendered politics in the region<sup>11</sup>; or current women's activism in the Central American region<sup>12</sup>; or post-war disillusionment in former revolutionaries<sup>13</sup>; or the political leftist turn and gender politics in Central America<sup>14</sup>; or threats against feminists, ranging from antifeminist politics to femicide<sup>15</sup>. Though many of these topics directly address revolutionary and feminist

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<sup>8</sup> For more on this topic, see: Jocelyn Viterna's article „Pulled, Pushed, and Persuaded: Explaining Women's Mobilization into the Salvadoran Guerrilla Army“ (2006).

<sup>9</sup> For more on this topic see: „Stress of War, Conflict and Disaster“, Edited by George Fink (2010).

<sup>10</sup> For more on this topic, see: „Post-War Reconstruction in Central America: Lessons from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua“ by Ardon, translated by Eade (1999).

<sup>11</sup> For more on this topic, see: „Democratization, Women's Movements, and Gender-Equitable States: A Framework for Comparison“ by Viterna and Fallon (2008).

<sup>12</sup> For more on this topic see: „Women's Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean. Engendering Social Justice. Democratizing Citizenship“. Eds. Maier and Lebon (2010) and „Women in El Salvador: Continuing the Struggle“ by Silber and Viterna (2009).

<sup>13</sup> For more on this topic see: „Everyday Revolutionaries. Gender, Violence and Disillusionment in Post War El Salvador by Silber (2011).

<sup>14</sup> For more on this topic see: „Gender and Populism in Latin America. Passionate Politics“ Edited by Karen Kampwirth (2010) and „Latin American New Left and The Politics of Gender. Lessons from Nicaragua“ by Karen Kampwirth (2011).

women's lives, ultimately they all carry the intention to contribute or inform broader social phenomena that is beyond the study of narrative identity.

The following sub-section describes in detail both the way in which this research project has been conceptualized, including the methods used to answer the questions defined above, as well as how the chapters of this dissertation are organized.

### **1.3-Research Design and Organization of Chapters**

In theoretical terms, this research project is informed by a postmodern and narrative turn in social sciences, drawing from the 'narrative psychology paradigm' and from 'life course research', placing attention to the study of life 'turning points'. In this sense, this research aims at exploring how a 'narrative identity' is constructed while undergoing life transitions. As post-modernists posit the self within the construct of language and discourse, identity is regarded as being conditioned by language, and thus, fluid. Thus, for postmodern psychologists, identity becomes a way of talking about the self and a fluctuating and fluid discursive force (Goodson and Gill, 2011, pp. 8f). Though this study does not go as far as equating identity with just a way of talking about oneself, it does acknowledge and is concerned with the narrative and performative qualities of identity.

In addition, this study situates the exploration of narrative identities in a socio-historical context, by looking at the evolution of revolutionary movements in Central America as well as the history of feminist organizing in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. It also informs the reader about the most influential theories of identity in psychology, in order to locate the narrative turn in the broader discourse of the field. Finally, it presents a discussion on the literature of revolutionary women testimonials, as well as how meaning creation takes place after traumatic experiences.

The historical overview, as well as the discussion concerning theories of identity, with a particular focus on narrative identity and the impact of trauma in life stories are presented in Chapter Two.

In methodological terms, this study represents an exploratory, inductive and empirical qualitative approach. It relies on the analysis of life stories by using combined methods of narrative analysis. The data collection method used is the 'Life Story interview',

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<sup>15</sup> For more on Antifeminism, see article: „Abortion, Antifeminism, and the Return of Daniel Ortega In Nicaraguan Leftist Politics?“ by Karen Kampwirth (2008); or on Femicide, see chapter: „No More Killings! Women Respond to Femicide“ by Carron, Thompson and McDonald (2007).

considered a form of unstructured, in-depth kind of narrative interview. A methodological contribution of this research is the combined use of narrative analytical methods drawing from different traditions in order to unveil both subjective and inter-subjective meanings from the stories. While most narrative research draws only on the use of one or two methods, this project combined five methods, including the analysis of 'storied themes'; plot development; semiotic analysis; deconstruction and the mapping of the life narrative through 'life story charts'.

The research design as well as the methods used for data collection and data analysis are discussed in detail in Chapter Three.

The fourth chapter summarizes the results obtained after the application of the analytical methods to all the 'narratives of change' selected from the stories of each one of the women interviewed. In order to facilitate the integration of large amounts of data generated by the analysis, 'life story summaries' integrating the insights yielded by the methods were prepared for each one of the participants of the study.

The fifth chapter presents an in-depth discussion of the results obtained, as well as a 'summary of findings' per country, noticing here that narratives from revolutionary and feminist women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala have been selected for narrative analysis. In addition, results concerning experiences of identity transition, as well as experiences of opposition and engagement are presented here as well. The chapter concludes by answering the research questions and evaluating the results in light of present-day Central America and looking at the implications of this research for narrative research, grassroots feminist organizing and peace building processes.

## 2. Revolution and Radical Leftist Activism in Central America

### 2.1- Historical Overview

Writing a summary of Central American history that attempts to track dissidence requires a critical look at the sources used for this purpose, and what are their explicit and implicit standpoints and objectives. If one is looking at dissidence, then, as Berger (2001, p. 16) warns us: “we must always keep in mind certain critical questions: what becomes visible and why? in whose interest? And, what is hidden intentionally and unintentionally?”

This historical overview attempts to make visible the roots of dissidence in Central America, by looking at the quest of early revolutionaries in El Salvador, who fought against the ‘agrarian elites’ and Nicaraguans who rebelled against the occupation of the United States during the first part of the Twentieth Century. But for the most part it seeks to unveil the role that women have played in revolutionary processes in this region. As many have argued, war in Central America has also been fought by dissident women who have –and continue to- claim their places in the history of the region. Yet, their contribution has remained unseen by many, possibly unintentionally.

A particular interest of this study is to look at how women who became ‘revolutionaries’ and opponents of the status quo re-defined what is possible for “las de abajo” (the women from below). Thus, what this historical overview attempts to ‘make visible’ is how the ‘monopoly of force’ of the local elites of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala created conditions for the emergence of revolutionary discourse –and eventually, feminist revolutionary discourse- that challenged the power structures of these societies.

#### Roots of inequality in Central America

Inequality, social dominance and fragmentation among Central American states can be traced to a point in time where Central America was one nation, the ‘Federation of Central America’, officially proclaimed as one nation on July 1, 1823. The new republic was constituted by five states: Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua and Costa Rica. These states represented political and cultural divisions that dated from the colonial era. Nevertheless, despite the desire for federalism, the “physiognomy of colonial society” (Perez-Brignoli, 1989, p. 70) almost did not change with the creation of the federation: the Indians lived in their communities and the mestizos in their *Rancherias* (subsistence farms) near large haciendas and cities. Despite discourses of progress, there were deep imbalances, strong localism and ambitions towards autonomy among the above-mentioned nation states. A poignant issue involving the Catholic

Church was the creation of new bishoprics in the region. Other reasons that conspired against federalism were isolation and poor communication between regions, as well as the imbalanced distribution of population (Perez-Brignoli, 1989, p. 67-71). In addition, competing local strong men of the rival liberal and conservative parties took power in different provinces, severing the possibility of unity. The 'liberals', who were members of the emerging commercial class, wished to integrate the Confederation and unite the economies adhering to the principles of free trade, public education, the separation of church and state, and social Darwinism; whereas 'conservatives' wanted to preserve the power of church in this new secular society, supported protectionist trade regulations and limited suffrage. (Krauss, 1991). Liberals and conservatives aimed at different and contradictory goals for the region; for the liberals, it was important to bring a kind of progress inspired by the French Revolution and the Independence of the United States, whereas the conservatives wanted to prolong the Spanish colonial way of life, professing boundless respect for the church and limiting possibilities of social change. An additional factor that influenced the fall of the Central American federation were foreign interests, such as British ambitions to declare a protectorate in parts of the Central American Atlantic coast (Perez-Brignoli, 1989, p. 77f). In the end, in 1839, due to the complexity of factors indicated above including the struggles between liberals and conservatives, Guatemala, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Honduras and Costa Rica became separate nations, despite their historical and sociocultural similarities. (Krauss, 1991).

In his study on 'coffee elites' in Central America, Paige (1997) describes how the origins of the later revolutionary crisis of the 1960s in Central America was deeply rooted in the emergence and maintenance of coffee elites throughout the Central American region, particularly in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Nicaragua. These 'elites', which outlived the fall of the Central America federation, were composed by wealthy coffee-producing family dynasties that emerged in the nineteenth century at the expense of worker populations. They supported a coffee export economy that created deep divisions between local privileged elites and impoverished rural masses. The expansion of their export ideology was associated with liberalism, which justified programs for political and economic transformations that consolidated an agro-export order in the region (Paige, 1997, p. 13). The worldwide economic crisis that began with the crash of 1929 initiated a political and social crisis that challenged the local order constructed by these elites and alternative ideological discourses began to challenge their positivist visions of order and progress among the different Central American countries; for example in Nicaragua, it was the Indo-Hispanic nationalism of Augusto Cesar Sandino, a revolutionary dissident who in 1927 founded the guerrilla "Army of National Sovereignty", who defined the alternative vision, whereas in El

Salvador, it was Farabundo Marti, leader of the Salvadoran Communist Party, who introduced radical political views demanding social transformation. (Paige, 1997, p. 100). In the case of Guatemala, the alternative response to the crisis of 1929 was seen in the emergence of new social forces: the Cooperativist party, the Labor Party and the Guatemalan Communist Party (Perez-Brignoli, 1989).

Both, in El Salvador and Nicaragua the execution of Marti in 1932 and the murder of Sandino in 1934 not only silenced these leaders, but also suppressed their movements and ideologies for half a century. After these events, and for approximately thirty years, those two countries experienced a 'tense peace' under authoritarian military regimes and dictatorships that suppressed their alternative political voices. It was not until the early 1960s-1970s, when the ideas of Marti and Sandino re-emerged in the form of revolutionary organizations: *Marti* and *Sandino* were the names chosen by the revolutionary guerrilla fronts in El Salvador "Frente Farabundo Marti Para la Liberacion Nacional" (Farabundo Marti Front for National Liberation or FMLN) and in Nicaragua "Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional" (Sandinista National Liberation Front or FSLN). The Guatemalan story proceeded in a similar way as revolutionary organizations in the early sixties referred to earlier socialist minded leaders of the 1944 "October Revolution" such as Juan Jose Arevalo and Jacobo Arbenz as sources of inspiration and symbols of political dissidence in the country.

In the 1960s, a crisis in the old liberal order, as well as and social protests and guerrilla movements became increasingly difficult to contain, to which grown repression became the response of the ruling classes against these trends for social change. More and more, handing over power to the military became necessary to assure the survival of landowners and business leaders who resisted any attempt at social justice, and blamed Fidel Castro's Havana as the head master of a socialist political conspiracy throughout the Central American region. (Perez Brignoli, 1989).

Another significant alternative current that intersected with ideas supporting the need for social transformation during the 1960s was the 'Theology of Liberation', which emerged after the Latin American Episcopal Conference known as the "Medellin Conference" held in 1968 in Medellin, Colombia. The "Medellin Conference" expressed the concerns and criticisms of a new generation of priests and sisters on the front lines of the Church's pastoral work, who were more critical of the situation of the Church, largely as a result of the new spirit of openness deriving from the meeting of bishops during "Vatican II (1962-65)". Shortly after the Medellin meeting, the theologian Gustavo Gutierrez outlined a 'Theology of Liberation' for Latin America while addressing a group of priests in Chimbote, Peru. Gutierrez and other theologians were raising new questions: what does Christian love mean in a class society? How should the mission of the Church

be defined? What does Jesus saying “Blessed are the poor” mean today?”. In the cases of Nicaragua and Guatemala, foreign clergy became crucial in spreading ideas of ‘theology of liberation’ (80 percent of the progressive clergy was foreign) whereas in El Salvador, mostly it was native-born priests who became prominent in Church renewal efforts (Berryman, 1994, p. 11-13).

What followed was a dramatic period in the history of the region, characterized by revolutionary wars in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua that consumed both human and material resources until peace agreements were signed in the early to mid nineties in each of the three countries. By the end of the wars, the loss of life and destruction appeared insurmountable: in the case of El Salvador, the war took the lives of more than 75,000 people (Krauss 1991, p. 70). In the case of Nicaragua, both the 1979 revolution and the ‘Contra’ war, killed more than 60,000 people; and in the case of Guatemala, just when the struggle for liberation increased between 1978-1984, 50,000 or more indigenous peoples were massacred. (Krauss, 1991, p.17f).

The following section describes the origins and development of each of these wars in depth for the countries studied, focusing on how these revolutionary political movements emerged, gained support and declared the war to the authoritarian regimes and economic elites that dated from the XIX century. Throughout the political developments that took place in the XX century, Central American women became involved in popular protest and the challenge of authoritarianism. The revolutionary movements that followed in the 1960s laid the ground for the eventual involvement of women in revolutionary activisms and feminism. The connections between this revolutionary involvement and the emergence of second wave feminism in Central America are discussed in greater detail in section 2.2 of this chapter.

### 2.1.1- The case of El Salvador

*"I would go with my sister to the coffee harvesting season or 'cortas'... I started [then] to experience what families who had to support themselves and others went through... the food was awful, the 'tortillas' appeared with cockroaches and with mice meat, [it was] all disgusting. The 'finca' [owners] would give them that to eat, and later, they would steal from them at the time when they had to weigh the harvested coffee... around that time, I started to hear about the whole vindictive movement... I had no idea then..."*

*Dilsia, El Salvador.*

In XIX century El Salvador, already prevailing extreme inequalities created conditions for the political and social turmoil that would come later: on one side, the existence of high population density and the massive eviction of indigenous groups from their lands lead to a landless peasantry that provided an abundant and cheap source of labor. On the other side, elitist owners of coffee plantations benefited from these conditions by keeping cash labor costs to a minimum. (See discussion on 'coffee elites' in 2.2.1-"Introduction" section). In this context, the land owner-worker relations became a 'zero-sum game' where peasants, indigenous and mestizos could only improve their lot by becoming landowners or unionizing to collectively negotiate their wages. Both options meant a radical transformation in the context of socioeconomic structures of El Salvador at the time. Thus, a combination of authoritarianism and paternalism dominated between 1898 and 1931. In one particular case, members of a single clan, the Melendez-Quinonez family, rotated the presidency amongst themselves between 1913-1917 (Perez-Brignoli 1989, p. 100). Interestingly, in 1921-1922, early women's popular organizations mobilized by middle-class urban reformers in El Salvador already participated in demonstrations against the Melendez-Quinonez dictatorship, supporting a democratic presidential candidate, Miguel Tomas Molina. The depression of 1930 had a deep impact in the rigid political and economic structures of the Salvadoran society as the pressure for democratization and justice from different social groups increased. The poet Prudencia Ayala embodied women's fight for the right to vote at the time. When it was denied, she presented her presidential candidacy in 1930, which was then rejected by the Supreme Court. (Gonzalez and Kampwirth, 2001, p. 135). Around that time,, a separate and distinct "Partido Comunista Salvadoreño" or PCS (Salvadoran Communist Party) was founded in 1930 by Miguel Marmol, Modesto Ramirez and Abel Cuenca, who were early revolutionaries influenced by ideas of the the Russian revolution (Busky, 2002, p. 187). In 1931, Arturo Araujo, a liberal, was elected president with the support from unions and intellectual groups, where the figure of Alberto Masferrer (renowned Salvadoran writer, philosopher and poet) stands out. Araujo ruled for scarcely ten months, as landowners were horrified at his 'vaguely' socialist ideas. In this fragile political context, inefficiencies and serious fiscal problems precipitated a

governmental crisis, and in December 1931, a coup d'état brought General Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez to power. A year later, a general insurrection called by the Communist Party and carried by Indigenous groups and Mestizos armed with machetes and sticks rose up throughout the coffee-producing regions of the country while the government arrested and shot the leaders of this party, led by the renowned revolutionary leader, Farabundo Marti. The repression that followed the uprising took the lives of somewhere between 10,000 and 30,000 people mostly of indigenous origin. (Perez-Brignoli, 1989, p. 110f). Some sources claim that in every indigenous household, the Hernandez Martinez' army killed both the father and the oldest son in order to prevent younger men from joining the insurrection. This massacre, known as 'La Matanza' (the slaughter), marked a turning point in Salvadoran history: most indigenous people renounced their native language, costumes, and customs as a way of protecting their lives. Those who were previously associated with the Salvadoran Communist party, went underground for more than a decade, and only made a tentative comeback in the 1940s and 1950s when the labor movement reemerged and the national university became a breeding ground for opposition. The army destroyed all records relating to this massacre and became the most powerful sector of society (Krauss 1991, p. 63).

What followed was a historical period known by the repressive policies of Hernandez Martinez, who looked to Fascist Italy and Nazi Germany for inspiration and advice. He founded his own Fascist National "Pro Homeland Party" ("Partido Pro-Patria"), the only legal party allowed in the country during his rule. In 1938 he appointed an active German army colonel, Eberhard Bohnstadt, as director of El Salvador's military academy and adviser, who then trained an entire generation of Salvadoran officers (Krauss, 1991). Fernandez Martinez outlawed the Communist Party and the rights for union organizing until 1944, when he was overthrown by a sit-down strike, the so-called „fallen arms strike“ which provided the conditions for the development of an underground union movement organized by the "Salvadoran trade Union Reorganizing Committee" (Barry 1991, p.137). The Democratic Feminine Front (Frente Democrático Femenino) contributed to the overthrow of Fernandez Martinez during the events of 1944, but women had to wait six more years to achieve the full right to vote –the theoretical right had been granted in 1938 by Hernandez martinez- that was finally achieved in 1950 (Cañas Dinarte, 2004).

In 1961, the PCN, "Party of National Conciliation" (Partido de Conciliación Nacional) which had emerged from the previous PRUD, "Revolutionary Party of Democratic Unification" (Partido Revolucionario de Unificación Democrática), which despite its name, represented the interests of the oligarchy and the supporting military. Sometime between 1960-61 the military intelligence founded an organization named "ORDEN" (ORDER), composed by a rural network of informers and

enforcers that functioned as a paramilitary group serving the interests of the extreme right. Likewise, some progressive sectors of society reorganized themselves and soon, the “Christian Democratic Party” emerged as a political alternative. Another sector demanding political change was the teachers union or ANDES (Asociacion Nacional de Educadores Salvadoreños – National Association of Salvadoran Teachers) founded in 1965 by a woman, Melida Anaya Montes. Because the great majority of educators in El Salvador are women, the ANDES membership was mostly composed by women (90 percent). On June 21, 1965, twenty thousand people –teachers and other workers- marched through the streets of San Salvador in order to demand for a legal status for this organization. In 1967, under the leadership of Melida Anaya Montes, the women of ANDES took the streets to demand for a national board to listen to their grievances. In 1968, ANDES members were physically attacked by the government when Anaya Montes lead the women to organize a major strike against the government. (Shayne, 2004, p.24f)

In 1969, El Salvador entered a war against Honduras over a conflict regarding mistreatment of Salvadoran refugees in Honduran territory, which was showcased by the media as a war over the results of a football match, and thus, the conflict was known as “The Football War” (Data by Barry, 1991, p. 138). According to most academic and non-academic sources, the FPL or “Popular Liberation Forces” (Fuerzas de Liberacion Popular) and the ERP or “People’s Revolutionary Army” (Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo) were founded just a year after the war. By that time, the ideas of the “Theology of Liberation” (for an explanation on “Theology of Liberation”, see section, 2.1.1) had also permeated the work of the Salvadoran clergy and a number of priests felt ready to undertake this new kind of pastoral work. Soon, priests were seen as promoters of radical leftist ideas, which prompted their prosecution by radical paramilitary forces. In early 1970, the first kidnapping of a priest took place in El Salvador: father Jose Inocencio Alas, a parish priest of the city of Suchitoto and founder of some of the first Christian base communities, was taken by unknown men, beaten and left almost dead (Berryman, 1994, p. 17).

In 1972, Jose Napoleon Duarte, a progressive leader who had been elected mayor of San Salvador in 1964, ran for president with the UNO or “National Opposition Union” (Union Nacional Opositora) a union between socialist and communist organizations. This party, founded in 1962 as the ‘electoral front’ of the Communist Party, was forbidden according to the National Constitution. (Zamudio Gonzalez, 2007, p. 90). Duarte won the elections, but the election board declared the military candidate the winner, which led to strong protests by the opposition. Though the armed forces captured Duarte, politicians from Washington intervened to save him and in the end, he was forced to exile in Venezuela (Data by Barry, p. 138).

Table 2.1 presents a summary of the political parties of El Salvador from the period of 1930 until 1970, some of which have been introduced previously in this historical review.

**Table 2.1**

| <b>Influential Political Parties of El Salvador. Period 1930-1972<sup>16</sup></b> |                                                                                        |                                                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Date of Foundation</b>                                                          | <b>Name of Party</b>                                                                   | <b>Founder(s)</b>                                                                                         | <b>Political Orientation</b>                                                                                                                                                     |
| 1930                                                                               | Partido Laborista (Labor Party)                                                        | Arturo Araujo (President, 1931)                                                                           | Liberal ideology, based on the model of the Labor Party in the United Kingdom.                                                                                                   |
| 1930                                                                               | Communist Party of El Salvador (PCS)                                                   | Miguel Marmol, Modesto Ramirez, Juan Gilberto Ramirios and Abel Cuenca. Farabundo Marti joined later.     | Communist party adhered to the "Comintern" or the Communist International. Supportive of labor as well as socialist movements.                                                   |
| 1931-1935                                                                          | Partido Pro-Patria                                                                     | Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez (President, 1931-1944)                                                     | Extreme right and anti-communist.                                                                                                                                                |
| 1950                                                                               | Partido Revolucionario de Unificacion Democratica (Party of Revolutionary Unification) | Oscar Osorio, President (1950)                                                                            | Conservative, anti-communist, officialist party. It attempted to follow the model of the Institutional Revolutionary Party in Mexico                                             |
| 1960                                                                               | Partido Democrata Cristiano (Democratic Christian Party)                               | José Vicente Vilanova and Dr. Guillermo Manuel Ungo                                                       | Social democratic, traditionally considered a center-left party.                                                                                                                 |
| 1961                                                                               | Partido de Conciliacion Nacional (Party of National Conciliation)                      | Julio Adalberto Rivera (president, 1962-1967)                                                             | Far right, conservatism, liberal, officialist, connected to the National Army                                                                                                    |
| 1972                                                                               | Union Nacional Opositora (United National Opposition)                                  | Jose Napoleon Duarte and Guillermo Manuel Ungo (candidates running for the Presidential election in 1972) | A coalition of socialist parties including the "Democratic Christian Party" (PDC), the smaller "National Revolutionary Movement" (MNR) and the "National Democratic Union" (UND) |

<sup>16</sup> Diverse sources, including: Richard A. Haggarty, ed. *El Salvador: A Country Study*. Washington: GPO for the Library of Congress, 1988. (Retrieved from <http://countrystudies.us/el-salvador/75.htm>); History of El Salvador by the "Civic and Democratic Commission of El Salvador" (retrieved from <http://comisioncivcademocratica.org/historiadeelsalvador.aspx>) on March 29, 2011.

### **The Salvadoran Revolt**

As Krauss (1991, p. 68) has argued, with the democratic option closed, revolution became inevitable. As it is widely acknowledged<sup>17</sup>, the guerrilla groups that emerged in the 1970s derived from a split within the Communist Party. In April 1970, Salvador Cayetano Carpio, Secretary General of the Party and his followers broke away from the Communist Party hard-liners and founded the "Popular Liberation Forces" or "FPL" (Fuerzas Populares de Liberacion). Under Carpio's leadership, the FPL advocated doctrinaire adherence to a Vietnamese-style "prolonged popular war" strategy against "imperialism" and the Salvadoran oligarchy. During the FPL's formative years, the National University located in San Salvador became the largest urban center for recruiting and training members of the FPL and its mass organization, the "Revolutionary Popular Bloc" or "BPR" (Bloque Popular Revolucionario), which emerged in 1975. Other radical organizations founded in the seventies include the "Revolutionary People's Army" or "ERP" (Ejercito Revolucionario del Pueblo) in 1971; the "FAPU" or "Unified Popular Action Front" (Frente de Accion Popular Unificada) in 1974 and -after internal struggles that lead to the murder of revolutionary poet Roque Dalton by radical Joaquin Villalobos- the "FARN" or "Formation of Armed Forces of National Resistance" (Fuerzas Armadas de la Resistencia Nacional) emerged in 1975. (Data by Barry, 1991, p. 139). The fragmentation of revolutionary organizations in El Salvador had to do with conflicts concerning the ideological diversity regarding interpretations and applications of communism: while some Salvadoran revolutionary groups followed a 'Maoist line', others supported a 'Pro-Soviet' and 'Pro-Cuban' line. Furthermore, some old divisions had to do with earlier positionings of the communist party that were resented by parts of its membership, as the breakup of Cayetano Carpio demonstrated. In May 1980, the major guerrilla groups announced their unity under the banner of the Unified Revolutionary Directorate (Direccion Revolucionaria Unificada-- DRU). The pressure for unity among Salvadoran guerrilla groups began after Cuba's Fidel Castro took a direct hand in the matter. (Haggarty, 1988).

Table 2.2 presents a list of the five revolutionary organizations, its affiliated mass and armed organizations that eventually conformed the FMLN in 1980, some of which were previously introduced in this review.

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<sup>17</sup> Source: Country Data from the Library of Congress, retrieved from: <http://www.country-data.com/cgi-bin/query/r-4322.html> on November 2, 2010.

**Table 2.2**

| <b>Revolutionary Organizations that conformed the FMLN in 1980</b>                                                            |                                                                                             |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                      |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>Political and Military Organization</b>                                                                                    | <b>Affiliated Mass Organization</b>                                                         | <b>Armed Organization</b>                                                                                            | <b>Ideological tendency</b>                                                                                                                                          |
| Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL) (Popular Liberation Forces), f. 1970                                                    | Bloque Popular Revolucionario (BPR) (Revolutionary Popular Bloc), f. 1975                   | Fuerzas Populares de Liberación (FPL) (Popular Liberation Forces), f. 1970                                           | Emerged from an internal division within the Communist Party. Supported mass action and popular prolonged war                                                        |
| Resistencia Nacional (RN) (National Resistance), f. 1975                                                                      | Frente de Acción Unificada, FAPU, (Unified Action Front), f. 1974                           | Fuerzas Armadas de Resistencia Nacional, FARN (Formation of Armed Forces of National Resistance) f. 1975             | Emerged from an internal division inside the ERP connected with the murder of poet Roque Dalton. It was more focused on political work and mass action.              |
| Partido de la Revolución Salvadoreña (PRS) (Salvadoran Revolution Party), f. 1977                                             | Ligas Populares 28 de Febrero (LP-28) (Popular Leagues February 28 <sup>th</sup> ), f. 1978 | Ejército Revolucionario del Pueblo (ERP) (Revolutionary People's Army), f. 1971-1972                                 | Emerged from radicalized students with a militarist vocation, oriented to carry „commando“ actions supported by mass organizations, with an insurrectional objective |
| Partido Comunista de El Salvador (PCS) (Salvadoran Communist Party), f. 1930                                                  | Unión Democrática Nacionalista (UDN) (Nationalist Democratic Unit), f. 1967                 | Fuerzas Armadas de Liberación (FAL) Liberation Armed Forces, f. 1979                                                 | The PCS had participated previously in electoral processes. Its armed organization emerged as a response towards the oppression against UDN (1977) and UNO (1972)    |
| Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC) (Revolutionary Party of Central American Workers), f. 1976 | Movimiento de Liberación Popular (MLP) (Popular Liberation Movement), f. 1979               | Partido Revolucionario de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos (PRTC) (Revolutionary Party of Central American, f. 1976 | Emerged as a regional organization focused on revolutionary fight. Only in 1980 its local units achieved autonomy.                                                   |

Source: Montobbio, Manuel (1999, p. 255f)

In 1987, the women from all five groups decided to form a united umbrella organization that would be the expression of the women in the FMLN. This group was called UMS (Union of Salvadoran Women for Liberation “Melida Anaya Montes”), and functioned as a vehicle to organize more women and bring them into activities that supported the FMLN. They also saw their role as one of raising levels of political awareness among women (Carter et. al, Eds. 1989, p. 107f). According to Luciak (2001, p.3), researchers of the Salvadoran revolution argue that in the 1980s women represented 30 percent of the FMLN’s combatants and about 40 percent of the total membership, although the reliability of these figures has been questioned.

While underground revolutionary organizations emerged, some civil organizations were organizing themselves through “Christian Base Communities” that were spreading throughout the country; and in 1976, a critical event singled out these organizations as alternative forms of insurgency. As described by Berryman (1994, p. 18) in a confrontation with militant peasants of FECCAS (Federation of Christian Peasants of El Salvador) Eduardo Orellana, a land-holder, was killed. Although how he died remains unclear –some argued that he may have been shot accidentally by his brother- the upper classes made Orellana a martyr. FECCAS became ‘proof’ that church people were involved in subversion<sup>18</sup>. Several priests were arrested, beaten or expelled from the country at the time.

In 1977, the repression of those whom the military considered part of the opposition, which now included the radicalized Catholic Church, increased. Among the many victims, Jesuit father Rutilio Grande was assassinated. Father Grande was a symbol of martyrdom for the Base Catholic Church, as he was one of the first priests to develop “Church Base Communities” and develop a peasant leadership program in El Salvador. The same year, Oscar Arnulfo Romero became archbishop of San Salvador. Archbishop Romero devoted the following years denouncing the killing of father Grande –which was never investigated by the authorities- and other human rights violations against the poor and the Church. The same year, Carlos Humberto Romero, a military hardliner, was elected president in a fraudulent election. The Catholic Church, clearly aligned with the political opposition and boycotted his inauguration (Berryman, 1994, p.19). By the end of 1977 twelve women sharing a Christmas Eve dinner organized by Archbishop Romero joined together to form and lead the “COMADRES” (Committee of Mothers and Relatives of Political Prisoners, Disappeared, and Assassinated of El Salvador). At the beginning, the women of COMADRES were motivated by their individual and collective pains, but eventually went on to become activists for others who had suffered political repression. In 1978 they staged the first hunger strike and subsequent three-month occupation of the Red Cross, where they demanded the immediate release of political prisoners. They eventually staged other occupations, including the office of the United Nations in El Salvador and the Ministry of Justice. With the objective of reaching out to other Salvadoran women, COMADRES would occupy Catholic churches and called upon mourning women to demand that Salvadoran government return their children. The case of

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<sup>18</sup> “Delia”, one of the women interviewed for this research project claims to have been one of the young members of FECCAS who visited the Orellana brothers, when this incident took place. In her version of the events, Delia assures that the murder was the result of Eduardo Orellana’s brother shooting his gun carelessly to the sky, in order to threaten the FECCAS group. Her alternative version of the event was not supported by the authorities that found the so-called murderers of Orellana sometime later among young men who were also accused of being clandestine guerrilleros.

Silvia Olan, an activist brutally raped and murdered, as well as of other victims, led the women of COMADRES to expand their calls to the entire country. Despite the fact that COMADRES presented itself as a non-violent movement for human rights, and positioned itself in the context of Catholic values, in the following years, the women from COMADRES faced threats from death squads, as well as abduction and imprisonment by the armed forces (Shayne, 2004, p. 28f).

In 1979, the year in which many consider that the war began in El Salvador, violence escalated along with kidnappings by both the guerrilla and armed forces; assassinations; building seizures and hostage-taking by guerrillas as well as repression and killings by government forces became part of everyday life. A significant event was the coup d'état against General Romero by junior officers. These young officers organized a "Military-Civil Junta" that included officers from the military forces and civilians with progressive ideas. As the control of the military members of the Junta increased, the civilians quickly resigned and conceded the power to the military members of the Junta.

As the war intensified, on March 24 1980, Archbishop Romero was killed while offering mass. In his last homily the day before his death, Romero urged soldiers to disobey superiors who ordered them to kill civilians. To thunderous applause he concluded: „I implore you, I beg you, I order you in the name of God: ‚Stop the repression!‘" (Berryman 1994, p. 64-65). Throughout that year, and after his death, continued attacks on church workers and institutions took place: Churches and convents were machine gunned during services; offices were searched; bombs were set off especially in the offices of the Archdiocesan radio station; lay activists were picked up, tortured and murdered, and death threats became routine. A number of Church sites turned into refugee camps and many Catholic priests had to flee the country. Perhaps one of the events that mostly shocked the international opinion was the rape and murder of three American nuns and one lay-volunteer in December of 1980 by members of the armed forces. This crime seemed to evidence the fanatical conviction of the military that church people were to blame for popular discontent and organizing (Berryman, 1994, p. 67). The Salvadoran armed conflict already from its beginnings had involved 'non-traditional' combatants, both secular and clergymen, women and even families into it. Still in the same year, Roberto D'Aubuisson, leader of the military and paramilitary right -who has been connected with supportive evidence to the murder of Archbishop Romero- organized a secret anticommunist army to coordinate death squad activities.

In 1980, both as a response to the military offensive, and guided by Fidel Castro's directives, the guerrilla decided to launch the 'FMLN' as a joint revolutionary organization in order to coordinate action among the five strongest Salvadoran revolutionary organizations listed in table Table 2.2. Possibly because of the high levels of oppression exerted by the military, the

FMLN decided to organize a significant insurrectional effort labelled the 'final offensive' in 1981. Their idea was to create conditions that would facilitate an uprising by peasants and workers against the armed forces. The attack was dissolved three days later, as the expected popular insurrection did not materialize. This seemed to be a sign that the army's repression had 'decapitated' the opposition and traumatized civilian population (Berryman, 1994). Between January 1980 - July 1981, an estimated of twenty thousand civilians were murdered by the army, the police and government paramilitary death squads. When Ronald Reagan took office, US military aid increased and Roberto D'Aubuisson, a military hardliner organized the Nationalist Republican Alliance (ARENA) a far right party (Krauss 1991, p. 82). Though the FMLN received support from Nicaragua and Cuba, the Salvadoran military received U.S. aid of a different magnitude: between 1979 and 1992, this aid amounted to six billion dollars. In addition, in 1983, the CIA had around 150 agents operating in the country and by that time, almost all Salvadoran officers had been trained by the United States. In 1984, it was revealed that top members of the army, the police and the paramilitary forces were being paid retainer fees by the CIA (Gareau, 2004, p. 31).

The violence continued throughout the 1980s and women continued joining revolutionary forces by the hundreds. In 1983, Melida Anaya Montez was murdered in Nicaragua. At the time of her assassination she was the second in command of the FPL; at the time of her death, her position was one of the two highest positions in the FMLN ever held by a woman (Shayne, 2004, p. 26). In 1984, Jose Napoleon Duarte returned to the country from his extended exile in Venezuela and was elected president, beating D'Aubuisson in a presidential campaign. Duarte initiated peace talks with the FMLN, but he could not reconcile the interests of the guerrilla, the armed forces and the United States. Furthermore, political and military oppression continued against social and popular organizations. In 1984, COMADRES organized a march to the US Embassy demanding an end to the military aid, a popular demand that catalyzed the mobilization of other groups of the Salvadoran society at the time (Shayne, 2004, p. 30).

In 1988, both death-squads killings and FMLN military actions increased. The war came to a climax in 1989, when the FMLN launched a major final offensive, calling off talks with the government after the bombing of FENASTRAS, the country's largest labour federation (Barry, 1991, p. 140-141). On November 16th of that year, during the FMLN's 'final offensive' as it was called, thirty uniformed army troops entered the Central American University premises dragging and murdering respected intellectual Jesuits who were members of the University leadership: Ignacio Martin Baro, Ignacio Ellacuria, Segundo Montes, Juan Ramon Moreno, Amando Lopez and Joaquin Lopez y Lopez. They also murdered the cook and daughter of the priests. In the months

following the offensive, about forty-nine church workers were arrested and government forces carried out sixty-one searches of forty-seven church facilities. The military authorities were convinced that church and humanitarian agencies were serving the FMLN. The repression was extended to other church denominations: twenty members and workers of an Episcopal parish in San Salvador were also arrested (Berryman, 1994, 95-97). As the murders of the Jesuit academics generated worldwide repudiation, new pressures from the international community to seek peace in El Salvador arose and after ten years of war, the peace process was re-initiated with the support of the United Nations. After the failed 1989 guerrilla offensive, the FMLN realized that they could no longer win the war in military terms. On May 1991, the United Nations Security Council, by its resolution 693 decided to establish "ONUSAL", as an integrated peacekeeping operation, to monitor all agreements between the Government of El Salvador and the FMLN. The objective of the negotiations was to achieve a political agreement resolving the prolonged armed conflict by political means in order to promote democratization, guaranteeing unrestricted respect for human rights and reunifying Salvadoran society. The Mission's initial mandate was to verify the compliance of the parties with the „San Jose Agreement on Human Rights“. On October 1<sup>st</sup> 1991, the Mission entered its second phase of operations when it began investigating cases and situations involving allegations of human rights violations by following up investigations systematically with the competent state organs and with the FMLN.

Upon signing of the peace accords, the FMLN forces were supposed to demobilize between May 1st and October 31, 1992 with the supervision of ONUSAL, which registered the FMLN membership that concentrated in camps throughout the country. At the time, FMLN members were registered according to their status as 'combatants', 'wounded noncombatants' or 'políticos' (politicians). This latter category refers to FMLN militants who were engaged in political work on behalf of the guerrillas both in El Salvador and abroad.

Although sources reported that about 10 to 15 percent of the FMLN's membership was not processed, even with these limitations, the ONUSAL data reveals that women made up from 27 to 34 percent of the membership of the five armies that composed the FMLN. The data are consistent with the estimates of the 1980s on women's participation as combatants. The estimate at that time was 30 percent compared with 29,1 percent at the time of demobilization. The ONUSAL figure of 29,9 percent women members (as it is indicated in table 2.3 below), however, did not accord with the wartime claim that women represented 40 percent of the FMLN membership.

In table 2.3, the gender composition of each one of the FMLN revolutionary groups is presented. As it can be seen, the FPL is the revolutionary group with the highest level of both male

and female recruits followed by the ERP. This indicates that recruitment operated in similar way for both genders.

**Table 2.3 Gender Composition of FMLN Groups**

| Group | Women | %     | Men    | %     | Total  | %     | Women as % of total |
|-------|-------|-------|--------|-------|--------|-------|---------------------|
| ERP   | 1,156 | 25,7  | 2,774  | 26,4  | 3,930  | 26,2  | 29,4                |
| FAL   | 734   | 16,3  | 1,516  | 14,4  | 2,250  | 15,0  | 32,6                |
| FPL   | 1,397 | 31,1  | 3,685  | 35,0  | 5,082  | 33,8  | 27,5                |
| PRTC  | 356   | 7,9   | 892    | 8,5   | 1,248  | 8,3   | 28,5                |
| RN    | 849   | 18,9  | 1,650  | 15,7  | 2,499  | 16,7  | 34,0                |
| Total | 4,492 | 100,0 | 10,517 | 100,0 | 15,009 | 100,0 | 29,9                |

Source: ONUSAL, Proceso de desmovilización del personal del FMLN (Luciak, 2001,p.5)

The Peace Agreement was signed on January 16, 1992 in Chapultepec, Mexico, and ONUSAL's Military Division was established on January 20 with an authorized strength of 380 military observers. The Division was responsible for verifying the cessation of the armed conflict, dealing with the redeployment of the Armed Forces and the concentration of the FMLN forces in agreed "designated locations" throughout the country. ONUSAL's military division monitored the troops of both parties in these locations, verified the inventories of weapons and personnel, authorized and accompanied the movements of both forces, and received and investigated complaints of violations. As its mandate was extended, and the conditions necessary to ensure the final implementation of the Peace Accords seemed to be in place, there continued to be a number of outstanding problems; for example, there were indications of intelligence activity carried out by certain members of the armed forces and there were delays in the programme to transfer land to former combatants of the Armed Forces, the FMLN and landholders. By the end of August 1994, the total number of beneficiaries had not yet been determined, and the number of persons who had received title to the land was still below the target (Luciak, 2001).

Concerning the participation of women in post-revolutionary politics, Salvadoran women came together in the "Mujeres – 94" political platform in the light of the Presidential Elections of 1994, demanding political parties a quota of 50 percent of political participation for women. At the time, the FMLN adopted a quota of 30 percent. Other parties ignored the proposal. Consequently, political participation of women in El Salvador continued to face a number of obstacles. Until the 2009 presidential elections, a far-right political party, ARENA (Republican Nationalist Alliance) ruled post conflict El Salvador for around twenty years largely espousing traditional female values and being consistently poor at integrating women onto their ministries showing resistance to institute gender quotas within the party. Though the FMLN showed more political openness, nevertheless, its internal party divide, the lack of support on the abortion vote and the inability to place a highly qualified woman candidate (Dr. Victoria de Aviles) into a presidential race solidified

many women's organizations decision to remain autonomous from formal political activities (Silber and Viterna, 2009, p. 336).

Some detractors of the Salvadoran peace process question what exactly „peace“ has meant in this post-conflict period. For Wade (2008) despite the fact that the peace process in El Salvador has been hailed by many as a "success" of the United Nations peace building efforts because of outcomes such as the cessation of armed conflict; the restructuring of military and police forces; the demobilization and integration of the FMLN as a political party; and basic guarantees for human rights, almost twenty years later, El Salvador appears to be a questionable model for peace building as it represents the very real challenges of an incomplete peace: social violence and poverty; orthodox application of neoliberal policies, which has created little economic opportunity, leading Salvadorans to leave the country in record numbers in search of opportunities elsewhere. It is in fact the remittances of those who leave that sustain the country's fragile economy. Wade (2008) argues that government corruption and party polarization seem to impede meaningful democracy in El Salvador. From the gender perspective, despite the fact that women are highly organized in feminist and political organizations, still its political influence in the country remains limited (Luciak, 2001; Kampwirth, 2002; Viterna and Silber, 2009).

### 2.1.2- The case of Nicaragua

*"I was twelve years old when I started reading the newspaper "La Prensa", [where] an editorial by Pedro Joaquin Chamorro [was regularly published]. [He was] the husband of the [later] president Violeta de Chamorro. He was a man that supported public freedoms, and everyday there was [in La Prensa] an interesting editorial, where he would uncover the problems with the Somoza [regime]; the killing of students, the common graves where "they" would throw away people who disappeared... I followed those situations [in the news] and I already experienced a sense of restlessness. I was the only one in my family, no one else followed them...."*

*Elina, Nicaragua.*

Nicaragua's long history is replete with turbulent political struggles connected with the interests of the United States in the Central American Region. Invasions coming from the United States started in 1855 when William Walker invaded Nicaragua and declared himself president of the country for two years; followed by four interventions of US troops between 1894 and 1899; another US intervention in 1910 when the United States placed Nicaragua under customs receivership controlling the country's revenues for the next thirty-eight years. In 1912, US marines began a twenty-year period of repeated occupation of Nicaragua; and in 1916, the Bryan-Chamorro treaty confirmed Nicaragua's status as a United States protectorate (Data from Barry, 1991, p. 347). The "Bryan-Chamorro treaty" granted the United States the right in perpetuity to construct a canal crossing Nicaragua; a ninety-nine year concession of the Corn Islands (Islas del Maiz) in the Caribbean and the right to establish a naval base in the Gulf of Fonseca. The United States wanted to assure the defense of the Panama Canal, another protectorate in the region, by controlling Nicaragua, which became a virtual protectorate, where the United States not only controlled the customs collections, but also the railways, and the National Bank. When the marines finally left the country in 1925, a civil war broke out again. The Marines returned in 1926 and had to face a popular guerrilla struggle, but were able to achieve an agreement ratified in the Nicaraguan city of Tipitapa in 1927. Based on this agreement, General Moncada, the leader of the liberals, gave up his rebellion and took over the presidency in 1928. The nationalist and revolutionary leader Augusto Cesar Sandino, rejected negotiating with the United States and decided to continue fighting, presenting serious opposition to the US invasion forces that could not defeat the Sandinista army. Sandino's nationalist and anti imperialist banner became popular beyond the borders of Nicaragua. In the end, the United States agreed to withdraw its forces in 1932, when liberal Juan Bautista Sacasa was elected president of Nicaragua and a new agreement was reached with the Sandinista rebels who, in the end, turned in their weapons in January 1934 in order to promote lasting peace. However, the United States forces had placed Anastasio Somoza Garcia as the Commander-in-chief of the

National Guard, who ordered the murder of Sandino and his lieutenants in February 1934 (Perez-Brignoli, 1989, p. 112). Sandino was taken to the Managua airport and machine-gunned to death the same night of his kidnapping. His murder was the beginning of an eighty-day orgy of killing in which Somoza's guard murdered hundreds of Sandino's supporters. Two years later Somoza overthrew President Sacasa, and in January 1937 assumed the presidency beginning the dynasty that ruled Nicaragua until the Sandinista revolution of 1979 (Paige, 1997).

Augusto Cesar Sandino was the crucial figure that inspired Nicaraguans to challenge the status quo as a protectorate and fight against US invasion forces. He personified the nationalist spirit of his time. As Paige (1997, p. 168-169) explains, he had personally witnessed many of the events surrounding the United States intervention in 1912, including the arrest of his own father for protesting the Bryan-Chamorro treaty. For Sandino, the story of Nicaragua from 1909 to 1927 was one of unconstitutional betrayal. Particularly, the reversal of the Bryan-Chamorro treaty became one of his most enunciated demands. As Kraus (1991, p. 120-121) has argued, Sandino was a 'true nationalist' who rejected Americans and international communists as well: „there is no need for class struggle in Nicaragua“ Sandino once explained „because here the worker lives well; he struggles only against the American intervention“. Sandino called his army the “Ejercito Defensor de la Soberania Nacional de Nicaragua” (Army for the Defense of the National Sovereignty of Nicaragua) and his red and black colors symbolized 'free country or death'. His slogan was „Patria y Libertad“ (Motherland and Liberty). Through his ‚anti-Yankee‘ and anti-traitor campaigns, Sandino fought for those who represented the Indo-Hispanic race and the oppressed Nicaraguans, not for those who he considered had betrayed the country's right for sovereignty. Still, there is no evidence that he ever developed any class-based ideology or any socio-economic program beyond his 'anti-Yankee' nationalism. His great hero was Bolivar, not Lenin, unlike Farabundo Marti from El Salvador (Paige, 1997, p. 170).

After Sandino's murder, Somoza Garcia removed president Sacasa from power and ruled until 1956, when he was assassinated by a radical liberal party activist, Rigoberto Lopez Perez. The National Assembly then elected his son, Luis Somoza, to complete the term in office. In 1957 he was elected president and continued with the dynasty until he died in 1967, when his brother Anastasio Somoza Debayle was elected president (Barry, 1991, p. 348).

In the decades after the murder of Sandino, groups of Nicaraguans opposing the Somoza dictatorship periodically rose in opposition, and inspired by Cuba, in the early 1960s

some Nicaraguans tried to initiate an armed insurrection, but all their attempts failed. In July 1961, three Marxist-Leninist student leaders –Carlos Fonseca Amador, Silvio Mayorga and Tomas Borge- split with the non-violent Nicaraguan socialist party and founded a guerrilla movement following the Cuban insurreccional model. Their goal was to overthrow the Somoza regime and the destruction of ‘Yankee imperialism’ in Nicaragua. It was Fonseca’s decision to name the movement after Augusto Cesar Sandino, recognizing how he personified the nation’s nationalistic and rebellious streak. This is how the FSLN (Sandinista Front for National Liberation – Frente Sandinista de Liberacion Nacional) emerged (Berryman 1994, p. 20). Over the next decade of their existence, the Sandinistas lost one military campaign after the other until widespread support from the masses in the seventies transformed the movement.

Though the founders of the FSLN were men, soon after it was created, the first women were recruited into the FSLN. The organization still worked as the ‘foco’s stage, isolated from the masses<sup>19</sup> at the time of its emergence, and in this context, women were often recruited as collaborators and militants. The Sandino army in 1930 had had some women who worked inside his movement, but there was not a precedent for so many women incorporated into relevant roles until the later Sandinista movement was created. Furthermore, the women who were sympathetic to the FSLN’s revolutionary goals started to organize in the early 1960s and in 1963, they developed an organization called “Federacion Democratica” (Democratic Federation). In 1967, a group of Nicaraguan women organized the “Alianza Patriotica Nicaraguense” (Nicaraguan Patriotic Alliance) which served as a recruiting pool for FSLN cadres. In that year, the FSLN leadership decided to integrate women into the rural guerrilla forces. Before this moment, they had served only in support roles, acting as messengers, providing safe havens, and preparing the peasantry for the creation of the ‘guerrilla commands’. The first woman to join the FSLN as a full-time armed combatant was Gladys Baez, who became active in the “Nicaraguan Patriotic Alliance” (Luciak, 2001, p. 16).

In 1970, the emphasis on recruitment of students grew and young working class women, like Luisa Amanda Espinoza (the first female martyr of the FMLN) grew. Later, women from different backgrounds joined: peasant and urban women of different sectors and social classes. As explained by Dora Maria Tellez, former Sandinista commander: “more

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<sup>19</sup> “Foco theory” or “foquismo” refers to a military strategy attributed to Ernesto “Che” Guevara, where the emphasis is on the formation of thirty to fifty combatants which would conform the “guerrilla foco” (a small focused group) linked to people (the masses), that could serve as catalysts for a mass political movement. Guevara called this group “foco insurreccional” (Dosal, 2003, p. 189).

or less in 1972 or 1973 is when we began to incorporate women from the cities in large numbers; this is when we created organizations such as the “Association of Women Confronting the National Problem” (AMPRONAC) which took root in all sectors because it was a response against the dictatorship” (Stoltz Chinchilla, 1985, p. 429f).

By 1968 there were only about fifty of the original Sandinistas alive, but out of those, a new generation led by two brothers, Daniel and Humberto Ortega arose (Krauss, 1991). As it was the case in other Latin American countries, the progressive Catholic Church had started working in Nicaragua during the sixties, when American Capuchin priests on the Atlantic coast and parishes in the Diocese of Estelí led the way to new pastoral approaches, such as the formation of “Christian Base Communities” or small lay groups for Bible discussion, prayer and local action. Between 1969-1971 there were numerous strikes and other political actions against Luis Somoza, which at times included the occupation of the Cathedral and the Catholic University. In many occasions, the incipient base communities in Nicaragua were involved in these struggles. In 1974, Capuchin priests denounced the mass peasant murder that took place in northern Nicaragua (Berryman, 1994, p.20-21).

According to several sources, Nicaragua’s political climate changed on December 23<sup>rd</sup>, 1972 when a massive earthquake leveled Managua city killing at least 10,000 people, injuring 20,000 and leaving 250,000 homeless. Somoza’s guard took advantage of the catastrophe by looting stores and houses. In the wake of the disaster, Somoza fired a coalition junta and misused millions of dollars of international relief assistance. His behavior set almost the entire Nicaraguan public, including the business community against him<sup>20</sup> (Krauss, 1991, p. 125).

Increasingly, the Nicaraguan society united and spoke out against the extremes and oppression of the Somoza regime. Particularly, Monsignor Obando y Bravo, the new Archbishop of Nicaragua, openly expressed his indignation against the dictatorship. Under his leadership, the Roman Catholic Church moved away from Somoza and approved the urban and rural organizing activities of anti-Somoza clergy and lay ministers. With different sectors of the public sphere uniting against the regime, all Somoza had left was the monopoly of the use of force through his national guard and the support from Washington. As the FSLN was the only political group that could take advantage of the generalized disdain against the Somoza regime, its actions became increasingly aggressive: in 1974, 150 armed-

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<sup>20</sup> Selma, one of the women interviewed for this study in Nicaragua confirmed this view, arguing that in her case, the 1972 earthquake created material conditions that facilitated her search of autonomy and increased general rebelliousness against the Somoza regime. She indicated that other people from her generation experienced the same phenomenon.

guerrillas stormed a government party and kidnapped Somoza's relatives and upper class socialites. On that occasion, in exchange for fourteen prisoners, Somoza released some high-profile Sandinista political prisoners from jail such as Daniel Ortega, and paid a one-million-dollar ransom. After Daniel reunited with his brother Humberto Ortega in Cuba for ideological training, young Nicaraguans began to join the FMLN in large numbers. When Carlos Fonseca was killed in 1976, the Sandinistas fractured into three groups and the two Ortega brothers emerged as the top 'comandantes' (Krauss, 1991).

The work of women was crucial to the triumph of Sandinismo: AMPRONAC focused much of its work initially on the Somocista repression, and carried out drives, hunger strikes and clandestine activities. They also led open demonstrations at a time when no other mass organization dared to hold a mass meeting. They denounced the poor condition of women, and put forth demands against labor laws that discriminated against women. In 1978, AMPRONAC's base of support shifted from 'concerned' middle and upper class women to poorer ones who were experiencing the repression more directly and were willing to confront it in a militant fashion. In that year, AMPRONAC provided infrastructural support for the participation of women in the struggle against Anastasio Somoza; soon, they were organizing clinics in hard-hit barrios; managing food distribution networks and organizing Sandinista block committees. As the fighting escalated, the women guarded trenches, made bombs, delivered messages and hid Sandinista fighters in their homes (Flynn, 1983, p. 417).

The events that led to the successful 1979 revolt against Somoza occurred one after the other: a major FSLN offensive in 1977 was followed by the murder of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, editor of the "La Prensa" newspaper and leading opposition figure in 1978, which increased popular resistance against Somoza. The same year, an FSLN commando –led by a woman 'comandante', Doris Tijerino– seized the National Palace and still in the same year, the FSLN led an insurrection that took over important cities such as Masaya, Leon, Chinandega and Estelí for several days (Barry 1991, p. 348).

The Church played a significant role in the final struggle against Somoza's regime. Fathers Fernando Cardenal and Miguel D'Escoto were members of „The Twelve“ (Los Doce), a group of prominent Nicaraguans who called for moving beyond the dictatorship and including the Sandinistas in the resolution of the crisis. At the time, Parishes were serving as informal centers where censored news could be known. As the likelihood of final confrontation increased, the CEPAD (Evangelical Committee for Aid and development) that represented protestant churches began to oppose the Somoza dictatorship in 1978 (Berryman, 1994).

By the end of May 1979, the Sandinistas announced a final offensive, and in the following days, Catholic bishops issued a document listing the conditions and endorsement of a 'just insurrection'. By that time, women made up an estimated 30 percent of the Sandinista army and held important leadership positions, commanding everything from small units to full battalions. In the crucial final battle of the city of Leon, four out of seven commanders of this military front were women (Flynn, 1983, p. 416.). Another female Sandinista guerrilla commander, Monica Baltodano, along with two male commanders organized the national final offensive (Bayard de Volo, 2001, p. 32). Finally, in July 1979, FSLN units took over Leon and Masaya and began marching to Managua. The FSLN triumphantly entered the capital on July 19, and Archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo blessed the new Sandinista ruling-junta following its entrance into Managua's crammed plaza atop a fire engine (Berryman, 1994; Krauss, 1991). Anastasio Somoza fled the country and was offered asylum in Paraguay, where he was eventually murdered. Massive support from all sectors followed this revolutionary triumph. Krauss (1991) argues that after their military success, the Sandinistas put in place two governments: one pluralist led by a five-man junta and another with a Leninist influence secretly controlled by the nine-man Sandinista party directorate and profoundly influenced by Cuban diplomats. The Sandinista 'comandantes' believed deeply in the Cuban revolution model. As Cuban influence increased during the early years of the Sandinista revolution, the FSLN rule banned the broadcast or publication of uncensored news stories relating to economic problems or state security. Along with the strengthening of the Nicaraguan Sandinista regime, its alliance with the Soviet bloc deepened. It was common to see imports from the Soviet bloc in Nicaraguan markets during the 1980s.

Following the fall of Somoza, AMPRONAC changed its name to the "Association of Nicaraguan Women, Luisa Amanda Espinoza" (AMNLAE). This organization leadership asserted that women's specific demands had become the revolution's demands and gender equality would come through women's full participation in the revolution. Accordingly, the organization focused on FSLN political and party work, and neglected the concern to bring together and represent large groups of women who were taking their first steps toward political participation. As a result, and because of AMNLAE's top down leadership style, the organization soon stagnated in some parts of the country. Furthermore, the participation of women in the FSLN ranks did not translate into a notable female presence in positions of political power; nor did feminism flourish during the Sandinista period; nevertheless, the FSLN managed to improve the quality of health care and education, as well as increase

women's political presence through AMNLAE and other women organizations (Bayard de Volo, 2001, p. 5; p. 35).

At the international level, in 1981, the Reagan administration increasingly wary of the influence of the Soviet Union in the Central American region, authorized 19 million dollars and engaged the CIA in organizing former Nicaraguan National Guard members into a counterrevolutionary ("Contra") army based in Honduras. In 1983, the first large-scale invasion of 'contras' coming from Honduran territory took place. As a response and in need to 'defend the revolution' the Sandinistas instituted the 'patriotic military service' (draft). The 'Contra' offensive deepened with heavy fighting in the north and south fronts of Nicaragua (Krauss, 1991).

As 'Contra' attacks increased, the Sandinista media intensely promoted the image of women-mothers tied to protection of the nation's children. The idea of a 'combative motherhood' –the protection of one's children- became overwhelmingly the most common theme in Sandinista party attempts to mobilize women into defense work. This revolutionary discourse stressed that military women were exemplary mothers willing to offer their lives for the defense of their children and the country – the epitome of the selfless, self-sacrificing mother: motherhood and war were made complementary (Bayard de Volo, 2001, p. 41f).

In 1984, Nicaragua held free elections and as expected, FSLN candidate Daniel Ortega was elected to a six-year term with 67 percent of the vote. Despite the strong support that existed for Sandinismo, some signs of internal discomfort with the Sandinista regime among women were evident. One good example is the case of the "Mothers of Matagalpa"<sup>21</sup>; a woman's movement that in 1984 decided to separate from AMNLAE and began to explore their interests and own policies disregarding the guidelines of AMNLAE. They decided that AMNLAE was too restrictive and contradicted other Sandinista and Liberation Theology discourses that promoted participatory democracy and active social struggle. They wanted a more active role in the revolution and were concerned that the basic material and emotional needs of the Mothers were unaddressed by AMNLAE. This was one of the earlier shifts towards autonomy from Sandinismo by a woman's group in the 1980s Sandinista Nicaragua (Bayard de Volo, 2001, p. 79).

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<sup>21</sup> The "Mothers of Matagalpa" was a remarkable group of women who came together in 1979 in order to protest the killings and deaths of their sons and family members. Many of the earliest members personally experienced the repression of Somoza's national guard (Bayard de Volo, 2001).

As the Sandinista-Contra war deepened, the US continued to support the 'Contra army' during 1985-86. Finally, in 1988 the Nicaraguan government announced its disposition to enter into direct talks with the "Contras" and lifted a five-year state of emergency, but the "Contras" ended up breaking off peace talks. In 1989, the Sandinistas committed to an agreement amongst the Central American Presidents that conditioned them to modify the electoral law. In the 1990 presidential elections, Violeta Chamorro, the widow of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, won the presidency of Nicaragua with nearly 60 percent of the vote. The FSLN assumed its new role as opposition party to the dismay of thousands of men and women who had identified and given their lives to the Sandinista cause.<sup>22</sup> Despite the feminist voices of many former and current Sandinista women, "Dona Violeta" as she was called, ran an explicitly antifeminist campaign in 1990 and won. She was not the only one running a campaign with anti-feminist features: the gendered images drawn upon by Daniel Ortega, the incumbent from the Sandinistas were hardly feminist. In this context, President Chamorro's antifeminist strategies emerged in response to the perceived threat to the 'new' status quo, namely, a decade of the Sandinista revolution (Kampwirth, 1998, p. 259f).

According to Close (1999, p. 206, 211) who conducted a thorough study of the 'Chamorro years', from other perspectives, President Chamorro broke a new path for Nicaraguan democratic development, committing to the canons of orthodox liberal democracy and attempting to create a '*Estado de Derecho*' (a rule of law based state), despite the fact that during her rule there were many charges of government corruption. Seemingly, she did better in limiting the government's role –enlarged during the Sandinista years- and eliminating media censorship and supporting tolerance for political opposition. According to Ruhl (2003) when Chamorro replaced Daniel Ortega as Nicaragua's president in 1990, she was initially forced to share power with a large, partisan, and, according to the Nicaraguan National Constitution, legally autonomous Army (EPS – Ejército Popular Sandinista), but strong domestic and foreign political pressures helped her administration to persuade the military leadership to eventually sever its ties to the Sandinista party, downsize the army by 85 percent, and accept a series of statutory and constitutional reforms that

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<sup>22</sup> Almost all the Nicaraguan feminists interviewed for this study admitted that the transition period from Sandinista to Post-Sandinista Nicaragua was extremely difficult to manage, because of the pain and uncertainty that emerged after the 'failure' of the Sandinista project. Paradoxically, as the FSLN became an opposition party, new opportunities in terms of autonomy emerged for women groups. As Selma from Nicaragua argued, this period was the "spring of the women's organizations" for Nicaraguan feminism.

narrowed the armed forces<sup>23</sup>. Luciak (2001) has estimated that the Sandinista movement in Nicaragua was constituted by revolutionary combatants that represented roughly between the 25 and 30 percent. The FSLN never released official figures of the composition of its guerrilla force at the time of its demobilization, but it is known that women did participate in significant numbers and occupied important leadership positions by the later stages of the “Contra” conflict, as opposed to the early years of the revolutionary struggle, when their participation was very limited.

Luciak (2001, p. 16), has argued that women’s participation in the Sandinista guerrilla movement can be analyzed in terms of three distinct phases. During the first phase, from the origins of the FSLN in 1961 to the early 1970s, few women participated; women only joined in greater numbers during the second phase from 1973-1977 mainly to contribute in support roles. It was only the last stage, going from 1977-1979 onwards, that witnessed the massive incorporation of women and coincided with the popular uprisings in support of the FSLN.

An additional element concerning Nicaraguan women combatants is that their participation in Nicaragua’s armed movements was not limited to the revolutionary left. In the 1980s, a number of women who opposed the Sandinista revolution joined the “Contras” as combatants. Karen Kampwirth has concluded that women constituted 7 to 15 percent of this belligerent force (Luciak, 2001, p. 21).

Ruhl (2003, p. 61) argues that the Nicaraguan political system in the post-Chamorro years was dominated by liberal Arnoldo Alemán and Sandinista Daniel Ortega who can be considered two rival patrimonial political bosses regarded as authoritarian and corrupt. Although ideological differences remained, political leaders on both sides of this partisan divide (Liberal/Sandinista) have battled for personal power and for their political clienteles while doing little to address the dramatic social conditions that the great majority of Nicaraguans have endured for years. In 2006, after sixteen straight years of conservative government (with the Chamorro, Aleman and Bolaños presidencies) Nicaragua saw the return of revolutionary Daniel Ortega of the FSLN, who won the presidential election with a narrow victory that could be viewed as part of a larger hemispheric swing to the left (Anderson and Dodd, 2009).

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<sup>23</sup> Edith, one of the Nicaraguan feminists interviewed, was one of the members of the EPS who agreed to social re-insertion and applied to be discharged from the Army taking advantage of the benefits offered by the Chamorro government.

Since taking office in January 2007, artists and intellectuals accuse Ortega's government of restricting artistic and academic freedom. In addition, outspoken journalists have met with harassment under his regime<sup>24</sup>. Courting domestic favor, Ortega has imposed restrictive laws on foreign businesses, and his ties to Hugo Chávez underscores the sense that he is embracing authoritarian populism. In some latest political moves, Ortega has built alliances with Russia and Iran, designed to provoke the United States, more than aiding Nicaragua's national development (Anderson and Dodd, 2009, 156). Feminist women have experienced harassment from Ortega's new administration, which has clearly positioned itself as anti-feminist, banning the rights for legal abortion in the country, which has set the feminist movement in clear opposition against this newest version of anti-feminist Sandinismo (Kampwirth, 2008).

### 2.1.3- The case of Guatemala.

*"Since I was very small, I had to experience violence in Guatemala. I come from a family that was victim of oppression during the sixties. I was born in 1962, and the first years of my life were marked by a strong political persecution towards my family. We suffered disappearances; paramilitary groups entered our house, and therefore, we became an itinerant [family], and had to run from one place to the other. Experiencing this [kind of] dynamic, its how my consciousness was born. I recognized how those with power ran over the rights of others... I saw my family members being tortured, disappeared and reappearing in clandestine cemeteries... this was how I became very committed with pastoral work from the Catholic Church..."*

*Nelly, Guatemala*

Perhaps even more than in the cases of Nicaragua and El Salvador, Guatemala exemplified how race difference was translated into an exclusion of the lower classes in a country where 56 percent of the population is of Mayan indigenous descent. Privilege and wealth concentration was the fertile arena in which charismatic leadership ('personalismo') was used by early twentieth century dictators such as Manuel Estrada Cabrera - who inspired the character of the novel "Señor Presidente" of Miguel Angel Asturias - in order to retain power (Perez- Brignoli, 1989, p. 105f).

In 1920s Guatemala, the fall of dictator Estrada-Cabrera, led by the Central American Unionist Party (PUCA) gave temporary hopes to an alliance of intellectuals, students and the middle classes, led by Carlos Herrera, who was searching to achieve the freedoms repressed by the dictator. Herrera, who became president, was quickly displaced

<sup>24</sup> Selma, one of the feminist women interviewed for this research has presented evidence that she –and other women from her feminist organization- have been harassed by the Ortega government.

from power in 1921, when General Jose Maria Orellana -who had been a lieutenant of Estrada-Cabrera took control of the Presidency. Orellana was followed by General Lazaro Chacon, who took over the presidency in 1926, and worked on reducing the power of the so-called oligarchy during his rule. The economic prosperity of Guatemala during this period favored institutional modernization and the stabilization of the currency. As it was the case in other parts of the Central American region, in Guatemala, the alternative political discourses at the time emerged from several new political groups such as the Cooperativist party, the Labor Party and the Guatemalan Communist Party. During the Chacon's days, the National University of San Carlos was granted autonomy. Already, the "Men's Teacher's College" was regarded a 'hotbed' of critical thought and new ideas. This progressive atmosphere suffered a drastic break when General Chacon suddenly died in 1931. General Jorge Ubico won the elections of that year upon the death of Chacon and began an authoritarian regime that lasted until 1944. Under Ubico's administration, the secret police was reorganized and its tactics were oriented to terrorize the opposition: between 1931 and 1934, worker's organizations were decimated, the University of San Carlos lost its autonomy, and dissidents were silenced (Perez Brignoli 1989, 108-110).

In the twilight of the liberal era, Jorge Ubico reinstituted colonial-style vagrancy laws that obliged landless Indigenous and Ladino peasants to work one hundred and fifty days a year in the land of wealthy land owners. This administration was marked by a strong authoritarianism that quashed a series of labor strikes, killing hundreds in the process. Finally, Ubico's refusal to hold elections sparked massive student protests and a reformist army coup on October 20, 1944, in what came to be known as the 'October Revolution'. (Krauss, 1991). Many women were motivated to actively participate in political movements such as the "October Revolution", particularly those who were teachers of primary education that actively showed their discontent towards the policies of Ubico. When students and teachers marched the central streets of Guatemala City demanding the resignation of General Ubico, these women were repressed by the military. In one of these demonstrations, a woman, Maria Chinchilla was murdered. She eventually became a symbol of the incorporation of women to political struggle (Soriano Hernandez, 2006, p. 112).

In 1945, Guatemalans voted for the first democratically elected president in their history, Juan Jose Arevalo, a philosopher and educator who called himself a 'spiritual socialist' in order to be distinguished from capitalists and communists. He discarded Ubico's secret police and repressive labor laws and began national literacy and cooperative farm programs. He established the "Indigenous Institute" and for the first time, Mayan life started

to change. The Indigenous peoples joined peasant leagues to demand higher wages from the coffee oligarchs and local leaders formed political parties that in many towns replaced 'Ladinos' in municipal government (Krauss, 1991). Already in the 1940s, Catholic priests and nuns from the Maryknoll order had spread to towns throughout Huehuetenango (Western Guatemala) where they began their work supporting the indigenous communities. In addition, Belgian priests and sisters on the Pacific coast and priests from Spain in Quiche worked as teams in the region of Izabal. Still, despite the increasing support to the peasantry and Arevalo's efforts, large latifundia<sup>25</sup> in Guatemala were still owned by the United Fruit Company<sup>26</sup>, a situation inherited from the Ubico dictatorship (Berryman 1994, p. 13). As part of the democratization wave, in 1945 women finally achieved the right of suffrage, and two years later, women came together to create the "Guatemalan Feminine Alliance", which was affiliated to the "Guatemalan Workers Party". Among some of their concerns, women were active in demanding fair wages.

In 1950, Colonel Jacobo Arbenz who was elected president after Arevalo, tried to deepen the goals of the 'October Revolution'. He legalized the Guatemalan Communist Party, known as the Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT) that was banned during the period of Ubico, and adopted much of its revolutionary lexicon and set out to break the monopolistic control that American companies wielded over the Guatemalan economy. Within two years, Arbenz expropriated 400,000 acres of United Fruit Company property and handed it over to tens of thousands of poor families (Krauss, 1991, p. 30f). As Perez-Brignoli (1989) explains, as Arbenz became a problem for the Eisenhower administration, the CIA was authorized to organize operation „PBSUCCESS“ which consisted of an invasion from Honduras led by two exiled Guatemalan military officers along with an effective propaganda campaign that

<sup>25</sup> 'Latifundia' can be defined as "a great landed estate with primitive agriculture and labor often in a state of partial servitude" (Source: Online Merriam-Webster Dictionary, retrieved on April 20, 2011 from <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/latifundia>).

<sup>26</sup> The United Fruit Company was founded in 1899 in the merger of the Boston Fruit Company and other companies producing and marketing bananas grown in the Caribbean islands, Central America, and Colombia. The company expanded its capitalization to \$215 million by 1930, making it the largest employer in Central America. From the company's founding, Caribbean and Latin American governments made available to it vast undeveloped tracts of jungle lands, which United Fruit cleared, planted, and supplied with extensive railroad and port facilities. As a foreign corporation of conspicuous size, United Fruit sometimes became the target of popular attacks. The Latin American press often referred to it as *el pulpo* ("the octopus"), accusing it of exploiting laborers, bribing officials, and influencing governments, especially during the early decades of the 20th century. The company's defenders, however, pointed out that United Fruit's early excesses were somewhat mitigated later. Source: Encyclopaedia Britannica Online, retrieved on April 20, 2011, from: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/615483/Chiquita-Brands-International-Inc>.

created confusion inside the government and among the people. Cornered by the situation, Arbenz stepped down from the presidency on June 27, 1954. Carlos Castillo Armas, an opposer of reformist ideas who had been crucial in the CIA operation, stepped in. What followed was that thousands of peasants were thrown off their lands, unemployment soared, wages dropped and food became scarce in rural areas. Castillo Armas' counterrevolutionary government disbanded industrial unions and peasant leagues and rounded up nine thousand leftist suspects. As punishment for the insurgent Ixil Mayas for participating in the Arbenz land reform, the Castillo Armas administration killed or imprisoned hundreds of their peoples. Furthermore, Ubico's secret police apparatus was resurrected, and political prisoners were held and in many cases, tortured for years without ever standing trial. Over the next three decades, Castillo Armas created a 'black list' composed of people who were active in unions or other organizations considered close to Arbenz or the communists (Krauss 1991, p. 29-35).

In addition to the secret police, Castillo Armas' created a militia called 'MLN' (National Liberation Movement – Movimiento de Liberacion Nacional), placed in power by the Eisenhower administration, which was deeply resented by a fraction of military officers. In August 1954, a group of cadets of the Guatemalan military waged an unsuccessful attack on this militia. The rebellious cadets were exiled from the country as punishment and the dispute simmered, but several veterans of the rebellion led another officers' revolt on November 1960 against the then President Miguel Ydigoras Fuentes, who was supported by the Eisenhower administration. Women participated actively in the revolt against Ydigoras Fuentes, by supporting the union struggle; seizing radio stations with the objective of disseminating revolutionary messages and along with men, joined popular insurrection against the dictator. At this point, women acted not as members of the 'Feminine League' but as members of the "PGT" (Guatemalan Labour Party) (Soriano Hernandez, 2006, p. 120). Again, the rebels were defeated by the army of Ydigoras Fuentes, but some escaped for Honduras to regroup, and returned to the Guatemalan Highlands in 1963 having evolved into a Marxist guerrilla group called the "Rebel Army Forces" or FAR (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes). As a response, the Kennedy administration sent US Green Beret advisers to train the Guatemalan army into an effective counterinsurgency force to fight the FAR. At the cost of about eight thousand lives, the improved Guatemalan army defeated the FAR, though the group managed to regroup and survive in the jungles of the Guatemalan province of Petén (Krauss, 1991).

In 1967, three Maryknoll missionaries, Arthur and Thomas Melville and Sister Miriam Peter established contact with one faction of the guerrillas, and while they were still preparing to become actively involved in their struggle, they were detected and forced to leave the country. The 'Melville case' was singled out by the Guatemalan military and oligarchy as proof of how Church-based 'subversives' operated in the country (Berryman, 1994). Another example of Church involvement was that of the "Catholic Action" project: despite the fact that the conservative Roman Catholic church hierarchy had established a project named 'Catholic Action' oriented to build schools, clinics and chapels as well as to combat remnants of 'radicalism' from the Arbenz years, in the hand of local and foreign clergy and Indigenous base groups, the 'Catholic Action' movement became a vehicle for spreading 'liberation theology' and 'planting a seed' for the next cycle of revolution. Priests encouraged landless indigenous peasants from crowded highland villages to migrate north to the Ixcán jungles bordering Mexico to clear the land and homestead (Berryman, 1994). The move put the indigenous migrants in contact with a tiny new guerrilla organization consisting of about fifty radical students known as "The Patriotic Worker Youth" (Juventud Patriótica del Trabajo) that eventually became the 'Guerrilla Army of the Poor' or EGP (Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres). The leaders of the EGP saw the pioneer indigenous of the Ixcán as a potential base of support and their movement quickly spread. In one case, after an EGP attack in the town of Uspantán, Quiché, the army surrounded the parish compound where priests and their sisters lived and threw grenades into the patio. As the repression by the military increased, in 1972, another guerrilla group emerged: the "Organization of People in Arms" or ORPA (Organización del Pueblo en Armas) that began to spread its influence in the Guatemalan southern highlands in the late seventies. In the early years of Guatemalan guerrilla movement (1960-1962), female participation was very limited and largely restricted to the urban areas and involved support activities. Even in the early 1970s women were largely excluded, though gradually, an increasing number of indigenous women became part of the guerrilla movement, but military leadership functions were almost exclusively reserved for male 'Ladinos' (Luciak, 2001, p. 23).

Table 2.4 presents a list of the four Guatemalan revolutionary organizations that eventually conformed the URNG in 1982, some of which were introduced previously in this historical review.

Table 2.4

| Guerrilla Organizations that conformed the<br>"Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit" in 1982 |                                                                        |                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Date of establishment                                                                          | Armed Organization                                                     | Geo-political strategy                                                                                                                                             | Background information                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |
| 1952                                                                                           | Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (PGT) or Guatemalan Labour Party      | Focused on reaching out to unions and mass organizations                                                                                                           | The PGT emerged in 1952 as the result of a merger between two communist parties: the "Guatemalan Communist Party" and the "Revolutionary Workers Party". Its 'armed branch' was the "Juventud Patriótica del Trabajo" (JPT) or Work's Patriotic Youth. The PGT Favored the political and electoral approach as a way of achieving social change.                                                                                                          |
| 1962                                                                                           | Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (FAR) or Rebel Armed Forces                   | Mostly focused its actions in the capital city and the eastern part of the country                                                                                 | Organized by dissident national army members, this group adopted the "foquismo" approach and attempted to build its base among the peasants of the Eastern parts of Guatemala. It was dismantled in 1966 after the Guatemalan Armed Forces developed a joint strategy supported by the US military. This military campaign took the lives of nine thousand people approximately.                                                                          |
| 1972                                                                                           | Organizacion del Pueblo en Armas (ORPA) or People in Arms Organization | Focused its actions in the coastal areas and the high plains of the country (San Marcos and Atitlan) where there are high concentrations of indigenous population. | Organized by a group of dissidents from the FAR, headed by Rodrigo Asturias, son of Nobel Prize laureate Miguel Angel Asturias. This group rejected the "foquismo" approach to revolution making and attempted to incorporate the indigenous peoples to revolutionary organizing, as the ORPA rejected the idea that revolution had to be a "mestizo" or "ladino" endeavor. Its emphasis was on strengthening ties with the indigenous and field workers. |
| 1972                                                                                           | Ejercito Guerrillero de los Pobres (EGP) or Guerrilla Army of the Poor | Focused its actions in the Ixcán Jungle in the northern province of Peten bordering Mexico.                                                                        | Organized in Mexico, its first guerrilla contingent entered through the Ixcán jungle to Guatemala. It attempted to create a guerrilla „foco“ that would mobilize the masses to victory. This group was the revolutionary organization with the highest affiliation during the Guatemalan war. At its peak, the EGP could rely upon a social base of approximately 250,000 people.                                                                         |

Sources: Soriano Hernandez (2006, p. 75f.) and "Guerrillas Latinoamericanas" taken from: <http://perso.wanadoo.es/guerrillas/guatemala.htm>, retrieved on April 20, 2011

After a massive earthquake in 1976, which left twenty-two thousand dead and disrupted Guatemala's civil life as hunger and disease quickly spread, Church volunteers and foreign aid organizations helping with relief services also spread political ideas throughout the coffee highlands and helped organize peasants into rescue organizations that were eventually converted into guerrilla support groups. As an indirect result of the earthquake, a local radical Christian organization and a national Indigenous peasant union called the

“Committee for Peasant Unity’ or CUC (Comite de Unidad Campesina) emerged across the western highlands of the country. The latter merged socialist consciousness and village organizing, and its growing popular movement alarmed the regime of hardliner General Romeo Lucas Garcia, and as a result, in the cities, death squads began targeting students and union activists. In the countryside, they concentrated on the Catholic Church, killing priests and scores of lay workers (Krauss, 1991). In 1979, foreign priests from Filipinas, Belgium and Spain were murdered and as a reaction to these events, Guatemalan Bishop Juan Jose Gerardi decided to withdraw all church personnel from the Diocese of Quiche in an unprecedented act for the Guatemalan Church (Berryman, 1994, p. 109f). Around that time, the indigenous people joined ORPA and EGP in growing numbers throughout 1979 and the military government began to apply increasing repression to their communities. The Carter administration publicly criticized Guatemala’s human rights record and decided to cut off military aid in 1978. In another dramatic event that caught international attention, in January 1980, twenty-seven Ixil indigenous men and women occupied the Spanish Embassy demanding an inquiry into human rights abuses and the withdrawal of the armed forces of the Quiche province. Only three hours later, the National Police of Guatemala stormed the building throwing grenades and firebombs into the embassy. Thirty-nine Indigenous and Embassy office workers burned to death (Krauss, 1991).

It was in 1978-80 when women started to join the Guatemalan guerrilla organizations in greater numbers, but at no time did women constitute more than twenty-five percent of the total membership of these organizations (Luciak, 2001, p. 23). Around this time, the number of indigenous men and women seeking exile in Mexico increased dramatically. Most of the women who fled to Southern Mexico were indigenous peasants that spoke only their native languages. They did not seem to matter to the Guatemalan army that dismissed them as ‘vientres que producen guerrilleros’ (guerrilla-producing wombs) (Crosby, 1999, p. 184). Some of the indigenous men and women who stayed in Guatemala became radicalized in their revolutionary involvement whereas others surrendered to army troops. Increasingly, indigenous revolutionaries took command of battle units sharing a common language and the guerrilla ranks eventually increased to five thousand fighters including militia. The highpoint for the movement came in January 1982 when the four guerrilla groups formally united to create the “Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unit” or URNG (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca). The authoritarian regime of General Fernando Lucas Garcia counterattacked with massacres, mass political reeducation, forced militia duty and scores of ‘model villages’ whose objectives were to insulate the population

from the guerrillas. In 1982, retired general Efraín Ríos Montt achieved power through an anticorruption 'coup d'état'. After he was designated as President, he continued with the basic counterinsurgency model pursued by the Lucas García government. He financed and facilitated the work of evangelical churches that spread the word to Indigenous emphasizing how 'Catholic liberation theology' was the "work of the devil". With Ríos Montt in power, Evangelical Christianity became a principal element of counterinsurgency as he established twenty-model villages throughout the country where the rights and culture of the indigenous were submitted to military indoctrination. The indigenous groups of the Alta Verapaz province, such as the Ixils, the Kekchis and Pokomchis were particularly hit hard by the war and then subjected to various forms of psychological warfare (Krauss, 1991).

In 1983 army officers overthrew Ríos Montt, who left Guatemala bankrupt and internationally isolated. The defense minister Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores seized power through another military coup and continued with the 'model villages' program. In 1985, a civilian, Vinicio Cerezo was elected president in seemingly democratic elections. Early in his presidency, Cerezo appealed for "concertación" (harmonization) between the different actors of society. (Berryman, 1994). In 1985, a new women's group emerged, the "GAM" or "Mutual Support Group" (Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo) that was composed mainly of women who had lost their spouses or children to government violence. Twenty-five people from the capital attended their first meeting. Within a few months, their number had grown to over two hundred women. Although eventually two of the six board members were murdered, the group held marches that reached up to a thousand people. It was during this year when the United States resumed economic and military aid to the Guatemalan army (Krauss, 1991).

In 1987, the presidents of Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua signed the "Esquipulas II" peace accords promoted by Costa Rican Nobel Peace Prize winner Oscar Arias, and oriented towards the promotion of national reconciliation and development of democratic measures in all the signatory countries. By 1988, the number of people dying in the Guatemalan highlands had decreased and popular organizations were on the move, though at a much lower intensity than before. Two new groups emerged: the "Council of Ethnic Communities" that objected to civil disappearances and the "Unity of Labor and Popular Action" which held massive rallies in Guatemala. In addition, unions and popular organizations took further steps towards unification with the formation of the "Union of Labor and Popular Action" (UNSI TRAGUA) that the CUC also joined. Also in 1987, indigenous women whose husbands had been killed or disappeared organized the "National

Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Widows” (CONAVIGUA). In addition to these groups, other civil society forces were organized by both refugees in Mexico and by those who had been displaced in Guatemala through the use of violence (Krauss, 1991; Barry, 1991). Among the most significant groups, and the first refugee women’s organization to emerge publicly was ‘Mama Maquin’, founded in May 1990, honoring the memory of a Q’eqchi woman assassinated by the Guatemalan military in a 1978 massacre of indigenous peasants seeking land rights. This group came to represent around eight thousand refugee women from eight different Guatemalan indigenous groups who lived in Southern Mexico. This organization identified itself as being part of the Guatemalan popular movement, and attempted to enable women to participate at the community level from a perspective of equality. (Crosby, 1999, p. 186)

Despite some signs of political openness, the Guatemalan army continued to target the civil population as much as guerrillas in a context that supported violence, individual killings and disappearances. In spite of all this, in 1989, a peace process began to take shape in Guatemala. As in neighboring El Salvador and Nicaragua, the government had established a ‘National Reconciliation Committee’ by compliance with the Central America peace plan. In 1990, after the Sandinistas were defeated in free elections held in Nicaragua, the Guatemalan guerrillas seemed to evolve and take into account the changing circumstances, eventually opening to the possibility of a peace agreement. On December 29, 1996, a Peace Accord was signed by the Government of Guatemala and the URNG, which concluded a war of nearly three decades of duration, and a seven-year peace negotiation process that spanned during three Guatemalan governments.

Luciak (2001, p.23) has argued that the Guatemalan revolutionary experience had repercussions on the gender composition of the URNG, considering how female participation in the 1960s and 1970s was limited, but started to increase in the 1980s. By the time the URNG signed the 1996 peace accords, women’s participation had considerably weakened, possibly because of the guerrilla military stagnation and the massive emigration of Indigenous women. A European Union sponsored study gave a reasonably accurate picture of the URNG’s gender composition at the time where the revolutionary forces were demobilized, based on a survey of 2,778 URNG combatants (of the 2,940 concentrated in camps). According to table 2.5, women represented 410 (15%) of the 2,778 combatants interviewed and 356 (about 25%) of the 1,410 political cadres.<sup>27</sup> These data demonstrate

<sup>27</sup> A political cadre in the context of revolution can **be defined as** “militants that were engaged in political work on behalf of a revolutionary organization both inside and outside of the country (Shayne, 2004, p. 35).

that compared to their involvement in El Salvador and Nicaragua, female participation in Guatemala's revolutionary struggle was rather limited.

**Table 2.5**

| <b>Gender composition of URNG by demobilization category, 1997</b> |       |      |       |      |       |       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|------|-------|------|-------|-------|
| Category                                                           | Women | %    | Men   | %    | Total | %     |
| Combatants                                                         | 410   | 14,8 | 2,368 | 85,2 | 2,778 | 100,0 |
| Political cadres                                                   | 356   | 25,5 | 1,054 | 74,8 | 1,410 | 100,0 |
| Total                                                              | 766   | 18,3 | 3,422 | 81,7 | 4,188 | 100,0 |

Source: URNG: Personal incorporado, 2-4 (In Luciak, 2001, p. 26).

The end of the war confronted Guatemalans with dramatic figures: the war had already killed approximately 140,000 people, orphaned tens of thousands, destroyed hundreds of villages, exiled tens of thousands of people and left millions of others in fear, ripping the social fabric of the country (Krauss, 1991; Barry, 1991). Nevertheless, in spite of implementation problems, the peace process has been regarded as a catalyst of change in the traditional social relationships between powerful and marginalized groups in the Guatemalan society. As it gave an official role to non-governmental civilian organizations in formulating the treaty and its implementation, it made -at least rhetorically- more advances in according rights and legitimacy to the indigenous majority of Guatemala's population, as it reflects and encourages the proliferation of indigenous organizations; it facilitated a return of refugees even though negotiations of their return was largely outside the framework of the Peace Treaty negotiations, they were a key part of the overall process. The government committed itself to specific budgetary and taxation goals to increase education and health spending. The growing participation in the peace process of a variety of international players (the United Nations; a formal group of five countries designated "Friends" of the process and international financial organizations) helped to end the deep international isolation that Guatemala military government's war on the indigenous and human rights violations had created. In addition, the presence of the UN verification mission (MINUGUA) -following the signing of accords in March and June of 1994 on human rights and displaced populations- changed the political landscape of the country, though human rights violations did not disappear. In the end, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) facilitated the return of refugees (Source: "Latin American Network Information Center of the University of Texas at Austin")<sup>28</sup>.

<sup>28</sup> Retrieved from <http://lanic.utexas.edu/project/hemisphereinitiatives/promise.htm#civil> on November 2010.

As it was the case in El Salvador, the post-conflict period in Guatemala has seen an escalation of common and organized crime, as well as several dozen attacks on URNG activists, although there is widespread agreement among human rights groups that human rights conditions (excluding social and economic rights) have improved in recent years. The URNG successfully demobilized its troops under UN observation and modest reintegration programs began. The massive and largely involuntary “Civilian Action Patrols” organized by the military (and incorporating some 600,000 Guatemalans) were formally demobilized, and so too the “Mobile Military Police”, a unit often accused of human rights abuses.

Still, some analysts (Preti, 2002) have criticized the Guatemalan post-conflict arrangement, pointing out to the fact that violence has assumed new forms in the country. Some figures from the World Bank support the argument that Guatemala has become a substantially more violent country since the end of the internal armed conflict (Moser and McIlwaine, 2000). Other studies on violence in Guatemala reach similar conclusions on the basis of statistical elements: in particular the “United Nations Development Program” (1999, p. 88) observes that the overall crime rate in Guatemala has risen constantly since 1995. One particularly important dimension of cultural violence is related to the impact of the former war in Guatemalan society. The combination of terror and impunity that existed in the past created a culture of silence and fear, which is one of the most pervasive and destructive aspects of cultural violence. Anthropologist Linda Green (quoted by Preti, 2002) has observed that the routinization of terror and being socialized in a violent environment are still dominant factors that affect life in Guatemalan indigenous communities. From this perspective, the 1996 Peace Accords failed to address the problems of impunity, deeply seated in Guatemalan society. The United Nations Verification Mission has been particularly worried about the persistence of impunity and notes with concern that it is an entrenched phenomenon. It seems as if no real progress has been made in the prosecution of the most serious and representative cases of human rights violations during the war (MINUGUA, 2001a). Furthermore, Preti (2002) argues that while the elites have benefited from the peace process, the same does not seem to apply to ordinary people, as the Peace Accords did not offer clear benefits for those in condition of extreme poverty in rural areas, whose situation has not substantially changed since the end of the civil war. In 2007, a leftist civilian from the URNG, social democrat Alvaro Colom won the presidential elections. Despite the hopes, Colom has been unable to overcome the severe problems that Guatemalans face everyday, less so to tackle impunity, corruption and crime.

#### 2.1.4- Summary and Outlook

Tracing the history of revolutionary movements in Central America during the XX century allows us to establish the socio-political context where second wave feminism emerged in the region. It has been widely acknowledged that revolutionary movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, created the conditions for the emergence of discursive meanings associated with women's involvement in war that were adapted and incorporated by feminists into their own views of 'transformations of society'. The following points summarize key issues reflected in the literature that discusses the connections between the revolutionary movements discussed above and the emergence of second wave feminism in Central America:

1. Historically, There has been a longstanding social conflict in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala that has been characterized by a struggle between 'the economic and military elites' and the 'voices of dissidence' in those countries. The conflict reflects the extreme inequalities –inherited from the Colonial era- sustained by authoritarian regimes (dictatorships) that promoted economic liberal agendas with an almost inexistent social contract for the majority of the population. These liberal elites over time consistently refused to open spaces of democratization, and developed – sometimes conflicting- alliances with the national armed forces in order to guarantee the monopoly of force, creating conditions that limited the space for political dissidence, and leaving no other alternative for these groups than clandestine political organizing. From this perspective, revolutionary discourse worked its way to the public through indirect forms of communication and using means of expression that reflected the experiences of those 'underground'. These historical elements shaped the discursive context in which dissidence and specifically second wave feminism emerged in the region.
2. Just as much as men, women have a long history of political participation in the Central American region. Despite the 'devotion' to the memory of early revolutionary male figures like Farabundo Marti or Augusto Cesar Sandino, Central American women have not been indifferent to class oppression, and throughout the Twentieth Century history, have been involved in different types of political organizing. As Flynn (1983, p. 414f) and others have argued, a key element shared by a number of leftist organizations in Latin America is that the starting point for strategizing women's liberation has been the congruence between many of the demands of the women's movement and those of

broader struggles for political freedom and economic justice. Women have sought to radically transform their societies and in the process, to transform their positions within them. As Dora Maria Tellez (an iconic Sandinista 'comandante') has argued: "Revolutions transform everything, make everything tremble... all the structures are disordered so that later they can be put back in order... but a different, revolutionary order "(Schultz, 1980). Many Central American women believed that this 'new' revolutionary order would lead to equality and justice that would implicitly deal with structural gender inequality, and thus, their agendas were transformational, but not from the feminist, but the revolutionary point of view.

3. In the process of becoming politically organized, Central American women redefined the limits of what was considered possible for them at the time of their revolutionary involvement. Through their revolutionary participation women played a variety of roles, many of them considered to be support oriented: logistics, communication, food distribution, health, first aid, political and diplomatic work. These political organizing activities demanded new functions and responsibilities from women within both armed and unarmed sectors. During the revolutionary periods, women organized around three sectors of the political opposition movement: 1. Unions, student or peasant groups (for example, with organizations such as ANDES in El Salvador, ANPRONAC in Nicaragua or CUC in Guatemala); 2. Human rights sectors (with women involved in denouncing human rights violations, many times of family members, as it was the case of COMADRES in El Salvador, The Matagalpa Mothers in Nicaragua and the Mutual Support Group 'CAM' in Guatemala) and 3. The armed sector or guerrilla (FMLN in El Salvador, FSLN in Nicaragua and URGV in Guatemala) (Shayne, 2004, p. 24f). In post-revolutionary Nicaragua, women also increased their levels of political participation and joined a woman's organization such as AMNLAE by the thousands, reaching at some point 25,000 thousand women affiliated to AMNLAE (Flynn, 1983, p. 418).
4. Though women contributed in a variety of ways to their revolutionary organizations, those who joined the armed struggle were more radicalized in their involvement. In the cases of El Salvador and Nicaragua, the women in combat amounted to almost thirty percent of the belligerent forces. As Stoltz Chinchilla (1985) has argued, this represented a break with past conceptions of women's proper role in socialist and revolutionary struggles and strategies that changed the attitudes about the roles of women as combatants. In this context, women military participations redefined and constructed

different meanings for a “combatant”. Shayne (2004, p. 43) has argued that women who fought in the wars became ‘gendered revolutionary bridges’; ‘gendered’ referring to femininity; ‘revolutionary’ to the type of social movement of which the women are part of and ‘bridges’ implying the strategic connections women made as a result and subversion of femininity within such a context. Thus, women activists subverted prototypical images of femininity while transmitting highly militant messages. The use of familiar icons of femininity to communicate revolutionary sentiments contributed to expand the base of support for the movement. This particular phenomena was seen in the militarization of motherhood in Nicaragua, where the iconic image of the ‘combatant-mother’ brought the war into the private sphere and bridged families into revolutionary action.

5. The political history of Central America has been written and re-written by authors and sources coming from various political and cultural positionings seeking to frame a certain view of reality. Starting with the construction of the ‘historia oficial’ (official history), the teaching of history in Central America has been used as an ideological tool at both schools and universities by both ruling governments as well as dissident political forces, particularly when looking at the construction of certain historical periods characterized by dissidence and rebellion. Before and during the revolutionary years in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, what students learned through –for the most part politically conservative- textbooks during their high school years was later challenged at the University levels, where ideological positionings tended to reflect progressive –and sometimes radical Marxist views of the Central American history, as it was the case at the National University in El Salvador <sup>29</sup>, or the San Carlos University in Guatemala, as both institutions functioned as cradles of revolutionary action in their respective countries during the 1970s and 1980s (see sub-section 2.1.1 for El Salvador and 2.1.3 for Guatemala on this chapter). As an example of these approaches, historical episodes such as the 1932 massacre of indigenous peoples in El Salvador (La Matanza) were practically

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<sup>29</sup> For a detailed discussion of the educational reforms that the University of El Salvador conducted in 1969, emphasizing the application of a Marxist approach in the Philosophy Program run by the Humanities School, see the University’s journal „LA UNIVERSIDAD“, No. 2, which features a series of articles on the „historical memory“ of the Institution. The journal (in Spanish) can be found in the following link: <http://www.ues.edu.sv/content/revista-la-universidad-02>

erased from history textbooks in high schools, yet, they emerged as crucial parts of national history at the university level. Precisely in the height of the revolutionary years, historians and philosophers at these universities considered themselves dissidents and revolutionaries, and re-telling the national stories became a crucial part of their activism.<sup>30</sup>

During and after the revolutionary periods in Central America, North American and European scholars contributed to the construction of a body of literature that has attempted to shed light into the deeply seated social inequalities in the region and its relationship with the emergence of revolutionary movements. These authors were interested in socio-economic; political; legal; gendered and religious aspects of these conflicts, underscoring the damaging impact that US policies, in the pursuit of its own special interests, had in this region. These academic works, though mostly aimed to North American and European readership, nevertheless, when translated into Spanish, also contributed to broaden academic discourses regarding the political conflict and the international and multilayered dimension of revolutionary conflicts in the region.

Some of the bibliographical works quoted in this chapter fit into the latter category, as they present a Central American historical summary that underscores a critical view of US interventionism in the region, while attempting to shed light into the socio-cultural dynamics of Central America. Works such as „Coffee and Power“ by Jeffery Page (1997), offer a detailed account of the workings between the Central American coffee oligarchy and far right politicians of the US; or „Inside Central America. Its people, politics and history“ by Clifford Krauss (1991) tries to strike a middle ground in terms of shared responsibility in Central America, but ends up unveiling many instances of US diplomacy unethical tactics; or „Stubborn hope. Religion, politics and revolution in Central America“ by Philip Berryman (1994) explores the works of theology of liberation in Central America in the background of a massive military campaign sponsored by the US or „Central America Inside Out“ by Tom Barry (1991), looks at the role played by the United States in regards to each Central American country „state of affairs“. By using these books as references for a historical review of Central America, the researcher has attempted to draw upon the comparative insights gained by these works, as they compare the different kinds of revolutionary experiences in the region, while retaining a commitment to the questions of historical causality and ethical responsibility concerning the high toll

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30 Idem as 14.

of death and oppression endured by these societies. These works are complemented with theme-specific arguments written by experts in the fields of gender and revolution (Karen Kampwirth; Norma Stolz Chinchilla, Julie Shayne; Lorraine Bayard de Volo) or gender and democratization (Ilja Luciak, Jocelyn Viterna) who shed light into the contribution and experiences of revolutionary women in Central America and the impact of their activism in the state and democratization processes. More than historical accounts, their insights tend to reflect the outcome of empirical studies that they conducted and bring to the forefront the alternative story of women as revolutionaries. In addition, drawing upon the works of Central American and Latin American historians (Hector Perez Brignoli; Carlos Canas Dinarte; Silvia Soriano Hernandez) exceptional cases and events in the history of Central America are included in this summary; for example, accounts from the role of women in the „1944 revolution“ in Guatemala, or the role of women in overthrowing dictator Salvador Hernandez-Martinez“ in El Salvador, or the story behind the murder of Augusto Sandino in Nicaragua. By bringing these perspectives together as a historical backdrop of the women’s stories, the researcher has attempted to contextualize the words of women like Dilsia of El Salvador (see section 4.1.5 in Chapter four), who narrated an alternative story of the murder of a wealthy Salvadoran whose death was connected to Christian base communities that she belonged to; or Selma from Nicaragua (see section 4.2.3 in Chapter Four), who argued how the 1972 earthquake shaped and contributed to her revolutionary activism. Undoubtedly, there are certain decisions made by the researcher concerning how to summarize and tell the political story of Central America that are open for debate and can be regarded as problematic; for example, in the case of El Salvador, calling Roberto D’Abuisson the intellectual murderer of Monsignor Romero or Joaquin Villalobos the murderer of poet Roque Dalton, in spite of the existing evidence, is still challenged by certain groups within Salvadoran society. In this way, the researcher positions herself and makes a decision on how to tell these stories; a position which is still contested and highly problematized on ideological grounds in El Salvador.

Ultimately, it is important to acknowledge that, in line with the constructivist stance taken in this study (see section 2.4.2-The Concept of Self and Identity in Narrative Psychology) the historical summary in this literature review presents only one perspective out of many possible ones. This particular outlook seeks to establish comparisons across revolutionary movements from the region while focusing on the contributions of revolutionary women. Telling the story in this way demands definite

decisions and a certain focus that is, as any other, open for further interrogation.

The following section will address how feminist movements evolved from these revolutionary and post conflict contexts in each one of the countries discussed.

## **2.2- Feminism in Central America**

In the previous section, the connection between the political history of Central America and new positionings and roles achieved by the women involved in war was discussed. The question that concerns this section has to do with how 'feminism' as a political force evolved in the Central American region in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, particularly focusing on the connections between feminist organizing and the political left in those countries. In order to contextualize the development of feminism in the region and its inter-connectedness with political activism, the following sub-section presents a literature summary of the experiences of women as revolutionaries and political activists, followed by a sub-section on key historical developments of Latin American feminisms, including Mexico and the South Cone, as well as the influences of North American and European feminists in the Latin American region, and concluding with separate sub-sections discussing the development of feminist movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

### **2.2.1- The Question of Women as Activists and the Role of Feminism**

Many languages do not have nouns such as 'feminism' or use 'feminism' as a term for the politics of equal rights of women. This term came into English language use not until the 1890s, and stands for a belief in sexual equality combined with a commitment to eradicate sexist domination and to transform society. Most writers agree that in Britain, feminism -as a group of political and social movement- probably dates from the seventeenth century; but 'feminism' as a body of answers to the 'question of woman' has a more diffuse and longstanding existence (Humm, 1992, p.1).

In the United States, the term feminism gained currency in the 1910s, a few decades after its appearance in Europe. During the 'first wave of feminism' (a designation of Marsha Weinman Lear, who dubbed the revival of feminism in the late sixties the 'second wave') 'Feminist' (originally capitalized) defined those women and men whose concept of female liberation was more radical and comprehensive than mainstream ideas concerning a 'woman

movement' of the progressive era (1890-1920). These so-called 'Feminists' demanded revolutionary changes in the economic and sexual types of female dependency and subordination. These early 'Feminists' rejected Christianity and conventional sexual respectability, and unlike many self-defined feminists (lowercase f) in Europe who took more traditional views in their campaigns for women's rights and societal transformation, 'Feminists' in the United States challenged prevailing beliefs in innate gender attributes and roles (Kramarae and Spencer, p. 763). The so-called 'First wave feminism' both in Britain and America centered on debates about materialism as well as political interests and self-determination. The overall movement had a progressive social vision which encompassed suffragism, 'old' and 'new' feminisms and 'welfare' feminism (Humm, 1992, p. 11). Within the first wave feminist movement, a decided minority were those clearly identified with radical issues; the most numerous and influential were socialists; and a smaller contingent were anarchists. Not all socialist women were identified with the women's movement, but most of the female leadership were engaged with the 'human rights' campaign (Kramarae and Spencer, 2000, p. 765). Both politically and culturally, 'First wave' feminism was internally diverse: from the campaigns for women's rights in Europe and America; to efforts to transform women's labour in revolutionary Russia, it incorporated a wide range of theoretical perspectives. Though campaigns for women's rights were often conducted within a liberal framework, Russian feminists based their reforms on the work of Marx and Engels, and others were inspired in anarchism. The movement contained within itself differences of opinion about the sites of women's disadvantage and thus the sorts of changes needed in order to overcome it. Many feminists demanded the reform of existing political and economic institutions, and a range of civil and economic reforms, challenging both the deeply embedded assumptions that women were not capable of conforming to the norms governing the political realm and the workplace, and the assumption that it was their duty to be an 'angel in the house', safely protected by men (James, 2003, p. 495f).

### **Women's Oppositional Consciousness**

The site of emergence of the so-called "second wave" of feminism in the 1960s and 1970s, took place in US middle-class suburban neighborhoods in which college educated mothers and young women lived and experienced frustration and a growing discontent that moved them to a different personal and political direction for themselves and their daughters. These women were mostly inspired and swept into feminism by the civil rights

movement; the discussion of principles such as equality and justice, and the revolutionary ferment caused by protests against the Vietnam War.<sup>31</sup>

Sara Evans (1979, p. 232) has argued that US women in the 1960s arrived at their feminist consciousness through their involvement in other [political] causes. Eventually, in the 1970s, thousands of women became politicized through the awareness of their own oppression, which they extended into other social arenas as well. Molineux, 1985; Ray, 1999 Kampwirth, 2001) and many others have argued that women's involvement in various forms or types of political and social movements seeking liberation from oppressive structures has transformed themselves, their roles and ultimately, the way they have struggled for their gendered rights. For Peterson and Runyan (1993, p. 116), women's political struggles have gone beyond gender interests and have sought transformative changes in social, political and economic systems, as a way to react to prevailing "masculinist systems", which is why, it has been sometimes difficult to separate women's movements from other political movements agitating for social, political and economic transformations.

When it comes to addressing the emergence of women's activisms, Raka Ray (1999, p. 12, 35) brings in the importance of context in which they appear, arguing how women's movements do not occur in a vacuum and tend to emerge in sites of generalized political instability and protest, which both encourages and constrains them. Ray makes explicit reference to the case of Latin America, women's movements, which emerged in the context and reacting to authoritarianism; as in the case of Indian women's movement, the enabling factor was the Indian independence. Thus, Ray emphasizes how women's movements configurations are shaped by social phenomena such as histories of political participation, struggles and the nature of elites in the different societies in which they appear. She goes on to say that women's participation in social movements previous to participation in the women's movement is crucial in the formation of the interests and capacities for the latter.

But what are the motivations and circumstances under which activists create and sustain movements? And if so, what are the issues women tend to organize around?

Andrews (1991:32f) has argued that a definite condition for individuals to politically organize is to believe that a social system is both illegitimate and capable of change, as a sound psychological preparation for engagement in political activity. Furthermore, in the process of becoming politically conscious, individuals begin to develop a theory which

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<sup>31</sup> Source: <http://www.britannica.com/EBchecked/topic/724633/feminism/216008/The-second-wave-of-feminism>. Retrieved on May 19, 2013.

explains the underlying reason for their relatively disadvantaged situation –or the disadvantaged situation of others. Mansbridge (2001, p. 4f) defines this political or oppositional consciousness as “an empowering mental state that prepares members of an oppressed group to act to undermine, reform, or overthrow a system of human domination”. Hunt and Benford (2004, p. 442) understand this ‘consciousness’ not just as a disposition for action, but also as “interpretive frameworks that emerge out of a challenging group’s struggle to define and realize its interests”.

Both as a disposition for action or as a way of interpreting reality, oppositional consciousness is heightened if individuals themselves are members of the oppressed class, in which also their sense of membership is heightened. But as individuals may identify themselves with various social, and sometimes, competing groups, Andrews asks, how can the concept of consciousness incorporate the various and sometimes competing aspects of an individual’s social identity? In this context, the concept of collective identity may serve as a mediating variable that can explain how individuals choose to identify themselves with a particular collectivity in spite of contradictory affiliations, and eventually, engage in political action on behalf of this collectivity. Polletta & Jasper (2001, p. 285) define collective identity as:

“An individual’s cognitive, moral, and emotional connection with a broader community, category, practice, or institution. It is a perception of a shared status or relation, which may be imagined rather than experienced directly, and it is distinct from personal identities, although it may form part of a personal identity. A collective identity may have been first constructed by outsiders, who may still enforce it depending on the acceptance by those to whom it is applied. Collective identities are expressed in cultural materials—names, narratives, symbols, verbal styles, rituals, clothing, and so on—but not all cultural materials express collective identities

Put in other terms, collective identity is not strictly an individual attribute. Rather, it is a cultural representation, a set of shared meanings that are produced and reproduced, negotiated and renegotiated in the interactions of individuals embedded in particular sociocultural contexts (Hunt and Bedford, 2004 p. 445). These identities can be institutionalized in various forms; for example, Polletta and Jasper (2001, p. 288) explain how institutional contexts are named in ways that describe how these institutions are removed from the physical and ideological control of those in power (“submerged networks”; “halfway houses”; “free spaces”; “havens” or “sequestered social sites” just to name a few). They argue that these institutions supply the solidarity incentives that encourage movement participation, but they also represent a “free space” in which people

can develop counter-hegemonic ideas and oppositional identities. These sites facilitate the development of oppositional identities either due to their distance from the physical coercion and ideological control of those in power or due to the belief systems that are sustained and located in those places.

In addition to the influences of institutionalization in the development of oppositional collective identities, Hunt and Bedford (2004, p. 450) point out to the sense of we-ness and collective agency that these identities provide, as well as a sense of 'the other' via boundary identification, construction, and maintenance. Collective identities in this sense, are shared meanings and provide cultural contexts for planning, enabling, carrying out, and evaluating individual participation and collective actions. For more on identity, see: section 2.4- Identities in Transition).

Focusing specifically on women's political mobilization, or what makes women mobilize, the question of whether 'women' can consider themselves as a 'collective identity' around which mobilization is possible should be considered first. As Molyneux (1985, p. 231f) has cleverly argued, to assume that women mobilize on the grounds of being women, implicitly assumes that women have certain common interests by virtue of their gender; that these interests are primary for them; and that transclass unity among women given by these shared interests is possible. However, as she points out, although women can be said to have experiences in common, there is no consensus over what these 'women' overarching interests are and how can they be formulated, as there is no universally applicable causal explanation of women's subordination from which a general account of women's interests can be derived. (For more on this topic, see, Mohanty, 1988; Ciotlaus, 2010 and Fuchs Epstein, 2007).

Looking at the case of most of the Central American women of the 1970s and 1980s who participated in revolutionary movements, it can be argued that their sense of being part of a 'collective' did not stem from a gendered agenda, but a overarching transclass transformational one. These women, like the men who were involved in revolutionary processes, felt strongly pulled to engage in political action because of a radical political consciousness that emerged from their conviction of being oppressed by socio-economic structures that dominated at the time. The way in which these women radicalized and came together was very different from the kind of political organizing that takes place when women have gendered interests in common. As Molyneux (1985, p. 232f) has argued, when women come together in order to stand for 'gender interests', these can be considered

strategic and pragmatic, but in no way generalizable to an overarching 'women category', as there is a need to specify how the various categories of women might be affected on the accounts of their social positionings and identities. In the Central American case, many revolutionary women shared what Molyneux called 'women's interests' as opposed to 'gender interests', as they did not organize around gender oppression, but rather, around political oppression which had an impact in the way they lived their lives as daughters, wives and mothers.

Valentine Moghadam's has focused on integrating gender analysis in the broader study of revolutions, growing out of the observation that almost all revolutionary processes have involved the participation of women in ways that disrupt pre-existing social relations of gender. Her work has focused on developing a model that would classify revolutions by their (immediate) gender outcomes. As mainstream studies tended to neglect women and gender issues in revolutionary processes, Moghadam (2003, p. 160f) distinguished between two types of revolutions and their implications for women and gender relations. In cases where revolutionaries are guided by a modernizing and socialist ideology, the revolutionary process is more likely to be 'emancipatory in gender terms (the Nicaraguan revolution would conform to this model); but whenever revolutionaries are guided predominantly by religious or nationalist ideology, patriarchal outcomes are more likely to occur (the Iranian revolution would conform to this model). Moghadam (2003, p. 162) also observed that pre-existing gender relations and the place of women within the revolutionary movement, strongly determined the gender outcome of the revolutionary process as well. Therefore, she has concluded that structural determinants of gendered revolutionary outcomes are (1) pre-existing social structure and the nature of gender relations; (2) revolutionary ideology and the movement's goals and (3) the extent of women's participation in the revolutionary movement and the leadership. These determinants may answer the question of why women become actively involved in revolutionary processes that yield no change in regards to their social positioning.

The previous section presented a brief discussion concerning the interconnectedness between the participation of women as activists for political causes that seek transformational outcomes in their societies, and the influence of those experiences in their latter gendered and feminist activisms. As women come to experience themselves as connected to a broader collectivity, they may develop a 'collective identity' and identify themselves with the goals, interests, shared meanings, collective agency and fundamentally

a sense of 'we-ness' that is developed through this collective identity. In the face of domination, or political oppression, as members of these collectivities, women can develop 'oppositional consciousness' which prompts a certain action response towards the oppressor aimed at vindicating and realizing the interests and goals of the collectivities that they identify themselves with. Notwithstanding the homogenizing use of the category 'women', and the generalized belief that all women are naturally drawn together and identify with universal 'women's interests', it was also discussed how women may come together to fight for gendered rights only when these represent chosen identities that reflect their particular social positionings. Based on these arguments, it is possible to understand how and why women may find themselves fighting in political and revolutionary processes that may not yield gendered outcomes, but reflect some aspects of these positionings.

The previous discussion offers some analytical tools to keep in mind in the following sections of this chapter, where discussions on the socio-political environments that enabled and constrained women's activism in Central America before, during and after the revolutionary periods are presented.

### **2.2.2- The feminist movement and its emergence in Latin America**

The rise of a feminist consciousness in Latin America was most vocal in South American countries such as Uruguay, Argentina and Chile, where the combination of relatively advanced public education systems open to both sexes and the influx of European immigrants seeking better lives combined to produce a new class of educated, articulate women whose reformist ideals intersected with those of their male counterparts on issues of health care, social welfare and general political reform, but diverged on issues of equal female rights in marriage, to jobs, to higher education and political power). Examples of early feminist thinking can be traced back to the XVIII and XIX century journals published by women in some Latin American countries, such as "O Sexo Femenino" in Brazil published in 1873; "La Mujer" in Chile published in 1890; "El Aguila Mexicana" in Mexico published in 1823 and "La Ondina de Plata" in Buenos Aires in 1870. These early Latin American feminists were unanimous in their call for equal educational opportunity for both sexes (Miller, 1991 68f). Latin American intellectuals, both male and female were well aware of the women's movement in Europe and the United States. Whereas many of the early proponents of women's rights in Latin America were upper-class women, speaking out as individuals, nevertheless, it became the female school teachers who formed the nucleus of the first

women's groups to articulate a feminist critique of society: they were the first generation of educated middle sector women. In 1910, the International Feminist Congress organized by the University Women of Argentina (Universitarias Argentinas) included among its sponsoring groups the National Argentine Association against the White Slave Trade; the Socialist Women's Center; the Association of Normal School Teachers, the Women's Union and Labour Group and the National League of Women Freethinkers. Many women who attended this congress belonged to the Socialist Party, others aligned instead with the anarchists, whereas others remained loyal to the Argentine Radical Party, representing a traditional brand of political opposition (Miller, p. 1991, 70-74). This trend reached also the northern part of the continent: as early as 1916, more than six hundred women attended two "Feminist Congresses" held in the Yucatan Peninsula in Mexico (Alvarez and Kampwirth, 2001). Miller (1991, p. 74) who has written extensively on the emergence of feminism in Latin America has argued that the belief in women's 'different mission' lies at the heart of feminist movements in this region and differentiates these from the predominant form of feminism that developed in England and the United States where equality with men was the goal and gender differences were played down. In the Latin American context, the feminine is cherished; the ability to bear and raise children, to nurture a family is celebrated. Rather than reject their socially defined role as mothers, as wives, Latin American feminists acted to protest laws and conditions which threatened their ability to fulfill that role.

In 1922, the Pan American Conference of Women (PACW) represented U.S. women's first organized foray into international relations following the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment in 1920, which granted U.S. women the right to vote. Over two thousand women from twenty-three countries travelled to Baltimore, Maryland to attend the four-day meeting, making it the largest assemblage of women in the history of the city. Fortified by their suffrage victory, the League of Women Voters sought to spend their new political capital by reaching out to Latin American women and by influencing U.S. foreign policy in the Western Hemisphere. This was an opportunity to forge an inter-American community of women, organized around common interests and concerns, with the aim of furthering women's rights throughout the hemisphere (Threlkeld, 2007). Indeed, the fact that woman suffrage had been passed in the United States in 1920 provided impetus to the woman suffrage movement in Latin America. After women were granted the right to vote (starting with Ecuador in 1929 and ending with Paraguay in 1961), first wave feminism ebbed away (Miller, 1991, p. 97).

Second wave feminism gained its impetus in the United States from the assertiveness of the 'New Left'<sup>32</sup>, the Civil Rights and the 'anti-psychiatry' movements, and in Britain from socialist and Marxist anti-Vietnam campaigns. Pre-dating the growth of feminism in the sixties came a growth in women's employment, in women's entry into higher education and in increase in rates of divorce. In 1963, Betty Friedan's 'The Feminine Mystique' made feminism again visible in the U.S. media (Humm, 1992, p. 54).

When 'feminismo' in Latin America rose back again in the 1960s and 1970s (clearly influenced by events taking place in the U.S. and Europe) it had a different class character and a new set of demands. Just as in the United States, second wave Latin American 'feminismo' arose out of "the new left"; nevertheless, the 'organized left' had a complex relationship with feminism: though -at the rhetorical level- women's issues were important, still, many male and female leaders were unwilling to extend their egalitarianism to gender relations. The rhetoric of equality, democracy, and revolution stood opposed to the reality of unchallenged gender inequality, and this contradiction gave birth to second wave feminism in the region (Gonzalez and Kampwirth, 2001).

By the 1980s in South America, women played major roles in the struggles against military dictatorships in Brazil, Argentina and Chile, as well as throughout Latin America, where they were active in peasant organizations, neighborhood protest movements and Christian based communities. Bickam-Mendez (2005) supports Gonzalez and Kampwirth's view (2001) of Latin American left wing organizations' of the 1970s and 1980s open hostility to issues related to gender inequality. These groups sometimes portrayed feminism as a 'counterrevolutionary', bourgeois or 'yankee imperialist' construction. As a consequence, a new wave of feminist and women's political organizing occurred in those same decades as women began to form feminist, non-feminist and often autonomous organizations in order to choose their own leaders and political agendas. Because many Latin American women's movements emerged from the progressive organizations of the left, the issue of autonomy from these class-based movements was a pivotal point of debate within the national feminist movements. Although feminism in many countries broke with the left organizationally, it did not fully do so ideologically (Sternbach et al., 1992, p. 211). In this sense, the struggle for class equality and the search for autonomy has been an integral component of Latin American feminist theory and practice. As the second wave of feminism

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<sup>32</sup> "New Left" activists both in the U.S. and in Latin America shared a vision of a more egalitarian world and a commitment to promote organized protest. (Gonzalez and Kampwirth, 2001)

progressed in Latin America, women continually bridged the dichotomies of practical versus strategic gender interests or feminist versus feminine organizations and articulated their identities in notions of *feminismo popular*, a kind of feminism grounded in the experiences and perspectives of grassroots women (Stephen, 1997; Sternbach et al., 1992, Bickam-Mendez, 2005, p. 70f).

### **2.2.3- Revolution and Feminism in Central America**

Looking specifically at feminism and its relationship with the political left, scholars have focused on some Central American countries, due to the unique opportunity that they provide for exploring the dynamics of contemporary social movements and revolutions and their impact on local feminist movements. A great deal of research on this topic has been written on the specific cases of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, where the emergence of “second wave” grassroots feminism was deeply embedded in the revolutionary discourse that prevailed in the seventies and eighties<sup>33</sup>.

Women’s groups and secretariats within the labor and union movements that emerged in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala during the war years mostly focused on supporting the efforts of revolutionary organizations. These groups didn’t have a clear feminist perspective and were mostly concerned with addressing class and ethnic inequalities. Eventually, a feminist agenda was brought forth by women from revolutionary organizations. For example, in the case of Nicaraguan women, after the Sandinista triumph in 1979, a landmark organization that merged the goals of women’s emancipation and revolution was AMNLAE (Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women) that was part of the structure of the FSLN until 1990. In the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala, where the revolutionary left did not achieve political power, some women’s organizations remained clandestine or were prosecuted by the armed forces until the peace agreements were signed in 1992 and 1996 respectively.

After political turmoil of revolution yielded, many feminist social organizations that became institutionalized, derived from the “guerrilla experience” and contributed to create a unique type of feminism in those countries. According to Karen Kampwirth (2004, p.7):

“In Nicaragua and El Salvador organized feminism can be seen as an unintended consequence of guerrilla struggle. The vast majority of the leaders of the feminist organizations of the nineties were active in the revolutionary

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<sup>33</sup> See Vasquez et al., 1996; Stoltz Chinchilla, 1985; Montenegro, 1997; Stephen, 1997; Hipsher, 2000; Luciak, 2001; Kampwirth, 2001, 2002, 2004; Shayne, 2004; Bickam-Mendez, 2005; Soriano Hernandez, 2006; Kirk, 2010.

struggles of the seventies and eighties... [Second wave] Central American feminists were created by decades of armed and unarmed social struggle for reasons that had to do little with gender interests. In general, the reasons women gave for joining the guerrilla struggle were similar to those given by men: to end dictatorship, to end exploitation of the poor or indigenous, or to create more just countries for their children”

Former combatant women of these countries who had been influenced by foreign feminist discourse –mainly coming from Mexico, Argentina and Spain- came together and developed organizations with an overt feminist agenda. The mobilization of women within social movements against right-wing authoritarian governments in Central and South America- was followed by a desire to become autonomous from their left wing organizations that were all too often uninterested in (or even hostile to) their concerns about gender inequality. Second wave feminism in Central America refers to the process that post-combatant women underwent by trying to seek autonomy and making women’s agenda the priority of their activism (Alvarez and Kampwirth, 2001).

Obviously not all former revolutionaries became feminists. But those who did shared some characteristics documented by Karen Kampwirth (2002, p. 9f) who argues that the founders of the feminist movements were not former guerrillas who had held positions of most prestige during the wars, like commanders, nor were they the ones who held positions with the least prestige (like cooks or caretakers) but rather, it were those women in a mid-prestige level (those who were members of the ranks or the base) who were later drawn to feminism. These were women who had some authority in carrying out traditional women’s work or were engaged in some kind of work that created opportunities for them to make decisions (human rights activism, political education, etc.). This position in the middle did not shield them from machismo within the guerrilla ranks, as were female commanders, but on the other side, they had the opportunity to develop political skills and consciousness that was not available for low ranking female participants.

Gradually and increasingly, these women’s organizations started to claim autonomy and worked on opening new political discursive spaces in their national contexts. For post-conflict Central American feminists, to ‘re-think themselves’ and claim a distinctive identity from the political left was and continues to be a significant part of their development process. An example of this self-reflection process can be seen in a meeting that took place in 1992 in Matagalpa, Nicaragua, when a group of feminists from the Central American region came together –sponsored by the ‘Matagalpa Feminist Colectiva’- to discern and discuss the influence of the major discursive trends in Central American feminisms in the

past and present. They identified and characterized the following tendencies among Central American feminisms:

- **Radical Feminism:** a trend that emphasized the need to depart from leftist movements which did not acknowledge the kinds of oppression that women have been subjected to because of their gender position. It focused on the need to unveil gender oppression in historical, social, political, biological, sexual and cultural areas. It also argued that the true feminist struggle is against the 'heterosexual model' as the only way of expression of sexuality and romantic relations. More importantly, this model emphasized that class struggle does not implicitly 'dismantle' oppression framed in a social system where patriarchal mechanisms prevail.
- **Marxist Feminism:** a trend looking at the exploitation of women as the result of capitalist production relations, arguing for the need to transform 'ideological super-structures' which perpetuate relations of dominance, in order for women to achieve true emancipation. Because the 'private' is political, women need to emancipate also at this level. In the end, there cannot be a women's liberation without social change, but likewise, there cannot be a real social transformation without women's emancipation. This trend incorporated core discursive elements from Marxism but introduced categories of 'gender' and 'private sphere'.
- **'Popular Sector feminism':** a trend that supports actions and processes of women in the grassroots context, demanding the recognition of women's rights. This movement supported a class-gender integration perspective and in this context, the women's movement is seen as the action of the people's women ("las mujeres del pueblo") in response to their class needs.
- **Socialist Feminism:** this trend challenges two types of oppression, one that comes from capitalism, which controls property and the means of production; and the other coming from the so-called 'material base of patriarchy' which attempts to control women's labor force and sexuality. These types of oppression reinforce each other and constitute the so-called 'patriarchal capitalism'. In this context, socialist feminist analysis attempts to unveil relations of power in the private sphere that support the exclusion of women in the public sphere. It promotes social change in favor of women (Source: "Corrientes Feministas en America Latina y Centroamerica. Memoria-Matagalpa 1992").

These discursive trends influenced the particular shape that women's organizing took in the Central American region after the wars. As discussed above, feminists had a strong class and political consciousness, but the issue of "autonomy" from the left and the need to denounce and fight gender oppression became crucial for the movement. Eventually, a focus on grassroots development and welfare provision was incorporated into core goals of the movement, a trend influenced and supported by international donor agencies throughout Latin America in some post-conflict societies.

In the following section, a detailed account of the national history of feminist movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala is presented.

#### 2.2.4- Feminism in El Salvador

*"I think that meeting changed the lives of many of us, because, well, they [the women who were waiting there] expected us to bring the party guidelines, and we didn't have them. Instead, we said... "why don't we ask ourselves what is it that we want? And why don't we talk about what it has meant to be a woman during all these years?" Thus, the only question that we asked ourselves was: what did it mean to be a woman. We were all women who came from a leftist involvement. Some [of us] from the rural guerrilla; others from the urban guerrilla; and others from the urban popular movement. That question was like removing the lid off a pressure cooker. We spoke all day long, and everything came up: experiences with rape, abortion, discrimination, marginalization... almost all the experiences [were] connected to the context of our leftist involvement. That was the origin of our feminist organization..."*

*Mireya, El Salvador*

Feminism in El Salvador, as in other parts of Latin America, can be traced back to the end of the XIX century. Salvadoran historiographers (See the works of Cañas Dinarte; Henríquez Consalvi; Navas de Melgar) have increasingly expanded on the roles and contributions of the early feminists of the twentieth century and argue that the development of the women's movement during the 1980s revolutionary war is part of the larger thread of Salvadoran women's involvement in the struggle for citizenship rights and political freedoms.

Salvadoran sociologist and feminism historian Candelaria Navas de Melgar (2006) has described how at the beginning of 1921, women from the public markets of San Salvador protested the oppression of the Meléndez Quiñones regime. Other women coming from other public markets joined the protest and ended up seizing the police headquarters of the "El Calvario" neighborhood in San Salvador. In 1922, six thousand women

demonstrated against the regime of then President Jorge Melendez dressing in black signaling the 'death of democracy' and supporting presidential candidate Miguel Tomas Molina. These women fought back an infantry regiment when they were machine-gunned by the armed forces during this protest.

Karen Kampwirth (2004) argues that unlike most Latin American countries, El Salvador did not have a first-wave feminist or suffrage movement, because female political activists were occupied with opposing a long series of military governments and also because those governments preempted a women's movement by promoting women's suffrage in an effort to bolster their own legitimacy. In 1938, President Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez (see section 2.1.2) called a Constitutional Assembly in which women were granted the vote, making El Salvador the first Central American country to give women the theoretical (not practical) right to vote. That right was only put into practice twelve years later when the Constitution was reformed in 1950 (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 213). Navas de Melgar (2006) agrees with Kampwirth's point regarding how achieving the right to vote cannot be perceived in El Salvador as the result of the work of a suffragist movement, because, other than the individual case of Prudencia Ayala, who ran for the presidency of El Salvador in 1930 (See following section on her case), there were no public demonstrations, or public forums that supported this demand. This situation could be attributed to the cultural isolation and the political oppression imposed by the authoritarian regimes throughout the first part of the twentieth century. Despite the emergence of the Salvadoran 'Feminine League' in 1946, the right to vote was promoted by authoritarian regimes that wanted to capitalize the feminine vote to their advantage (Navas, 2006).

### **Prudencia Ayala: they called her "la loca" (the crazy)**

The figure of Prudencia Ayala (1885-1946) (See section 2.1.2) stands out as the single case of a Salvadoran woman who forcefully demanded the right for participation in the political system. She struggled in support of women's rights and was often imprisoned for her political involvement. She was a journalist, activist and author of two literary works who in 1930 became the first woman to declare herself a candidate for the Salvadoran presidency as a way of protesting the laws that barred women from politics (Foster, 2007, p. 202).

Navas de Melgar (2006) argues that the figure of Prudencia Ayala was the strongest indicator of the new and unknown environment that supported the existence of politically involved women (before the dictatorship of Hernandez Martinez). Transgressing cultural and

racial boundaries, Ayala surprised the conservative Salvadoran society of the 1920s when she declared herself “a proud humble Salvadoran indigenous woman” (published in the ‘Diario de Occidente’ – no date), a statement that showed her strong conviction for the need of racial and gender inclusion in El Salvador. Ayala navigated both the arts and politics: supported the cause of Sandino in Nicaragua, as well as the need to protest the US invasion in the Central American region (see 2.1.3); but she also presented herself as a ‘fortune teller’ and speaker at public squares, activities which some criticized in order to de-legitimize her gender based demands. Being a Central American Unionist, she created also a newspaper called “Feminine Redemption” where she detailed her ideas regarding women’s rights. She also created the “Femenine Circle of [the city of] Santa Tecla”. On October 1920, Ayala offered a conference at the National Theater of Santa Ana where she spoke of ‘feminine patriotism’. Ayala’s tone demanded attention to the women’s contribution to the construction of a new political landscape in El Salvador and Central America:

“Central American peoples: Your feminine gender is tired of so much disgrace, of the sacrificed lives in the battlefields, without any reason other than defending the greed of a bad ruler of a ‘caudillo’. Let’s leave this separatism behind...this disgusting state of misery that we present in the face of the ‘Giant of the North’. The feminine gender energetically fights to not leave this work undone. Sooner or later our proof of abnegation and of patriotic love will give the example of true civic-mindedness, because in its heart, the burning fire of ideal and love for the Motherland and the liberty is consumed, and will triumph quickly going beyond all the barriers of those who fail, because they don’t want to see the future of Central America” (Published in “El Unionista” Newspaper, Santa Ana, El Salvador, 1920).

Ayala’s political aspirations presented a unique blend of nationalism, an emphasis on citizenship rights for those marginalized by the ‘powerful’ (such as women and the indigenous peoples) and a reframing of the ‘feminine’ as powerful and patriotic, yet retaining its ‘traditional’ qualities such as ‘self-sacrificing’ and ‘loving’. Possibly the only suffragist who gained national prominence, the figure of Prudencia Ayala disappeared from the public landscape with the dictatorship of Hernandez Martinez, until he was overthrown in 1944. After his fall, conditions for public and social actions by women created new spaces that led to the achievement of the right to vote in 1950.

### **Historical Periods of the Women’s Movement in El Salvador**

Salvadoran historian Navas de Melgar (2006) distinguishes six periods in the history of the Salvadoran women’s Movement, that do not correspond with the international conceptualizations of feminist ‘first’ and ‘second waves’, but provide a chronological outlook

of the Salvadoran wider women's movement and situate the emergence of the feminism in this national context. These periods are briefly described below:

1. First Period (Second half of XIX Century – 1957): begins with the opening of the National University of El Salvador (1841) and the partial access of women to education until the second half of 1950s with the creation of the “Fraternity of Women” (1957).
2. Second Period (1957-1975): during this period, women's organizations began to articulate gendered thinking into their work demanding gender equality within their political structures. These organizations were promoted by women coming from the peasantry, working classes and the ‘informal sector’.
3. Third Period (1975-1985) Many women's groups affiliated with revolutionary action emerged (a detailed list of these associations is presented in the following section on “Salvadoran feminist positionings”). In addition many other organizations were created during the exile of combatant women and others that supported popular struggle. These organizations did not respond to gender demands, but rather to the political and revolutionary struggle.
4. Fourth period (1986-1989): Many women's organizations emerged from the leftist organizations. They addressed the ‘women question’, but still did not regard themselves as feminist. Nevertheless, during this period, a growing number of former combatant women returned to the country and began searching for a ‘Latin American’ feminism, particularly looking at the feminisms of Mexico, Colombia and Costa Rica. It was during the IV Latin American Feminist Encounter of Taxco, Mexico (1987), where Salvadoran women organizations participated for the first time. Their participation allowed them to learn from other Latin American feminist perspectives and view their own process under a feminist light.
5. Fifth period (1990-1993): Emerged by the end of the war. During this period, previously created women's organizations and feminist NGOs began to outline the current women's movement and to incorporate gender and feminist perspectives in their demands.
6. Sixth period (1993-2004): The Salvadoran society went through a post-conflict period, where the feminist movement continued to deal with internal differences, separation from the ‘political left’, but also began consolidating their actions and

start to involve rural women into their organizations.

### **Salvadoran feminist positionings**

As it has been previously argued, the emergence of feminism in El Salvador is deeply connected with the involvement of women in revolutionary struggle and their eventual search for autonomy from the military and political left (for references, see sub-section "Revolution and Feminism in Central America"). These connections began to develop when the women who joined the different organizations that comprised the FMLN also created five different political organizations that were affiliated with one of those parties that were part of the FMLN (Navas de Melgar, 2004). These organizations were: „Asociacion de Mujeres Progresistas de El Salvador“ (Association of Progressive Women of El Salvador or AMPES) founded in 1975 by the Communist Party; „Asociacion de Mujeres de El Salvador“ (Women's Association of El Salvador or AMES) founded in 1978 by the Popular Revolutionary Bloc (BPR); „Asociacion de Mujeres Salvadoreñas“ (Association of Salvadoran Women or ASMUSA) founded by Revolutionary Worker's Party of Central America (PRTC) in 1983; Asociacion de Mujeres Salvadoreñas-Lil Milagro Ramirez (Association of Women „Lil Milagro Ramirez“) founded in 1983 by the Unified Action Front (FAPU) and „Comite Unitario de Mujeres Salvadoreñas“ (Unified Committed of Salvadoran Women or CUMS) created in 1981 to bring together the women from the five revolutionary organizations (Hipsher, 2000, p. 59).

In their revolutionary context, these organizations established political goals that already incorporated gendered discourses. For example, in 1980, an AMES document already emphasized the disadvantaged economic condition of women based on discrimination because of their gender identity (Golden 1991, p. 110). Increasingly, these groups stressed gender oppression, signaling a shift in attention that became more generalized in women's organizations by the mid-1980s. Seen as a threat by the Salvadoran government because of their ties to the FMLN, both AMPES and AMES were forced underground by the early 1980s, though the organizations continued to operate in exile.

The war years in the 1980s were characterized by extreme oppression on behalf of the Salvadoran military. Particularly the poor in the rural areas suffered, but also members of the labor movement were severely harassed. It was during this time that women who had suffered family losses because of the war came together to confront oppression and organized "COMADRES" or "Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared" (Comite de Madres

de Desaparecidos)<sup>34</sup> which organized women to denounce publicly the arrests, disappearances, and assassinations of their children, spouses, and other family members during the war. Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready (2000) argue that 'COMADRES' developed a new political identity and practice for a women's group in the country. Like the "Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo" in Argentina, the organization took to the streets to denounce human rights abuses when no other groups dared. Group members' status as mothers initially provided them with a measure of safety, as the government did not take their actions too seriously. But as their work became more effective, the government accused them of being an FMLN front and repression against "COMADRES" hardened. Despite the harassment, the movement remained active throughout the 1980s and early 1990s.

Across the spectrum of the popular movement of the 1980s, women's committees were formed. This process initially led to the increase of what might be called "Ladies Auxiliary Committees". For instance, the "Salvadoran National Workers' Federation" or FENASTRAS (Federación Nacional de Trabajadores Salvadoreños) began working with female factory workers as early as 1981, particularly in the textile industry. In 1986 the "Women's Committee" Co-FENASTRAS (Comité Femenino) was created. Its projects included a child-care center and a medical clinic. The committee's objectives focused on domestic violence, denouncing human rights violations, and supporting strikes of women workers. As women's committees formed across different sectors, they began to affiliate with one another within the political coalitions that mirrored the structure of the FMLN. In 1986, for example, the "National Coordinating Committee of Salvadoran Women" or "CONAMUS" (Coordinadora Nacional de Mujeres Salvadoreñas) was created. Its members represented a hospital workers' union, the women's committee of a teachers' union, and an artists' and cultural workers' union. By 1989, there were nine different women's organizations in El Salvador, many of which were related to labor rights, but there were also some groups that represented specific sectors, such as the Association of Indigenous Women or AMIS (Asociación de Mujeres Indígenas Salvadoreñas) and the "United Women of the University of El Salvador" or MUES (Mujeres Universitarias de El Salvador) (Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready, 2000). Though these organizations strongly supported women's political activism and

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<sup>34</sup> Two groups similar to COMADRES were CODEFAM, the "Support Committee of Families for Political Prisoners and the Disappeared of El Salvador" (Comité de Familiares de Víctimas de las Violaciones de Derechos Humanos de El Salvador) and COMAFAC or "Christian Committee of Mothers and Families of Prisoners, Disappeared and Murdered" (Comite de Madres y Familiares Cristianos de Presos, Desaparecidos y Asesinados).

were involved in offering welfare provisions for the benefit of women, they didn't see themselves as feminist (Navas de Melgar, 2004).

Women organizations developed a feminist agenda, at the very end of the war, in the early nineties. For Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready (2000, p. 3) the shift in women's organizations from supporting ongoing grassroots groups to concentrating specifically on women's issues and rights was already evident in the late 1980s. The change is well illustrated in an excerpt from "Guide to Salvadoran Women's Organizations," a pamphlet produced in August 1989 by nine women's groups. The pamphlet read:

"Since 1986, a series of new Salvadoran women's organizations [has] emerged within the popular mass movement for social justice, filling a space left empty by repression of earlier attempts at organizing women. Each of these groups shares the common primary goal of incorporating women into the struggle to create structural change in Salvadoran society, which will permit social justice and the dignified treatment of women and the Salvadoran family. At the same time, our women's groups work to achieve rights specific to women". (Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready, 2000)

The emphasis on 'rights specific to women' marked the emergence of a gendered discourse in women's organizations and, ultimately, the need to declare autonomy from sponsoring of the FMLN. By the late 1980s, some Salvadoran women's groups had begun using a feminist analysis of gender in their work. The women's movement reemerged as more powerful after the 1989 offensive, when the FMLN tried to recruit more women directly into its organizations to build strength for the transition into the peace process. In 1990, the first women's organizations to define themselves explicitly as feminist emerged: DIGNAS or "Women for Dignity and Life" (Mujeres por la Dignidad y la Vida) and CEMUJER or the "Center for Women's Studies Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera" (Centro de Estudios de la Mujer "Norma Virginia Guirola de Herrera"). As women's groups continued mobilizing to advocate their interests, their ideas about women's struggle began to change. The signing of the Peace Agreement –and the difficulties faced by many combatant women who could not enter the land distribution process- created distinctly different conditions for women's organizational efforts. With the end of armed conflict and the increasing support and influence of transnational feminism, women's organizations openly challenged pervasive discrimination in the FMLN and other mixed leftist organizations (Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready, 2000).

Post conflict arrangements created a need in women's groups to seek autonomy. According to Kampwirth (2002, p.19) in El Salvador the quest for autonomy was particularly hard because the vast majority of women's organizations that existed in the years following the end of the war had been founded by one of the five guerrilla organizations that became

part of the FMLN. The men of these groups often felt betrayed by the women who had been previously members of their leftist organizations. Feminists found themselves confronting old allies, and the personal and the political costs of seeking autonomy became high. Still, it was only by asserting independence from them that these new feminist organizations could negotiate as equals rather than dependents. Becoming autonomous from the political left, lead in some cases to an increased dependency to other institutions such as the state, the church, labor unions, and international agencies sometimes took on new importance as providers of funds and political support, which came with strings attached. Ultimately, there was no such thing as complete autonomy, as for these feminist organizations, it had to be negotiated and renegotiated with each new alliance.

In the end, the peace process created room for women's organizations to forge a new path of working both with opposition sectors and agencies of the government. The 'DIGNAS' was one of these organizations. Other organizations expelled from their ranks the more militant feminists while remaining associated with -though often publicly proclaiming their independence from- the FMLN party organizations. These associations generally declared themselves as "women's" groups rather than "feminist" organizations. Regardless of how they identified themselves, the overwhelming majority of Salvadoran women's organizations struggled to gain autonomy from the FMLN parties or from organizations closely associated with the FMLN (Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready, 2000).

In 1993, in the process of establishing the feminist movement in the country, Salvadoran women's organizations hosted the "Sixth Latin American and Caribbean Feminist Encuentro" in El Salvador. The women who worked on organizing this 'Encuentro' were the most independent and critical. Though old forms of repression, such as threats and media attacks, challenged the encounter, more than 1,500 feminists from all Latin America attended. The experience gave many Salvadoran women their first opportunity to network with other Latin American women struggling with similar issues. (Navas de Melgar, 2004).

In the post-conflict period, one of the most significant ways in which Salvadoran women's organizations exercised widening influence was through coalition building. Perhaps the most significant process amongst these newly created feminist groups was the organization of "Mujeres '94" (Women 1994), which grew out of an effort made by the women's movement to develop its own political platform during for first post-war presidential elections of 1994, which brought recently organized feminist organizations into a dialogue with national political parties. The process helped solidify a sense of a women's movement among different organizations. Over the course of eight months, more than 32

women's organizations participated in creating a common political and social platform that called for educational reform, reproductive and gay rights, improvements in the health-care system, women's inclusion in development, programs and drastic improvement in working conditions for women in all sectors. The platform demanded the establishment of quotas for women holding political office and positions of authority in political parties. These demands challenged the boundaries of the political and gender systems in El Salvador.

Herrera (in Aguilar Theissen, 1997, p. 320) argues that the collective identity of the Salvadoran feminist movement is based upon the idea of "transiting" from the "I-woman" to the "we-women" identity, a construction which is diverse, complex and not free of conflict, as it problematizes the existence of a "collective identity", which does not exist as a monolithic unity (See previous section on: Salvadoran feminist positionings). Still, she argues that there are some common grounds that allow for an understanding of a "we-women" within the Salvadoran feminist movement: 1. Recognition of women's subordination; 2. Actions conducted in common areas, particularly when dealing with violence; 3. Naming the world in "women's terms"; 4. Coming from the political left, which creates a political culture that still permeates the movement and 5. Identification with the feminist organization to which each woman belongs, as opposed to the overall "movement" (Navas de Melgar, 2004).

In sum, the feminist movement in El Salvador is deeply influenced by the fact that each Salvadoran feminist organization has an identity of its own connected to its emergence from a different guerrilla organization, a facet of the movement that seems to reproduce a strong sense of belonging among their membership that is as significant (or perhaps stronger) than a sense of belonging to the overall movement (Herrera, 1997; Kampwirth, 2004; Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready, 2000). In this context, Salvadoran feminists face the challenge to work in overcoming the cleavages and divisions that still permeate the movement and are a legacy from the war period. This clear 'sectarianism' has contributed to limit the possibilities of collaboration and the development of effective networks within the movement. In addition, feminists in El Salvador must challenge the FMLN policies as the new party-in-power. As the older feminist leaders struggled to seek autonomy from the FMLN, they are now mandated to negotiate and seek alliances with the FMLN as well.

### 2.2.5- Feminism in Nicaragua

*"It was around the year 1987... What happened was that I established contact with women who came from the 'Solidarity Sector'...they were supporting the cause of the Revolution, but had other ways of looking at things, and had a clear critique towards the manifestations of 'machismo' that existed within the revolutionary structures. This was fitting like a 'ring to a finger' for my own sense of discomfort, because that was precisely what bothered me about the party structures or the language that the revolutionary leaders used... I started to understand, reading, studying and speaking with women who had previous experiences within feminism. Around the year 86 or 87 I encountered feminism. This allowed me to question again my own membership to the Frente [FMLN]; my own discourses; my own priorities. That's where my feminist activism began..."*

*Tamara, Nicaragua*

When looking at the longstanding history of women's organizing in Nicaragua, feminist researcher Sofia Montenegro (1997, p. 378) distinguishes three periods: (a) the "preceding nucleus" ranging from the 1950s to the 1960s; (b) the period of "non-autonomous self-organizing" from 1977-1990; and (c) the period of "emergence of the wide movement and autonomous organizing" from 1991 to the present day. Montenegro (1997) argues that during the first period, women's involvement was centered on activities against socio-economic measures coming from the Somoza regime (i.e. strikes asking for wage increases; pregnancy subsidies; protests against the high cost of living; demands for better housing and health services). But Nicaraguan women not always opposed the Somoza regime. Nicaraguan feminist historian Gema Santamaria (2006, p. 69) argues that during the first half of the twentieth century, Nicaraguan women organized in clubs and organizations around the right for women's suffrage tried to incorporate the state apparatus. As women's participation in traditional political spaces was minimal, the right for vote was acquired only in 1955, during the Somoza regime. As Santamaria explains, contrary to what could be imagined from a dictatorial regime, the Somoza's seemed to favor the demands of the women's movement, as their government had a highly 'populist' tone, and appeared to integrate women's demands with the objective of expanding their support base. This support, nevertheless, was more rhetoric than real (Santamaria, 2006, p. 72). As Victoria Gonzales (2001) has pointed out, "Nicaraguan feminists are not Sandino's daughters", which Santamaria (2006, p. 79f) confirms -at least when it comes to early feminists- by noticing that the activism of suffragists was fundamentally elitist and had an educated, middle class

character and a 'liberal' collaborative affiliation<sup>35</sup> which allowed them to obtain significant gains, but at the same time, subordinated them to the needs of the political liberal elite.

In portraying the history of feminism in Nicaragua, I argue that some feminist historians –like Montenegro- choose to emphasize the 'dissidence' of early feminists whereas others – like Santamaria- attempt to unveil the complexities in the relationship between women who sought emancipation and their connections with the Somoza regime (Santamaria, 2006, p. 69f). Santamaria explains that when Nicaraguan women attempted to organize in clubs and associations that supported female suffrage, they also tried to incorporate the state apparatus and the Liberal Party into this process, but their demands were typically denied, which suggests an uneasy relationship between the suffragists and the Somoza regime. In this context, Santamaria has also argued that Somoza's support of women demands was more rhetorical than realistic.

In the 1960s, two partisan women's groups emerged: The "Organization of Democratic Women of Nicaragua" ("Organizacion de Mujeres Democracticas de Nicaragua") which was connected to the Socialist Party and the "Women's Patriotic Alliance" ("Alianza Patriotica de Mujeres") in 1966 connected to the FSLN. These organizations sought to vindicate gender aspects of the labor and political struggle, such as the participation of women in union boards. In the 1970s, women extended their activism to different professional associations, such as schoolteachers and hospital personnel (see 'first period' of Nicaraguan Women's organizing by Montenegro, 1997).

In 1977, the "Association of Women Confronting the National Problem" – AMPRONAC (Asociacion de Mujeres ante la Problematica Nacional) emerged as the first organization connected to recruiting women for the FSLN, displaying an intense activism in the middle of the civil unrest. In 1978, AMPRONAC mobilized women around the roles of "mothers" and "wives" of Sandinista men and eventually became clandestine since its actions unified social actors against the Somoza regime. Santamaria (2006, p. 104) points out that AMPRONAC included both women from poorer sectors of society as well as educated women, as the FSLN promoted a discourse that brought together class and gender considerations that promoted transgression of traditional women's roles.

After the Sandinista revolution succeeded in 1979, AMPRONAC was renamed and reorganized by the FSLN into the highly influential "Association of Nicaraguan Women Luisa Amanda Espinoza" AMNLAE (Asociacion de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza), which was the only women's organization in the country for approximately ten years. By the

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<sup>35</sup> The Somoza clan dictatorship was inexorably connected to the National Liberal Party.

end of the 1980s, this organization had affiliated approximately twenty-five thousand women from all over the country. Montenegro (1997, p. 379) argues that the FMLN held the belief that women's emancipation was assured with their incorporation in the works of the revolution, which explains why AMNLAE's political and social agenda was determined by the Sandinista machinery, not having the autonomy to work outside their political agenda. AMNLAE'S goals varied across time, and can be understood in the context of historical periods: 1. the period of the "defense of national interests" (1980-1984); 2. the period of the "military defense of the country" (1984-1987), and 3. the period of "sector interests" (1987-1990.) As these goals suggest, AMNLAE's priorities were concerned more with expanding and consolidating the revolution than with improving the condition of Nicaraguan women. Despite the control executed by the Sandinista government over AMNLAE, a minority of women who were militants of the organization and who recognized themselves as "socialist feminists" eventually took over the intellectual leadership of the 'yet to come' "feminist AMNLAE". Around 1985, some new feminist initiatives emerged, insisting on autonomy, claiming that women issues were better addressed separately from the revolutionary emancipation. These feminists brought awareness of "taboo topics" such as gender violence, abortion, sexuality and gender inequality, and because of their increased activism and the participation of Nicaraguan feminists in Latin American Feminist Encounters, the FMLN came under pressure to declare a "Proclama sobre la Mujer" (Women's Proclamation) in 1987. This was basically a declaration of commitment to fight against women's subordination, but in spite of these efforts, AMNLAE structures failed to incorporate feminist thought into its line of work, which eventually led to the organization's breakup with the feminists after the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 (Montenegro, 1997, p. 380f) (see 'second period' of Nicaraguan women organizing identified by Montenegro).

With the arrival of the government of Violeta de Chamorro, the hegemony period of AMNLAE ended. Santamaria (2006, p. 122f) argues that the arrival of a 'formal democracy' and the adoption of a neoliberal model shaped the development of the women's movement in Nicaragua. As part of the transition process of the feminist 'second wave' in the nineties, the trend among feminist movements in Latin America –and in Nicaragua– was the gradual fragmentation of the movement and the creation of NGOs administered by women who went from the military trenches to academia and then, to a focus on providing welfare benefits for women in need.

The Chamorro government penalized abortion and homosexuality, which was part of a larger anti-feminist policy promoted by her conservative government (Kampwirth, 1996). In

the meantime, Nicaraguan feminists were concerned with consolidating their autonomy, a process that had already started in the latter years of the Sandinista government. Two moments that symbolically indicated a breakup between the women's movement and political parties (both the FMLN and Chamorro's 'UNO') were the "Festival of the fifty-two percent"<sup>36</sup> in 1991 and the feminist encounter called "Diverse but United" in January 1992 (Santamaria, 2006, p. 137). These events marked the beginning of a third period for Nicaraguan feminism, where autonomy from Sandinismo led to changes in leadership, composition and direction of the movement. Approximately fifty percent of Nicaraguan women's organizations emerged during the 1980s and the other fifty percent during the first half of the 1990s, a trend that was consistent with the experience of other Central American countries (Montenegro, 1997, p. 383).

### **Contemporary Threats against Nicaraguan Feminists**

The Nicaraguan autonomous women's movement emerged with a vengeance as a response to a political climate of "antifeminism" that evolved after the defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections. When a clear breakup between AMNLAE and other trends within the feminist movement took place in 1991, the Feminist Encounter "Diverse but United" in 1992 seemed to express a goal more than a reality at the time. In this conference, women agreed on the creation of seven thematic and operational networks dealing with topics such as economy and environment; violence; sexuality; health; education; women and communication and mixed organizations (Kampwirth, 2004, p. 63). By the end of the nineties, only two out of those seven networks remained: "Women for health" and "Women against violence". These networks survived because they filled the void left by the Chamorro government in terms of providing health and legal services for women (Santamaria, 2006, p. 139).

Divisions remained within Nicaraguan feminists, who tend to position themselves around themes that have to do with "Sandinista" or "Independent-from-Sandinista" affiliations. Karen Kampwirth (2008) who has studied 'anti-feminism' in the region, argues that this 'ideological trend' is also related to the rise of politically sophisticated antifeminist movements in response to feminism's second wave. The election of Daniel Ortega, the historic candidate of the FSLN, as president of Nicaragua in 2006 marked the beginning of a new anti-feminist campaign in the country. Days before the presidential election, there was

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<sup>36</sup> Named as such, highlighting the fact that Nicaraguan women represent 52% of the overall population.

a convergence of long-simmering conflicts between him, the organized feminist movement, and opponents of those feminists. The result was the abolition of what Nicaraguans call ‘therapeutic abortion’, that is, the right for legal abortion under very limited circumstances, to save the lives of pregnant women. For Kampwirth, this can only be explained through the relationship of four long-term processes: (1) The FSLN’s becoming less of an ideological party, advocating reconciliation rather than revolution; (2) nearly a decade of FSLN pact-making with the political right; (3) the alienation of the feminist movement from the FSLN and divisions within it; and (4) the increasing sophistication of the antifeminist movement.

As Kampwirth (2008) argued, from a domestic perspective, the Nicaraguan antifeminist movement appears as a reaction against the mobilization of women and young people during the Sandinista revolution, and particularly, against the feminist movement that was an indirect consequence of revolution. From a global perspective, these views are a response to what antifeminists see as the challenges of globalization, among them feminist influence in international development agencies and the loss of sovereignty due to neo-liberalism. In the Nicaraguan case, it has had dramatic consequences for feminist women – even many of those who participated in this research project- who have felt either threatened and/or publicly discredited by Ortega’s government.

In sum, as it has been previously discussed, the feminist movement in Nicaragua has a longstanding conflictive relationship with the Sandinista Party which to this day poses a threat to the movement in the form of ‘anti-feminist’ policies that have a negative impact on the work of feminist organizations with women and families. In addition, divisions among Nicaraguan feminists (based on women’s various degrees of affiliation with the Sandinistas) contribute to fragment the movement. As Santamaria (2006, p. 150) explains, one of the big challenges of the feminist movement in Nicaragua is to retain its critical position in regards to the status quo, particularly regarding the high “NGOization” of the movement, which may impact negatively on how it retains its close connections to the women at the grassroots level. Other types of challenges involve the movement’s capacity to re-energize some of the self-developed structures, like “thematic networks” that the feminists of the early 1990s created.

### 2.2.6- Feminism in Guatemala

*"After signing the Peace Agreements, feminism became some kind of lifesaver, [it gave me] the possibility to continue believing in a quest, and continue doing... It is not a surprise for anybody that the peace agreements in Guatemala and all the internal revolutionary processes were chaotic. All that part made [me] feel like a political failure, aside from the contents of the agreement. Having feminism as a political quest became a 'lifesaver' [it allowed me] to continue believing in the possibility of transformations, and [from there] we continued connected to the possibility of engaging in transformation processes, from transgression, from rebelliousness; from political actions to the transformation of reality or the symbolic order..."*

*Clarisa, Guatemala*

The participation of Guatemalan women in politics takes us back to the times when indigenous and 'mestiza' women were active in the anti-colonial struggles of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries, or the Liberal-Conservative conflicts in the early part of the twentieth century, and more significantly, the nationalist struggles of the years 1944-1954 (Berger, 2006, p. 20). In 1944, women came together to join political action by actively participating in the demonstrations against the dictatorship of General Ubico (See section 2.1.4). It was during the so-called 'October Revolution' of 1944 when school-teachers dared to confront this military regime, and among them primary school teachers who were mostly women. During the repression, Maria Chinchilla, a school-teacher, was murdered and became a symbol of the incorporation of women into the 'revolutionary' struggle (Soriano Hernandez, 112).

During the second half of 1944, after democratic leader Juan Jose Arevalo was elected President, some women got involved in the foundation of one of the first modern political parties in Guatemala, like the Frente Popular Libertador – FPL (Popular Libertarian Front) which was composed mainly of medicine and law students. In addition, a prominent group of women organized independently the "Guatemalan Feminine Union – Pro Citizenship" that attempted to achieve civic rights of women, particularly the right to vote for literate women and the optional right to vote for illiterate women (Rodriguez de Ita, 2001, p. 8f). In the end, women finally achieved the right to vote in 1945.

During the years that followed, the so-called "Guatemalan Democratic Spring" (1944-1954) women's organizations became stronger and more influential; among those, the one that stood out was the "Guatemalan Feminine Alliance" (AFG – "Alianza Femenina Guatemalteca"). This organization was strongly supported by first lady Maria Vilanova de

Arbenz whose husband, Jacobo Arbenz was president of Guatemala from 1951-1954 (See section 2.1.4). Among its core objectives, the organization sought to protect infancy, support health improvement and provide for 'helpless' women. The AFG developed a newspaper "Mujer" (Woman) that began to circulate in 1953. By the end of the "Arbenz era" the AFG organized a 'National Conference' and then presented a "Message to Guatemalan Women" where they demanded various rights, such as land property access; credit support for women peasants; labor protection for working class women; state assistance for small business women and equal political rights for women (Rodriguez de Ita, 2001, p. 10f).

After the June 1954 coup d'état organized by the CIA, that left Colonel Castillo Armas in power, a strong anti-communist sentiment permeated different sectors of the Guatemalan society. At that time, many women organizations joined forces through an anti-communist "Catholic Action" organization. Paradoxically, this organization's work created the conditions for women to leave their houses in order to receive "religious orientation". This was the time when "House Wives Clubs" were created with the objective of improving home conditions and family health. Clearly, these 'feminine' objectives focused on emphasizing traditional roles for women that were more aligned to gender role conceptualizations promoted by the authoritarian regimes that followed (Rodriguez de Ita, 2001, p. 16).

In 1965, Guatemalan women achieved the right to participate in political campaigns. By then, the political climate had changed, and the first revolutionary organizations had emerged in the country. Slowly, women began to join these organizations and enter the revolutionary struggle. Beginning in the late 1970s, Guatemalan women started to participate in relatively large numbers for the first time. The confluence of a number of domestic and international factors opened up new spaces to women and encouraged them to think about gender as a basis for identity politics. For the first time, Guatemalan women expanded spaces to best address their needs as women. During the early 1980s, Guatemalan women began organizing to confront escalating state repression, the rising cost of living and land consolidation (Berger, 2006, p. 20f). Furthermore, segments of the international community strengthened incipient moves by women to place gender on the agenda, beginning with the 1975 United Nations World Conference on Women, held in Mexico, where the Guatemalan government was slowly pulled into a series of international and regional conferences that addressed reforms in the condition of women. In 1981, the Guatemalan National Women's Office was founded (Berger, 2006, p. 28).

## Emergence of feminism in Guatemala

The most prominent Guatemalan feminist historians (Monzon, 2000; Aguilar Theissen, 1997) trace back the origins of feminist discourse to the 1980s, a moment in time during the Guatemalan revolutionary process when women became significantly more vocal about the human rights violations that were taking place in the country. For Aguilar Theissen (1997, p.113f) the quest for human rights was of major importance in the emergence of a feminist women's movement, which was defined, in her view, by three crucial historical periods:

1. *The 'foundational moment' (1984-1985)* coincided with changes in the political arrangements of the Guatemalan state (such as the election of a civilian as President) and ended with the organization of the First Central American Women's Encounter "Gender History: A New Woman, A New Power" in 1992. During this time, some Guatemalan feminists came out publicly and began discussing 'women issues' as opposed to "popular-politics issues". This process allowed many women's organizations to come out of their clandestine activity. At the time, the "Coordinating Committee of Guatemalan Women Groups" COAMUGUA ("Coordinadora de Agrupaciones de Mujeres Guatemaltecas") became the most important coordinator of women organizations that were working for the development of a space called the "Permanent Assembly of Central American Women for Peace". Other protagonists of this period were groups such as the "Guatemalan Group of Women" – GGM (Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres); "Tierra Viva" Women's Group (Agrupacion de Mujeres "Tierra Viva"); "Mama Chinchilla" Women's Institute; the "Women's Group for the Betterment of Family Life" – GRUFEPROMEFAM and the "National Coordinator of Guatemalan Widows" – CONAVIGUA (Aguilar Theissen, 1997, p. 114). Monzon (2000) also points out that, during the mid 1980s, some Guatemalan women who had participated in different types of groups that were part of Guatemalan society (unions, human rights, academia, self-help, women in exile) spoke about the effects of war on their lives and proposed the discussion of themes that had been so far neglected, such as domestic violence; the right to reproductive health and the right to free expression, among others. Looking into this period of Guatemalan feminism, Aguilar Urizar (2003, p. 20) who conducted research on political identity of Guatemalan feminists, explains how the commitment of women to the

revolutionary struggle and their roles as direct or indirect victims of the armed conflict, were some of the crucial elements that supported the emergence of the women's movement during the second half of the 1980s. Because of this fact, the axis of the movement was constituted by the "struggle for the respect of human rights and the process of dialogue, negotiation and fight for the demilitarization of the country" (Aguilar Theissen quoted by Aguilar Urizar, 2003, p. 20). From this perspective, it can be argued that feminism in Guatemala found a discursive space only when a civilian president –Vinicio Cerezo in this case- made it possible for women to express openly their demands without fearing for their security, something which would have been almost impossible during previous military regimes. Despite the fact that human rights were a priority, during this time, women started addressing gendered needs.

2. *The emergence of feminist trends (1994-1996).* "Feminism" as a discursive trend among Guatemalan women's organizations coincided with the process of negotiation of the Peace Agreements. In the context of the peace negotiations, new coordination spaces emerged such as the "Women's Sector of the Civil Society Assembly" which reunited all organized women and addressed gender-specific topics. For the first time, feminists became vocal in promoting autonomy from the political left and began bringing to the forefront topics such as sexual and reproductive rights. This process placed pressure for the inclusion of some gender discussion-themes into a series of commitments that the government assumed as part of the peace process. The "Beijing-Guatemala" committee was created in order to prepare Guatemalan women groups for the "United Nation's Fourth Women Conference" (Aguilar Theissen, 1997, p. 114). In addition, Latin American feminist encounters became increasingly significant for Guatemalan feminists; particularly those that took place in Taxco, Mexico (1987) and in San Bernardo, Argentina (1990) as well as the "First Central American Women's Encounter" in Montelimar, Nicaragua (1992) that became a landmark experience in the region. These processes allowed Guatemalan 'feminisms' to delineate clearer positions regarding their political identity and declare autonomy from previous affiliations (Aguilar Urizar, 2003, p. 25).
  
3.       The '*Diversification of the movement*' (1996 onwards) This period was characterized by an increased diversification of the women's movement and the

challenge to follow up on themes and agreements negotiated during the Guatemalan Peace Process, such as the 'Law Against Domestic Violence'; the development of compulsory quotas of women in political parties; the creation of the 'Office for the Defense of Indigenous Women' and the 'Law for the Comprehensive Development of Women'. In addition to these agreements, the 'National Forum of Women' was created and the first feminist newspaper "La Cuerda" (The Rope) appeared in 1998 (Monzon, 2000). From there on, Guatemalan feminists have coexisted in several groups that articulate action with gender goals in mind, but –as some analysts point out- have yet to evolve into a cohesive feminist movement. In the Guatemalan context, groups that are not considered feminist would support women's welfare provision and de-emphasize the need to engage in denouncing women's rights violations or the promotion of a 'patriarchal and racist system of values. For the Guatemalan feminist movement, becoming more diverse and opening spaces has intersected with the need of marginal women's voices to share their stories and to open political participation for their actioning. In the year 2000, three indigenous women's groups –„Mama Maquin“, „Madre Tierra“ (Mother Earth) and „Mujeres en Resistencia Ixmucan“ (Women in Resistance Ixmucan)- created the "Alliance of Rural Women for Life, Earth and Dignity" that operates in Quiche, Huehuetenango, Alta Verapaz, Suchitepequez and Peten. In these groups, indigenous women tend to organize themselves around their rights to land; or cultural, political, education, local leadership and to fight against discrimination. For example, a particular indigenous women's group, the "Kaqla Women's Group" that emerged from revolutionary organizations from the eighties, has a clear feminist agenda as the women in this group seek to develop a holistic version of feminism that would combine aspects of the cultural system and worldview of the Mayans with ideas about women's empowerment. This group seeks to "organize Mayan women around the "personal and private, the intimate, along with the public and historical, trying to find a path for personal and social healing for better societies" (Bolles et al., 2006, p. 231). The marginalized voices of Guatemalan Lesbians have also struggled to bring forward their particular identities within the feminist movement. According to Berger (2006, p.67) lesbian feminists affiliated with the global gay community have used strategies similar to those used by groups in the United States and Mexico. In July 2000, "Lesbiradas" (a Guatemalan feminist-

lesbian organization) issued the first edition of its magazine “Identities: Lesbian Guatemalans in their diversity” (*Identidades: Lesbianas Guatemaltecas en su diversidad*). The issue was dedicated to “recuperating our history” and “constructing a future”. Still as McClure contends, “the connections between sexual minorities in Guatemala and the global gay movement may have inhibited the formation of ‘local’ identities and thus may result in incongruity between these lesbian ‘activists’ and other more local ‘lesbians’” (Berger, 2006, p. 68).

The issue of the disconnection between Guatemalan lesbian feminist activists and local lesbians to which McClure alludes, needs to be placed in the larger context of the broader feminist movement in the country, which is in itself problematic, as a wide group of Guatemalan feminists consider that there is not a ‘feminist movement’ as such<sup>37</sup>. Guatemalan feminist historians agree with this view. For Monzon (2004) it is still difficult to establish alliances among women’s organizations, as there is a sense of distrust, racial prejudice and sense of inequality at the technical and political levels. Even though resources are invested in order to have an impact at the state level, women’s organizations still cannot achieve internal consensus on many topics. She also considers problematic that there is no renewal of leaderships and no development of feminist theory within the organizations. From this perspective, divisions among feminists, who tend to prioritize their own class, ethnic, generational and even physical affiliations, contribute to create negative misconceptions about feminism, particularly in rural and indigenous communities despite the actions of indigenous feminists. On the other side, new initiatives coming from indigenous women groups at the local-rural levels tend to present more critical views regarding their communities, which is contributing –not without difficulty- to expand the diversity of discourses and agendas of the women’s movement (Monzon, 2004).

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<sup>37</sup> All the Guatemalan feminist women interviewed for this research project, regardless of whether they are currently employed by an organization, or are autonomous feminists, find problematic the notion of a ‘feminist movement’ in Guatemala, as they argue that the divisions, cleavages, different perspectives and lack of support among the different groups do not allow for the creation of a sense of feminist movement. In this context, it appears less problematic to talk about a ‘woman’s movement’.

### Contemporary Threats against Guatemalan Feminists

An external threat for the women's movement in Guatemala in recent years, has to do with the systematic and increased violence against women, who have become targets of extreme violence (rape, mutilation) and murder. This phenomenon acquired international prominence in 1993 when bodies of poor Mexican women began appearing brutally tortured and murdered in the outskirts of Ciudad Juarez, Mexico. At that time, this extreme form of violence against women was called "Femicide" (in English) and in Spanish "feminicidio" or "femicidio", depending on the emphasis attributed to the expression. As Prieto-Carrón et al. (2007, p. 26f) explain, Mexican and Central American women's organizations use 'feminicidio' as a legal and political term used to refer to the murder of women just because they are women. This phenomenon is not new, but has seen a dramatic increase in recent years, reaching alarming proportions in Central America. These killings are carried out deliberately and with extreme cruelty: women's mutilated corpses are left in public spaces and become weapons to spread terror amongst women. Guatemala has the highest number of femicides in Central America and Mexico, but increasing numbers of women are also being killed in Honduras, El Salvador and Costa Rica. Many of the murdered women are from the most marginalized sectors of society, and it has become common for the media to present them as prostitutes, *maquila* (factory) workers and/or members of the *maras* (gangs)<sup>38</sup>. Indeed, young, poor women working on the margins of legality are in a very vulnerable situation and are more likely to be attacked. Women's organizations disagree with the official interpretation that these killings are connected with drug traffickers and criminal gangs: in 2003, out of the 383 women killed in Guatemala, only six murders could be attributed to street gangs (source: Amnesty International, 2005). Femicide has also been considered an extreme form of domestic violence that kills women (as studies in the region show that a high percentage of femicides are committed by an intimate partner or male family member of the victim) and occur in the victim's own house. In any case, the killings have a motive, are thoroughly planned and perpetrators are known to the victims.

<sup>38</sup> "Clarisa", a Guatemalan lesbian-feminist and one of the women interviewed for this project, described a disturbing trend of Guatemalan media concerning what is said when the body of a murdered woman is found. In some cases, presumed lesbian tendencies of the victim are 'hinted' to the readers, in an attempt to create a narrative that would connect 'lesbian tendencies' and a 'brutal end' for the woman. The underlying message has to do with creating a sense of 'punishment for the misbehavior' of the victim.

In Mexico and Guatemala, relatives of femicide victims have been instrumental in getting the issue onto the public agenda. Without funding or experience, mothers of the young victims have confronted the police and judicial systems at significant personal costs. Self-help organizations have now been formed to denounce impunity, generate income, support the orphaned children and cover legal and other costs. In additions, women's groups are providing legal and psychological support to women affected by violence as well as educating women in their rights (Prieto-Carron et al., 2007, p. 29, 35). As Guatemalan feminists currently denounce and face the horrors of femicide and extended social violence, their strategies and solutions may appear scattered and inconsistent, as there are inner contradictions within the movement that "seem to create uncertainty and contribute to a lack of coordination of visions because they reflect different ethnic belongings, priorities, methods of work and political strategies" (Monzon, 2004, handout without page numbering).

#### **2.2.7- Summary**

A historical overview of the emergence of feminism in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua invariably points to the impact of the revolutionary wars on the women's movement of those countries during the 1970s and 1980s, and how a particular form of second wave 'feminismo' emerged in the region afterwards. Before the wars, there were vital and vibrant women's movements in all of these countries, some of them – as in the case of Guatemala- go back to the colonial times. The following points summarize key issues reflected in the previous literature review, particularly looking at the 'first' and 'second' feminist waves, as well as similarities and differences across countries.

1. While North American and European feminist scholars connected the international 'first wave feminism' with the demands of thousands of women worldwide for the right to vote (suffragism) and the search of egalitarian rights, Central American historians have taken these periods as a point of reference, but not as a category that explains the 'whole story' concerning the women's movements of the first part of the twentieth century in the region. For example, in El Salvador, scholars have argued that there was not a typical 'suffragist' movement, but rather, low-income women were politically active in demanding democracy, fair wages and labor rights. The figure of Prudencia Ayala, a Salvadoran nationalist who demanded citizenship rights for women in the 1920s, stood out in her historical context as a unique case. In the end, in 1938, Maximiliano Hernandez Martinez granted the theoretical

right for Salvadoran women to vote as a way of manipulating female vote for political gains. In the case of Nicaragua, suffragists –who were coming from the upper class and educated sectors of society- were not concerned with questioning the political status quo, but rather, attempted to bridge women’s rights into the ‘state apparatus’ of the Somoza dictatorship and clearly distanced themselves from the libertarian claims of Sandinismo. It was therefore Somoza who granted the right to vote in 1955. In the Guatemalan case, suffragists –who were also educated women from the upper classes- found a political opportunity in the ‘democratic spring’ of Guatemalan history, where the progressive governments of Arevalo and Arbenz supported democratic gains. In this context, Guatemalan women were granted the vote as part of a larger campaign of national democratization. As it can be seen, in the Central American region, a ‘first wave’ of feminism sought –as much as in the North- to persuade governments of women’s citizenship rights; but differently from the North, women in the region were equally concerned with their political participation in the democratization of their countries (in the case of El Salvador and Guatemala) and in gaining political influence (in the case of Nicaragua, without questioning the social system).

2. A feminist ‘Second wave’, influenced by the ‘New Left’ and pacifist movements of the 1960s focused in Europe and North America on looking at inequalities amongst genders, emphasizing women’s need to demand reproductive rights and transform the private sphere. In spite on the emphasis on gender rights in the ‘north’, during the 1960s in Central America, leftist women –like men- were mostly driven into radical activism by a strong oppositional consciousness against dominant groups like the military or the political far-right which held power at the time in most Central American countries: El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala were governed at the time by authoritarian party systems that had repressed political leftist opposition. As Andrews (1991:32f) has argued, a pre-condition for political organization demands a de-legitimization of those in power. It could be argued that in the Central American context of the 1960s, both men and women challenged and de-legitimized the social and political structures of power which lead to the development of a unique political consciousness that not only permeated politically minded groups, but also religious and cultural ones.

In the case of El Salvador, women started to organize in the 1970s around popular labor organizations, such as the strong teachers union “ANDES” that was led by the later revolutionary leader, Melida Anaya Montes. From there on, Salvadoran women joined in large numbers the five clandestine political parties that constituted the FMLN and developed women’s organizations affiliated to them. The women’s movement was rooted

and eventually developed from women's participation in the war, despite the fact that revolutionary women learned that their gendered needs were not a priority for their revolutionary counterparts. In 1990, some early women's organizations that had emerged from the previous FMLN parties, took a feminist standpoint, meaning, they developed a strong feminist consciousness, and dared to claim autonomy from their political affiliations. After 1992 –when the peace agreements were signed- Salvadoran feminists continued to position themselves as autonomous, although a strong political sectarianism remained and shaped the movement in the sense that women's 'loyalty' was primarily with their organization.

3. In the case of Nicaragua, women in the 1960s were also mobilized by the clandestine Sandinista front, struggled against the Somoza dictatorship. In this context the 'Sandinista Front' women created "ANPRONAC", an organization devoted to the recruitment of women for the FMLN and to question the Somoza regime. 'ANPRONAC' organized women around traditional roles of "mothers" and "wives" of Sandinista men. After the 1972 earthquake, women started to join in great numbers the Sandinista cause, and after the Sandinistas defeated the Somocista guard in 1979, they established a 'revolutionary government' focused on protecting the 'achievements of the revolution' that prioritized military and security concerns. Sandinista women followed these priorities, despite the fact that their women's national organization, AMNLAE had pledged to make women's rights a priority. Hunt and Benford (2004, p. 442) have emphasized the cognitive aspect of political consciousness looking at how it creates "interpretive frameworks that emerge out of a challenging group's struggle to define and realize its interests". In the case of Nicaraguan women supporting the Sandinista structure after the revolution, new 'gendered' frameworks of interpretation emerged as they were influenced by foreign feminisms, which led to the formation of a new site of struggle –women's rights- and the development of gendered oppositional consciousness, that led them to began questioning the patriarchal Sandinista structure. It was only after the 1990 electoral defeat when Nicaraguan women claimed autonomy from the FMLN and a significant number of feminist and women's organizations emerged as a result of both a need to prioritize gendered demands and also, out of strategic reasons, as the international donor community offered significant support to these independent women's organizations. The governments that followed thereafter contributed to foster an anti-feminist environment.

4. In the case of Guatemala, very few women joined revolutionary organizations in the early sixties, when they emerged. It was only in the 1980s when Guatemalan indigenous women

joined in significant numbers these leftist guerrilla organizations, as they developed a strong oppositional consciousness and were drawn to revolution because of the levels of oppression that their communities experienced during the war. For the same reason, a significant number of Guatemalan women (indigenous and ladino) migrated to Mexico, and eventually organized exiled women's groups with a feminist component due to the influence of Mexican feminists who supported them. Women got also organized around human and labor rights during the war. When the Peace Agreement negotiations started in 1996, women groups, with a strong feminist consciousness were offered a space to participate in the "Civil Society Assembly". Out of these processes, an incipient feminist movement emerged. From 1992 onwards, the feminist women's movement gained diversity and representation but has not been able to overcome racial, cultural and class cleavages in the three different countries.

5. Raka Ray (1999) has argued how women's movements configurations are shaped by stories of previous political participation and the way in which these experiences become crucial regarding the formation of the interests and capacities within women's movements. Nowhere this could be more true than in the context of post-revolutionary El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, where, as former combatant women who grew independent and autonomous from their significant revolutionary affiliations, used many of the tools and insights gained through their revolutionary years in order to re-establish cultural/political positions within in their societies on their own under the various feminist identities that emerged at that time. Some strategies were old, but others were new: feminist women groups sought international and alternative sources of funding (such as international organizations and transnational NGOS), which came in different forms and demanded new mechanisms of organizing. The NGOization of the movement was then deeply connected with the feminists' need to professionalize their strategies of fundraising, fulfilling the demands of international donors. Sectarianism among feminists –to this day- still reflects cleavages from the war years, but it may also reflect competition for resources amongst feminist organizations.

6. The implication of the previously discussed differences among women's political positionings are particularly relevant in the Nicaraguan case, where Sandinista feminist women found themselves –even before the Sandinista Party was defeated in 1990- in open opposition of some of the AMNLAE policies. President Violeta de Chamorro and others that have ruled Nicaragua ever since, have continued to promote an 'antifeminist' environment

in the country, which the recently appointed government of Daniel Ortega has consistently raised to a higher level by banning reproductive rights for Nicaraguan women that were protected under the Constitution for more than a century. The breakup between the feminist movement and the Sandinistas is lived as a situation that positions feminist individuals and groups on different sides depending on their degrees of Sandinista affiliations.<sup>39</sup> These strong oppositional collective identities, as Hunt and Bedford (2004, p. 450) have pointed out, contribute to a stronger sense of we-ness and collective agency within each group, as well as a sense of 'the other', which has contributed to a stronger sense of separation between the current Sandinistas turned feminists and the 'Ortega' Sandinistas.

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<sup>39</sup> It is relevant to mention that AMNLAE as a women's organization still exists, and that some feminist women, to this day, continue their affiliation to Sandinismo and AMNLAE despite the contradictions that this position may create. One of these women was interviewed as part of this research project.

## **2.3- Interconnectedness Between Revolution And Feminism in Central America: Rationale Underlying Case Selection**

The following section addresses the rationale underlying case selection for both the countries selected for the study as well as the participants identified as cases.

### **2.3.1- Why These Countries?**

This research project is a case study that focuses on the exploration of the experiences of identity transition of women who underwent periods of revolutionary and feminist activisms in three Central American countries. It is concerned with looking at 'first order narratives' from a sample of women who joined revolutionary movements of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua, enduring political prosecution and personal losses while supporting their political causes. These women's narrations about their experiences as revolutionaries, and later as feminists, can be seen, paraphrasing Andrews, (1991, p. 43) as pathways for the understanding of how commitment to work for social justice is sustained through a lifetime. In fact, as it has been argued by various researchers, that through the exploration of life story narratives it is possible to understand how oppositional consciousness and solidarity can be constructed and sustained via individual and movement narratives (Polletta 1998; Gongaware 2001; Nepstad 2001; Steward et al. 2002) in Hunt & Benford, 2004, p. 446.

By exploring stories from women coming from different revolutionary experiences in the Central American region, this study attempts to look at how these women construct their radical narrative identities in similar or different ways, and to what extent these similarities and differences are influenced by the socio-historical conditions in which they experienced these activisms. On one side, the similarities shared by these women's narratives allow for cross-country comparisons which, according to Yin (2003), provide grounds for analytic generalization to a theory of the phenomenon in question, namely, the emergence of women's radical revolutionary and feminist identities in this region. On the other side, by understanding the differences among the experiences of these women, it is possible to explore the variation and richness of experiences of these women's revolutionary and feminist activisms in this region.

Therefore, in the remaining part of this section, a detailed account of both the similarities and differences concerning the socio/political environments existing in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods

is presented, drawing upon pertinent literature concerning revolutionary movements and second wave feminisms in this region (see: Stephen, 1997; Hipscher, 2000; Luciak, 2001; Kampwirth, 2001, 2002, 2004, Shayne, 2004, Bickam-Mendez, 2005; Soriano Hernandez, 2006).

### **Similarities Across Countries**

As mentioned above, there are grounds of comparison among the feminist and revolutionary experiences of women from El Salvador (for more on Salvadoran women, see section 2.2.4- Feminism in El Salvador), Nicaragua (see section 2.2.5- Feminism in Nicaragua) and Guatemala (see section 2.2.6-Feminism in Guatemala), based on similarities concerning the socio-political environments of the countries where these activisms emerged. One fundamental similarity pertains the fact that, during the revolutionary periods, a strong patriarchal environment within revolutionary groups fostered dissatisfaction amongst combatant women, who, despite the fact that did not voice their gender concerns, were able to carry and develop new roles and affiliations that opened new symbolic and discursive spaces for them. In these revolutionary contexts, traditional women's roles like "mother" or "daughter" took on new meanings as they re-defined women's involvements in human rights movements as activist-mothers or activist-daughters, and even more so, as combatant-mothers or combatant-daughters.

Another similarity among the experiences of the women from these three countries occurred after the revolutionary periods ended, where most of the women sought autonomy from their previous revolutionary organizations, as they realized that their gendered needs were not a priority for their male guerrilla counterparts. Throughout the Central American region, and particularly in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, foreign feminist discourses were a significant influence among post-revolutionary feminists. These perspectives came through the voices of other Latin American and European feminists, mostly from Mexico, Peru, Argentina and Spain. The influence of feminists from the United States was also significant. As women's movements struggled to create and develop their own spaces for oppositional consciousness, women's movements in these three countries nevertheless experienced a generalized tendency towards fragmentation and 'NGOization' where political sectarianism had a significant impact on the social dynamic among women from the various organizations. Not surprisingly, most feminist organizations experienced conflicting relationships with the political left in their countries. The divisions that stem from "NGOization" mostly concerned the shared feeling by some women within feminist

organizations that independent and political grassroots involvements were compromised at the expense of donor interests.

As feminist organizations have continued to denounce human rights violations against women in the region, some groups from El Salvador and Guatemala have become targets of death threats and femicide, in social environments where raising awareness on gender rights has become increasingly problematic and dangerous.

### **Differences Across Countries**

In the following sub-section, the differences across countries are presented, with an emphasis of understanding the distinctive aspects of the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods as experienced by many women in these countries.

Concerning the revolutionary periods, one difference across countries had to do with the social class from which the women who were involved in the revolutionary process came from. Whereas in El Salvador and Guatemala (see sections 2.2.4 and 2.2.6), revolutionary involvement took place among women coming from lower income social strata (peasants, urban working class) in Nicaragua (see section 2.2.5), many more women who joined revolutionary action came from the middle class and in some extraordinary cases, from the upper class. This differential factor played a significant role in terms of how women positioned themselves after the revolutionary periods.

During the post-revolutionary period, Salvadoran feminists with a revolutionary background tended to reproduce war sectarianisms pertaining the five strongest revolutionary organizations in the configuration of their feminist organizations, differently from feminists from Nicaragua and Guatemala. In the Nicaraguan case, revolutionary action succeeded in overthrowing Somoza from power and creating 'revolutionary' structures that centralized women's organizing in a one-national-women-organization like AMNLAE; thus early Nicaraguan Sandinista feminists shared a 'common root' of women's organizing, unlike Salvadoran feminists who were more prone to reproduce old war divisions. The case in Guatemala was different from the other two countries, given its unique geographic factors such as the high amount of indigenous population in the country, and thus, the Guatemalan post-revolutionary feminist movement reflected both the diversity and the cleavages existing in the overall Guatemalan society, which have to do more with class and race. Increasingly more Guatemalan indigenous women joined the feminist movement or even developed their own feminisms, differently from El Salvador and Nicaragua, where indigenous women did not play a significant role in their women's movements.

Currently, feminist movements from these three countries face different social and political environments that significantly influence these organizations strategies and aims. In the Nicaraguan case, feminist groups appear to confront a stronger anti-feminist environment than in Guatemala and El Salvador which has been supported by various governments, both from the political right and the left, as Nicaraguan feminists have faced other forms of state violence including legal prosecution, accusations and illegal incursions into their organizations. This claim, nevertheless, does not deny that Salvadoran and Guatemalan women do encounter anti-feminism as they carry on with their political work. Notwithstanding the Guatemalan case, where the Peace Process has promoted political participation of women's groups into the 'making' of the Guatemalan post-conflict society through the "Civil Society Assembly". Furthermore, in the cases of both El Salvador and Guatemala, some feminist women have also joined the 'revolutionary' party structures of the FMLN and URNG respectively in order to participate in electoral politics and municipal government structures, which is unthinkable in Nicaragua (with the exception of the current AMNLAE women) because of the deep divide between the current Sandinista President Daniel Ortega and various Nicaraguan feminist groups.

In sum, it can be argued that a sample of narratives of revolutionary and feminist women that includes El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala offers a degree of diversity that allows for the exploration of the similarities and/or differences of underlying patterns in these narratives which makes it possible to speculate about the different developments in these women's lives depending on specific socio-historical situations and conditions that are present in all the cases, which makes it possible for the researcher to draw conclusions relevant for this region.

### **2.3.2- Why these Women?**

The tradition of interviewing former activists as a way of understanding the mindset behind political movements draws from a significant tradition in sociology, psychology and political science. Molly Andrews, one of the pioneers in the field, has argued: "if we wish to learn about the psychology of political activists, we must listen what they have to say about their own lives" (1991, p. 20).

In most of the landmark works of testimonial literature concerning the experiences of female revolutionary activists from Central America, stories told by unique individuals or

prototypical activists have informed theories and approaches attempting to understand the overwhelming involvement of women in revolutionary action. Some of these early works focused on revolutionary 'heroines', for example: "Hear My Testimony: Maria Teresa Tula, Human Rights Activist of El Salvador" Ed. by Lynn Stephen (1994); "My Name is Rigoberta Menchu and this is how my conscience was born" by Elizabeth Burgos (1994) or writings on Dora Maria Tellez, a Nicaraguan Sandinista comandante known for her audacity in facing the Somoza dictatorship. Other classic testimonials focused on the experiences of groups of women from the region who suffered great oppression and developed a strong oppositional consciousness that led to their political involvement. Some of the most well known works among these are: "The Hour of the Poor, the Hour of Women: Salvadoran Women Speak" by Renny Golden (1991) and "Women and Social Movements in Latin America" by Lynn Stephen (1997). Furthermore, some of the bibliography on women and revolution focused on the experiences of country-specific revolutionary movements, such as "Women and Revolution in Nicaragua" by Hellen Collinson (Ed.) (1990); "Guatemalan Women Speak" by Margaret Hooks (1991); "A Dream Compels Us: Voices of Salvadoran Women" by Brenda Carter et. Al. (1989) and "They Won't Take Me Alive: Salvadoran Women in Struggle for National Liberation" by Claribel Alegria (1983).

However, A more recent bibliography informed by gender sociology and political science focused on establishing comparative perspectives across those Central American countries which experienced revolutionary upheavals and how these were later connected to the emergence of feminism in the region. Among these gender scholars, Karen Kampiwerth has a prominent place with her books: "Women and Guerrilla Movements: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas, Cuba" (2003) which sought to explain why large groups of women joined guerrilla movements in the region and "Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution: Nicaragua, El Salvador, Chiapas" (2004) where she focused on the connection between revolutionary involvement in patriarchal revolutionary organizations and the emergence of Central American feminisms. The data-gathering method of her research involved open-ended interviews of –on average- one hour with women's movement activists from the different countries. The method that she used to find the women that she interviewed was snowballing, where activists helped her and pointed out to other activists for further interviews. Both in El Salvador and Nicaragua, a significant subset of those interviewed were also former guerrillas. In her interviews, she covered data from the women's childhoods and family influences, following to their early political involvement, where she obtained extensive narratives from her participants and ending with analytical

accounts provided by her participants on the status of women's movements in the different countries. (Kampwirth, 2004, 12f).

Interviews of both male and female political activists were also the method of choice of renewed sociologist Ilja Luciak for his study "Gender and Democracy in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala" (2003), where he and his team conducted structured interviews and used participant observation as data gathering methods. Luciak also relied on local contacts to help him identify potential participants in his research.

Following both Kampwirth and Luciak's research approach, this study falls into the tradition of interviewing current feminist activists of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, with the ultimate purpose to gather textual data that can be analyzed with the objective of generating plausible theories that explain the interconnections between revolution and feminism in this region. Thus, the selection criteria of the samples identified by these scholars is very similar to the one used in this study: participants in this study –as in their research- are also women with a personal history of revolutionary AND feminist activisms which continue to be actively involved in the women's movements of their countries. In addition, both Luciak and Kampwirth used local contacts and snowballing as ways of identifying potential participants, a process that was also undertaken with the same purpose in this study (see section: 3.2-Introducing the Sample of Radical Feminist Women). Finally, participants in this study were asked to share relevant aspects of their personal histories through an interview, using a similar approach from the one used by Kampwirth in both her books (see section: 3.3-Data Collection: The Life Story Interview). Notwithstanding, this study shares a very similar view regarding research design and data selection criteria, it also departs from the mentioned studies because it takes a narrative perspective focused on exploring identity transition from revolutionary to feminist activisms. With this particular focus in mind, this study attempts to shed light and bridge a gap in the literature by offering further understanding on the personal experience of radical identity transition in the region.

## **2.4- Identities in transition**

Based on the previous historical overview, it can be argued that women who participated in the revolutionary movements of the 1980s in Central America faced significant challenges when they re-entered the societal mainstream in order to find a 'place' in their post conflict societies. In a way, these women were 'confronted' with the need to resign the 'guerrillera' identity and find a functional identity that would support a link, a transition to a new phase in their lives. These women found that this identity transition was possible through their identification with emerging feminisms in the region. They eventually called themselves 'feministas' and developed feminist groups. Their work in these organizations changed their lives. Precisely, this is the instance of identity transition that concerns this study, namely going from revolutionary to feminist involvement and making sense of the interconnections between these two experiences.

The understanding of how these processes came to exist necessitates the theoretical grounding of the concept of 'identity transition' in psychological literature. Thus, in the following section, the emphasis shifts from a historical perspective and the focus is placed on exploring the key concept of 'identity' and 'identity transition' in psychology.

### **2.4.1- Overview of main concepts of identity formation and development**

Identity is one of those multifaceted phenomena, that attracts the interest of scholars from a wide spectrum of disciplines, including philosophy; anthropology; cultural studies; political science; sociology and psychology (Simon, 2004), which has created an extremely rich, but also complex and confusing terminology and distinctions. In this section, an overview of the psychological understandings of identity is presented as well as a discussion of the theoretical frameworks that have informed the term. An underlying objective of this section is to define some crucial concepts when discussing the topic of identity distinguishing one from the other, which may not be an easy task, considering how, for example, some authors refer to 'self-concept' or 'self' and 'identity' as indistinct. Within psychology, how 'identity' is defined, depends significantly from which theoretical standpoint the definition comes from. The most significant theoretical and research threads

that have informed contemporary understandings of the concept of identity as well as ‘their’ definitions are introduced below:

**1. Psychoanalysis and the Ego Psychoanalytic Theory of Psycho-Social Development:**

Clinical psychologists and psychoanalysts have expanded on groundbreaking works of ‘identity’ based on Erick Erickson’s concept of ‘identity crisis’ (e.g. 1959; 1963; 1964; 1968) and the so-called “psychoanalytic culturalist” tradition; engaging in empirical research of his theory and further developing the ‘identity status’ research. A frequently quoted definition of identity offered by Erickson is: “identity expresses such a mutual relation in that it connotes both a persistent sameness within oneself (selfsameness) and a persistent sharing of some kind of essential characteristic with others” (Erickson, 1956, p. 57). For Ericksonean theory, the crux of identity stability lies in the interplay between the social and the psychic; as Erickson has argued, a person requires a viable social identity, which integrates her/him into a particular culture, and in this way, the psychological sense of temporal-spatial continuity is established. Erickson speaks of three forms of identity continuity: 1. a sense of sameness of the self with itself (ego identity); 2. inter-relationships between the self and the other (that maintain the stability of personal and social identities) and 3. functional integrations between the other and other (stability in community relationships that safeguard personal and social identities) (Cote and Levine, 2002, p. 16).

- 2. Social Psychology and “Social Identity Theory”:** The concept of ‘social identity’ has been at the forefront of the study of identity in social psychology. Social psychologists have tried to deal with the opposition between personal and social identity and regard social identity as part of the self that refers to cognitions ensuing from social ecological positions. More specifically, social identity points to how an individual perceives him or herself as similar to others of the same background (the ‘we’) but also different in connection to members of other groups or categories (the ‘them’). The stronger the identification with a group, the more significant the differentiation will be. On the other hand, personal identity refers to specific character attributes of each individual, based on the notion that each person is a unique combination of features which makes him or her different from others, and which explains his/her uniqueness and specificity. Conversely, an individual would perceive him/herself as identical to him/herself; being the same in time and space,

but that is also what would specify and marks him/herself out of the others (Deschamps and Devos, 1998, p. 2f).

3. **Narrative Psychology and Perspectives on Identity:** Theodore Sarbin (1986) was the first one to propose the narrative mode as a root metaphor in psychology, which allowed psychologists to engage in understanding individuals through their narratives or life stories. It has been argued that there is an interrelationship between cultural and personal narratives as narratives reflect the culture of the storyteller; and it is within this socio-cultural matrix that narrative identity is developed: in the act of telling a story about oneself a sense of self is created (Flanagan et al., 2008, 324f). Another narrative psychologist, Dan McAdams, has argued that it is an individual's story which ties together past, present and future in his or her life, providing unity and purpose, and specifying a personalized 'niche' in the adult world and a sense of continuity and sameness across situations and over time. From his perspective, identity is a life story, and individual identities may be classified in the manner of stories. Thus, identity stability is longitudinal consistency in the life story, and identity transformation –crisis and change- is story revision. The problem of identity is the problem of arriving at a life story that makes sense, providing unity and purpose within a socio-historical matrix that embodies a larger story. In this way, identity is psychosocial: the life story is a joint product of the person and the environment. In a sense, the two write the story together (Mc Adams, 1988, p.17f).
  
4. **Identity and Self:** A further relevant distinction pertains to the differentiation between 'identity' and 'self'. Sometimes, these concepts are taken as interchangeable, and sometimes, they are distinguished from each other in the literature. As it has been explained above, there is no unified sense of what 'identity' means and the same applies for the concept of 'self', thus, is not a single, universally accepted definition of 'self'. According to Leary and Price Tangney (2003, p. 6f) there is significant difference in terms of what the term 'self' means for different authors, and the meanings can range from regarding the 'self' as the person him- or herself; or as a part or the whole person's personality'; or as the seat of the person's self-awareness; or the person's knowledge about him- or herself or even the source of agency and volition in individuals. The latter three uses are closer to depict a better explanation of the concept of self in psychology. Leary and Price Tangney (2003)

propose a more encompassing view, where the self is regarded as the 'psychological apparatus that allows organisms to think consciously about themselves'. The self is a mental capacity that allows an animal to take itself as the object of its own attention and to think consciously about itself. Broadly speaking the 'self' is the outcome of the separation-individuation and rapprochement process undergone by the toddler. Developmentally, the structure of 'self' precedes that of identity and lies at a deeper level within the personality. A solid sense of self is necessary, but not a sufficient condition for identity (Marcia, 1994, p. 70f). Just as authors talk about individual and collective identities, psychologists talk about the individual self as that which contains those aspects of self-concept that differentiate the person from others; the relational self, which contains those aspects of the self concept that are shared with relationship partners and define the person's role or position within significant relationships and the collective self, which contains those aspects of the self concept that differentiate in-group members from members of relevant out-groups and it is based on impersonal bonds to others derived from common and symbolic identifications with a group (Sedikides and Brewer, 2001, p. 1f).

Summarizing what has been discussed above, the differences between self and identity lie on the following aspects:

- a) Developmentally speaking, the structure of the self precedes that of identity, and a sense of identity necessitates a sense of self.
- b) A sense of self has to do with the capacity to be self aware, to become self-knowledgeable and to become an agent in one's environment, whereas concepts of personal identity have to do more with a perceived sense of uniqueness and specificity that provides a sense of continuity and sameness, tying past, present and future.
- c) There are authors who talk about 'collective self' as opposed to individual 'self', just as 'collective identity' is discussed in opposition to 'individual identity'; nevertheless, the first ones tend to use the concepts of 'self' and 'self-concept' interchangeably.

The remaining part of this sub-section offers a detailed account of each of the 'identity theories' outlined above, ending with the proposition of the identity concept that informs this study.

### **The Concept of “Identity” from the Ericksonian Perspective**

Our present sense of ‘identity’ has evolved in the last forty years, deriving most of all from psychoanalyst Erick Erickson’s concept of an ‘identity crisis’. Erickson described a sequel of eight psychosocial developmental stages, which encompassed the life cycle. These psychosocial stages represented a sequence of ego growth occurring as the individual meets the challenges of different periods of life and resolves the conflicts that are inherent to those periods. Identity is understood within this context as a developmental achievement. It reaches its time of ascendancy about middle to late adolescence (Marcia, 1994). In Erickson’s own words, he defines the concept of Identity in the following way:

“identity formation employs a process of simultaneous reflection and observation, taking place on all levels of mental functioning, by which the individual judges himself in light of what he perceives to be the way in which others judge him in comparison to themselves and to a typology significant to them; while he judges their way of judging him in light of how he perceives himself in comparison to them and to types that have become relevant to him”. Erikson (1968, 15-25).

Erickson’s term ‘identity crisis’, refers to a process that takes place in adolescence as a result of growing up under disruptive, fast-changing conditions; and can be understood as experiencing a sense of uncertainty concerning one’s feelings about oneself, as well as one’s character, goals and origins. Erickson’s psychoanalytic theory of psychosocial development initially conceived that by the end of the adolescence, the individual must ‘achieve identity’ and if this does not occur, the opposite outcome, ‘identity diffusion’, refers to what he conceived as a failure to establish a coherent sense of identity, which leaves the adolescent without a solid sense of self (Jackson, Ed., 2010, p. 362)

Some have argued that Erickson’s theory has been useful in bridging the divisions established by primordialists and constructivists concerning ‘identity’, because his understanding cannot be fully encapsulated by primordialists (who emphasize inherent qualities of the individual) or constructivists (who emphasize the constructed nature of the self), but his theory is positioned to see both faces. He understood, with the primordialists, that not ‘any identity’ will do. People are limited in their senses of self by their families, their communities, the prevalent typologies of identities that surround them, and what he called the ‘identity possibilities of an age’. In this sense, identity is given. Yet individuals also seek to adjust their identities to the judgment of relevant others and tend not to settle on an identity for much of their youth. In this period of search, individuals look to themselves and others, trying out new identities to see how they feel, both to themselves and to others

judging them, before adopting one permanently. In this sense, for Erickson, identity is constructed. Identities are therefore categories of membership that are based on all sorts of typologies –gender, race, class, personality, caste. In this sense, people are limited by, but they are not prisoners of their genes, their physiognomies and their histories in settling on their own identities (Laitin, 1998, p. 20f).

The empirical study of ‘ego identity development’ by means of the ‘Identity status paradigm’ began more than 25 years ago based on Erickson’s ego psychoanalytic theory of psychosocial development. Identity status researchers have attempted to demonstrate the validity and usefulness of Erickson’s idea in an empirical way. After conducting research it became evident that Erickson’s original dichotomy of either ‘achieving identity’ or ‘identity diffusion’ (the two alternative outcomes of adolescence) did not capture adequately the variety of styles of identity resolution that research participants have described; thus four identity statuses have been formulated, which are: ‘identity achievement’; ‘moratorium’; ‘foreclosure’ and ‘identity diffusion’. ‘Identity achievement’ persons have undergone significant explorations and have made commitments in most areas. ‘Moratorium’ individuals are currently in the exploratory period and their commitments are not firm but they are struggling to arrive at them and possibly they may be experiencing an identity crisis. The third identity status is ‘foreclosure’ where these persons, while strongly committed have not arrived at their commitments via the route of exploration, but rather have retained the values and occupational directions of their childhood. Finally, ‘identity diffusion’ individuals may have undergone some explorations, but this is more wandering than exploring and there is clearly a lack of commitment (research by Archer and Waterman, 1990; Marcia, 1989).

In addition, an identity is expected to undergo an accommodative process when it can no longer assimilate successfully new experiences occurring later in the life cycle. If the initial identity configuration attained at late adolescence is self constructed rather than one that has been conferred upon the individual, achieved rather than ascribed, successive identity reformulations can be expected throughout the life cycle as the individual meets and resolves the challenges involved in ego growth. Hence, if the initial identity is ‘self constructed’, it will not be the individual’s last identity (Stephen, Fraser and Marcia, 1992, p. 71). From this additional perspective, the concept of ‘identity’ can also be discriminated from that of ‘self’.

Looking at the importance of ‘relatedness’ in the development of personal identity, Ruthellen Josselson (1994) has argued that identity “brings the individual to the social world

and the social world to the individual in an indivisible wholeness". For her, the consciousness of existence itself is linked to the response of an 'other': there is no independent self, but rather, it arises out of and is created by relationship between the individual and the social world. Identity in this sense is psychosocial at its core, as it necessitates the self and other; the inner and outer; the being and doing; an expression of self in response to others. Research has shown that identity resides in connection to others as well as in separateness; and in this sense, adolescents do undergo a separation-individuation process on the road to identity. But at the same time, they are not becoming 'lone selves' needing no one, standing to face the forces of life alone. Rather, they are editing and modifying; enriching and extending their connections to others, becoming more fully themselves in relation. In this sense, their sense of individuation is based in revisited relatedness, meaning, evaluating their relations/commitment to others and, it is in the integration of these commitments that the integration of identity lies (Josselson, 1994, p. 82f).

The relevance of the Ericksonian conceptualization of identity for this research project lies on the fact that Erickson's theory was one of the earliest ones in discussing the impact of socialization processes in the development of identity. Without rejecting the fact that individuals are limited by certain socio/historical factors, Erickson's developmental view of identity offers a life course perspective concerning identity construction that is supported by narrative psychologists, who view identity construction as a process that goes beyond adolescence into adulthood. According to Erickson, identity in adulthood is considered to undergo reformulations, where both adult women and men continue to meet and resolve challenges involved in their ego growth. This perspective is consistent with the view of identity construction that is explored in this study.

### **Social Identity Theory from the social psychology paradigm**

Within the field of social psychology, the study of identity has been related to sociological theories discussing social roles (such as role theory) and the meanings derived from social interaction (from symbolic interactionism), that were appropriated by 'identity theory' (Stryker, 1987; 2000). Role theory, as discussed in the 1960s by notorious social psychologists, such as Brown (1965); Biddle and Thomas (1966); Biddle (1979) established the importance of "social roles" in the understanding of human behavior as these were defined as any set of behaviors that have a socially agreed-upon function and an accepted code of norms. At the time when it emerged, the term role was taken from the context of theater. Thus, "Role Theory" has attempted to apply the same framework to social life.

Three elements of concern to role theory are: the patterned characteristics of social behavior (role enactment); the parts or identities a person assumes (social roles); and the scripts or shared expectations for behaviors that are linked to each part (role expectations). Social roles bridge individuals and society, as every society has a range of roles that individuals must learn, as well as expectations associated with them. As people enter new roles, they modify their behavior to conform to these role expectations (Newman and Newman, 2009, p. 48).

Other significant influences into “social identity theory” came also from “Symbolic Interactionism”, which focuses on social interaction, such as everyday events in which people communicate, interpret and respond to each other’s words and actions. The concern from this theory has been to explore how individuals interpret, influence and respond to what they and others are doing while interacting. In order to answer these questions, symbolic interactionists focus on 1. self-awareness/reflexive thinking; 2. the importance of symbols and 3. a negotiated order. Thus, symbolic interactionists maintain that people interpret other’s actions, words and gestures first, and then respond based on their interpretations (Blumer 1962). This interpretation-and-response process suggests that interactions between people depends on shared symbols, which, from this theory, are defined as any kind of physical phenomenon to which people assign meanings (Ferrante, 2008, p. 36f).

Drawing on the previous concepts, social psychologists concerned with the study of identity criticized role theory for emphasizing a “static, normatively deterministic view of social life” (Stryker and Statham, 1987, p. 341) and symbolic interactionism was also criticized for granting insufficient recognition of social structural influences. Thus, attempts to articulate both frameworks into a more balanced theory for the analysis of self-society reciprocity led to an effort of incorporating into identity theory both interactionally constructed and social structural aspects of the ‘social person’. Thus, identity was defined as a ‘set of internalized role expectations’ and along with the concepts of ‘identity salience’ and ‘commitment’, they became the conceptual cornerstones of identity theory.

The concept of ‘identity salience’ and ‘commitment’ demand further explanation: ‘Identity theory’ proposes that role identities are ranked on a hierarchy of salience, which is based on two aspects: 1. ‘Interactional commitment’ or the number of relationships owing to a given role identity; and 2. ‘affective commitment’ based on the strength or ties to others who are involved in a particular role identity (Stryker, 1987; Stryker and Burke, 2000; Stryker and Serpe, 1994). Thus, ‘Identity salience’ refers to ‘the location of a particular

identity in that hierarchy'. The distribution of identities in the salience hierarchy reflects the different levels of commitment to the social roles underlying the various identities. In this context, commitment is defined as 'the costs to the person if she could no longer participate in a particular social relationship and thus no longer play the corresponding role or have the corresponding identity'. To put it in other terms, a person is committed to a particular social role to the extent to which her or his social relationships are built around the role, and the characteristics of the larger social structure, such as class, gender or age, affect commitment and constrain identity, by facilitating or impeding entry and exit from social relationships (Simon, 2004, p. 23f).

As Stryker (2000) has argued, 'Identity theory' builds on the assumption that social structure contains, facilitates or inhibits –though it does not determine- human action. In the context of this interactionist formula, the theory basic proposition becomes: 'commitment affects identity salience [which then] affects role choice'. Thus, the theory emphasizes directionality but recognizes reciprocity among its elements; and in this sense, persons potentially can have as many identities as sets of role variations in which they participate. The choice among behaviors that are expressive of particular roles reflects its location in the salience hierarchy of identities associated with those behaviors. Four implications for the concept of 'identity' emerge from this theoretical framework:

1. Persons carry 'cognitive schemata' across situations (meaning they are trans-situational), which predisposes them to perceive and act in line with existing identities in different moments.
2. Identities can be self-reinforcing given the reciprocal impact of behavior on the person's self-concept.
3. Identities are motivational, moving people to actions that express their meanings in behavioral form.
4. Because of the implications mentioned above, identities can influence action independently of relationships supporting them and may become functionally independent of those commitments (Stryker, 2000, p. 26f).

The implication of the points mentioned above is that identities can be considered self-cognitions tied to roles and to positions in organized social relations. Thus, there is interconnectedness between a cognitive aspect (reflected in self-cognitions) and a social aspect (reflected in these organized social relations) of identity that is emphasized by "social identity theory".

### **a) The Concept of Multiple Identities**

A basic premise of identity theory is that modern society is interdependent but composed of highly differentiated parts. In keeping with the reciprocity between self and society, it is also postulated that the social person is equally differentiated and complex. Furthermore, identity theory proposes that people have multiple identities, which result from participation in multiple sets of structured role relationships. These multiple identities of a person are organized in a hierarchy of salience, and it is the commitment to these social relationships which affects –and determines– identity salience. Expanding on these assumptions, Mc Call and Simmons theory of ‘role identity’ (1978) has argued that the prominence of a role identity depends on its reward value, which is a function of other’s support of the identity as well as the extrinsic and intrinsic gratifications of performing such identity. Together, ‘identity’ and ‘role identity’ theories suggest a model in which salience of a particular identity depends on all three aspects: affective commitment, interactional commitment and the rewards from enacting a role identity (Kielcolt and LoMascolo, 2003, p. 32).

### **b) How does identity account for the variation regarding participation in social movements?**

Stryker (2000) has expanded ‘social identity’ theory to account for variation in social movement participation. The question of why some individuals join organized movements, whereas others with the same ideology and interest do not, has remained a crucial one for those who study social movement affiliation. The following points attempt to summarize insights gained from the work of Stryker (2000) concerning the study of movement participation from the ‘social identity theory’ perspective:

1. In general terms, the recruitment of new members into a political or social movement is facilitated if some of the members of this movement are also part of the recruited person’s own social networks (family, colleagues, friends); but these conditions do not necessarily apply to all individuals. Thus, in some other cases, the fact that members of a pre-existing network are also members of a particular social movement can hinder potential recruitment and participation.
2. Individuals tend to become committed to a social movement when their relations to others depend on particular roles and identities that are connected to their participation in this social movement.

3. Individuals tend to have multiple commitments; that is, they base their different identities in affiliations to different groups (family, employment, religion affiliations can be considered here). Some of these commitments may be related to a particular movement and some of these may not. The more movement and non-movement relations overlap, the more they will reinforce each other. On the other side, if they are independent, they will compete for loyalty, that is, the person will have to choose one behavior commitment over the other.
4. Commitments are dynamic, based on life developments; thus, one important source of commitment dynamics refers to life course changes (marriage, divorce, loss of significant others) which can interrupt current relationships or create new ones. Thus, if social commitments change, movement or group affiliations may be affected by these changes.
5. If an individual is part of a social network that shares expectations, norms, values and goals that are similar to those of a movement or group, this reinforces the individual's likelihood to get involved in this movement.
6. If an individual is committed to two different identities, and these share meanings, the behavior that reflects one identity will also reflect the other. This dynamic is presumed when political movements are nurtured by family and friendship groups -that underlie a certain movement- because in such cases, identities as a family member and as an activist share meanings. The opposite is also true, meaning, if the individual belongs to a social network that does not share the movement expectations, the recruitment tends to be damped.
7. Thus, it can be said that identities compete for behavioral expression, and if different identities have different meanings, they will impede the behavioral expression of one or the other. Furthermore, the selection of one choice behavior over another, assures its salience.
8. Stryker has argued that differences among persons rooted in social structure, social location and social interaction create identities that are potential competitors in producing behavioral choices (Stryker, 2000, p. 21; 33). These differences among individuals create identities that compete for choice behavior. Thus, a particular identity can exert influence over action choice depending on whether other relationships support it or not. In the end, this is how certain identities become autonomous of situations that give rise to them (Stryker, 2000, p. 36).

Because this research project is focused on the lives and identity transition of women who have joined revolutionary and feminist movements in Central America, the insights gained from the 'social identity' theory concerning the connection between social identity and political movement's recruitment is relevant here. Particularly important for this project is to take into account how the recruitment of new members into a political

movement is facilitated if some members of this movement are also part of the recruited person's own social networks (family, colleagues, friends), which –as it is widely known- was the case for most revolutionary women in Central America, whose families had already a history of dissidence, and whose social networks (such as the progressive Catholic Church; unions and revolutionary student organizations) were also intertwined with family networks. In those cases, as Stryker argued, the more movement and non-movement relations overlapped, the more they reinforced each other. Another significant contribution from this theory concerns how movement or group affiliations may change if social commitments (such as marriage, loss of significant others or divorce) change. As social commitments are dynamic –particularly in times of conflict- this insight highlights how particular experiences - such as marriage, motherhood, loss of loved ones- may have influenced Central American women's revolutionary involvements during the war and post war periods.

#### **Post-Modern Psychology: New directions in the study of identity**

As it can be inferred from the previous accounts concerning the development of psychological understandings of identity, both the 'Ericksonian' tradition and the Socio-Psychological 'identity' theories are grounded in psychological meta-theories based on paradigms that date back to the 1950s. Because psychology was concerned with establishing itself as a science; even Erickson's theory driven model was questioned for not fully meeting quantitative expectations concerning research, in spite of his reputation as an outstanding clinician, which preceded his contribution as a theoretician and researcher in identity development. Before writing on his concept of 'identity diffusion', he spent over a decade observing Native American children and working at a prominent psychiatric facility in the United States (Jackson, 2010, p. 206; 364). Stryker, on the other side, has both reported and conducted significant empirical research in identity salience and centrality (Stryker and Serpe, 1994) and cognitive salient identity (Stryker & Burke, 2000) just to name a few (Stoner, 2007, p.7f).

By modeling itself on the natural sciences, arguably, psychology has ignored its own cultural and historical specificity. The discontent with the rigidities of the psychological 'status quo' found voices in the 'postmodernist' movement (Jones, 2007, p. 3). Over the last three decades, postmodernism, considered a shift in sensibility and practice, has permeated the making and understandings of the sciences. The key features of this shift are: the acceptance of ephemerality, fragmentation and discontinuity; an intense distrust of all global or 'totalizing' discourses, a rejection of meta-narratives; of large scale theoretical

interpretations of universal application. Writers like Michel Foucault and Jean-Francois Lyotard attacked the notion of a meta-language or meta-theory through which things could be connected and represented. As a result, philosophical projects seeking universal emancipation became suspicious, and history could no longer be conceived as a real representation, but as a 'pastiche' (Sarup, 1996, p. 94f).

Postmodern psychology can be considered as an aggregate of frameworks – discursive, critical, narrative, rhetorical, socio-cultural, dialogical – each with its own set of concerns that overlap or contradict others. During the 1990s, social constructionism emerged as the most distinctive philosophical standpoint within these 'psychologies' and among its major representatives were Kenneth Gergen and Rom Harré. The rhetoric of the postmodern paradigm in psychology condemned the old claim that the essence of human nature is pre-given, fixed and determined irrespective of history and culture. The postmodern break from traditional psychology has been characterized by the decentering of the self, the move from the inside of the psyche to the text of the world'. In this sense, postmodern psychology replaced the assumption of a psyche with views of subjectivity as an emergent property of discourse (Jones, 2007, p. 3-10).

Among the most important works of scholarship that have tackled the issue of postmodernism and psychology is Kenneth Gergen's "Psychological science in a postmodern context" (2001), who draws on his explorations in areas such as social constructionism, cultural psychology and the psychology of the self. Other works worth mentioning are Sarbin's "narrative psychology" (1986); Kvale's "Psychology and Postmodernism"(1992) and Fee's "Pathology and the Postmodern"(2000). Gergen's postmodern psychology is sensitive to the interdependence between the pitfalls of language and the social construction of knowledge. From these lenses, objective, individualistic knowledge is challenged. The postmodern context of the psychological science contests totalizing and absolutist narratives that nurture dogmatism, scientism and ideological marginalization (Tiangco. 2008, p. 128f).

Gergen (2001, p. 10) has argued that postmodern empiricism is to replace the "truth game" with a search for culturally useful theories and findings with significant cultural meaning. For him, an effective empiricism requires a posture of culturally, ethically and politically informed pragmatism. In other of his writings on the making of postmodern psychology, Gergen (1997) argued for the emergence of a 'cultural constructivist psychology' where the universal is replaced with the indigenous. In this proposed psychology, contemporary dialogues on social construction meld together ideas from social sciences,

literary and rhetorical theory, postmodern theory and ideological critique. Though Gergen does not subscribe to a set of 'constructionist practices', he has proposed a series of generative suppositions that inform emerging practices in the field:

1. There are no transcendentally privileged accounts of what we take to exist, thus, the privilege of any person or group to claim superior knowledge of what there is, is removed.
2. Whatever account we give of world or self finds its origins within relationships. Language gains its capacity for meaning from relationships. Each discourse grows from a community of language users.
3. Language primarily functions as social action, constitutive of one or more traditions: utterances are forms of action that gain meaning through human coordination
4. Through communicative relations we can generate new orders of meaning from which new forms of action can emerge (Gergen, 1997, p. 2f).

Gergen also addressed the question of methodological innovation in psychology informed by constructionism. Among the new range of methodological sources, he argues that three perspectives illustrate the possibilities: first, 'narrative methodology' that enables research subjects to speak for themselves; second, 'multivoiced research', where the idea is to generate multiplicity as opposed to singularity; and third, 'collaborative research', that attempts to replace the traditional autonomy of the researcher by engaging in more collaborative forms of inquiry with either those or that what is researched about, such as 'participant action research' (Gergen, 1997, p. 7-9).

Within psychology, a growing number of scholars have taken the postmodern critique seriously have worked to advance positions in the field that are responsive to the challenges of postmodernism. These scholars can be grouped together as advocates of narrative psychology. The appearance of the interest in narrative across the human disciplines occurred within the context of postmodernism, and it was those postmodern theorists who proposed that understandings are 'constructions' of the mental realm and subjects to the distortions of historically varied conceptual schemes. In this context, narrative psychologists positioned themselves within a constructivist understanding, holding that narrative is the primary structuring scheme through which people organize and make meaning of their interactions (Polkinghorne, 2005, p. 4f). In this postmodern and constructionist context, ideas concerning the 'narrative construction of identity' in psychology gained voice and drew from the works of Paul Ricoeur and evolved into a

field where 'narrative psychologists' (see the works of Sarbin, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1991; McAdams, 1993; Josselson and Lieblich, 1993; Crossley, 2000) proposed that identity is constructed from a sense of 'self' which emerges from the question 'who am I?'. This conceptualization of identity is not dependent on anything permanent for its existence and is continuously adjusted by narrative configurations in the telling of one's life stories and reading and listening to one's narrative (Goodson and Gill, 2011, pp. 7-10).

The relevance of post-modern conceptualization of identity for this research project lies on the fact that this study takes a narrative stand and regards narrative as the primary structuring scheme through which people organize and construct a 'narrative identity'. This identity is constructed through answers that individuals give to questions concerning the 'I'. As post-modern psychologists have argued, these answers can be continuously adjusted in –and by– narrative configurations in the telling, listening and re-telling of one's story. In addition, insights advanced by Gergen (1997) have informed the methodology selected for life story exploration in this study, where participants have been asked to speak for themselves (not through inventories, questionnaires or interview guides) and were invited to 'collaborate' with the researcher in the co-construction of the story.

The following section discusses in detail how identity is framed and studied from the narrative psychology paradigm, which is the concept of identity adopted for the purposes of this research, given the fact that this project is concerned with the 'narrative identities' of revolutionary Central American feminists.

#### **2.4.2- The concept of Self and Identity in Narrative Psychology**

New approaches define narrative and narrativity as concepts of social epistemology and social ontology. These concepts posit that it is through narrating that we come to know, understand and make sense of the social world, of our social identity, and our place in it. As it is characteristic of narratives and stories, variables such as time, place and power in social interactions are placed in historical context (Somers, 1994, p. 606).

Psychological perspectives influenced by concepts of narratology and socio linguistics have evolved into a framework known as "Narrative Psychology". From this perspective, narratives construct the world –as we perceive it– and create a sense of

continuity in individual's lives. In our temporal world –it has been argued- we need to create narratives to bring order and meaning to the constant changing flux of our experiences, in order to give meaning and self-define our actions and ultimately, who we are (Ricoeur, 1984; Murray in Smith, 2003).

The making of a postmodern psychology has been influenced by 'constructionism', which needs to be distinguished from 'constructivism' as a conceptual stance. Whereas 'constructivism' refers to epistemological considerations focusing on the meaning making activity of the individual mind, pointing out to how the unique experience of each one of us should be regarded as valid as any other; 'constructionism' refers to the collective generation and transmission of meaning, emphasizing the hold culture has on the way individuals see or feel things (Crotty, 1998).

A further distinction was added by Kenneth and Mary Gergen (1985) who, instead of focusing on the matter of individual minds and collective processes, turned the attention outward to the world of 'intersubjectively-shared', social constructions of meaning and knowledge, labeling this approach 'social constructionism' since it reflects the notion that the world that people create in the process of social exchange is a sui generis reality, where there is a collective generation of meaning as shaped by conventions of language and other social processes (Crotty, 1998, p. 58). Narrative psychology has been incorporated within the broader movement known as "constructionism" and also referred to as 'social constructionism', which argues for a performative theory of identity, in which life stories do not simply reflect actual events, but actively shape who an individual is. Thus the particular conventions that govern the telling of self-narratives are critically important in the kinds of choices one makes in life. It could be argued that in the case of Central American feminist women whose lives have been abruptly changed by war, narratives have allowed for the creation of meaning, flow and continuity in the understanding of their experiences; not only for themselves, but for interested audiences.

### **The Concept of Identity from a Narrative Perspective**

From the previous arguments, it is clear that self-narratives shape ideas of those who tell them about themselves. But how can a "narrative" be defined? one helpful definition has been offered by Hinchman and Hinchman (1997, p. xvi) who argue: "narratives are discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way for a

definite audience". This definition encapsulates three central features of narratives: 1. They stress the temporal nature of social life; 2. Their evaluative or subjective dimension and ubiquity within everyday social interaction; and, 3. The fact that stories are produced and consumed (Elliott, 2005, p. 36f).

Recent work on the nature of the self which destabilizes the concept of the individual as having a fixed, immutable identity, has led to interest in the idea that people might be thought of having a "narrative identity" (Elliott, 2005, p.1). This construct is based on the assumption that a narrative not only brings order and meaning to our everyday life but, reflexively it also provides structure to our very sense of selfhood. We tell stories about our lives to ourselves and others about who we are and what we do in the world from our position in it. As such, we create a narrative identity. We can then hold a variety of narrative identities, each of which is connected to different social relationships, a point that has been also argued by social-psychologists and post-modern psychology paradigms concerning identity. Thus, each of those identities then connects us to a set of social relationships and provides us with a sense of localized coherence and stability. At times of instability, we can make connections to other aspects of our narrative identities. From this view, it is through narrative that we define ourselves, clarify the continuity in our lives and convey this to others. We are active agents who recall the actions we have achieved and those who have been suppressed by others. In constructing a personal narrative, we select certain aspects of our lives and connect them with others, which enables us to assert that our lives are not a disconnected sequence of events but have a *certain order* (Murray, 2003, p. 116).

For Hollway and Jefferson (2000, Murray in Smith, 2003, p.116) the process of narrative identity formation is dynamic and occurs in a changing social and personal context. The values attached to different experiences in particular contexts influence the character of events recalled and shapes the story told while we can tell our life story, the actual pattern our life takes and the structure of the story are shaped by a multiplicity of social and psychological forces of which we can be aware or unaware of. A claim that is taken up by this study is that in many occasions, individuals do not recognize when they are engaged in identity formation or the processes through which their identity story is formed (Polkinghorne, 1996, p. 365).

### **The Construction of a Gendered Identity**

For post-structuralists such as Foucault and Derrida, the notion of a unified self has been mistaken, as they understand it as multiple and under construction rather than a fixed set of characteristics and traits; therefore, subjectivity that cannot be “labeled” or “defined”. More concretely, Judith Butler, has questioned totalizing views of gender and what it means to be “woman” and in reference to Simone de Beauvoir’s notion that “one is not born, but rather becomes a woman” she suggests that “woman itself is a term in process, a becoming, a construction which cannot rightfully be said to originate or to end. As an ongoing discursive practice, it is now open to intervention and resignification” (Butler, 1990).

If traditional ideas about women’s identity in general have been totalizing and fixed, much more so, ideas about identities of women of color, which have been traditionally represented as powerless, victims of their circumstance and socially neglected. Lynn Stephen (1997, p.6) attempted to re-conceptualize the identities and activism of women who became involved in collective action in Latin America. In her view, “people of color’s multiple identities were often overlooked until they became fashionable when cited by the elite of the academy”. Furthermore, she has questioned how these identities are portrayed as a function of cultural ideologies embedded in dichotomies (public/private sphere; formal/informal economies; practical/strategic gender interests for the women movement) limiting understandings of women’s actions in specific historical and geographic locations, making it more difficult to attempt generalization and aggregation of experiences with the objective of talking of a single and shared ‘group identity’ (Stephen, 1997, p. 16) which arguably, would be the aim of a modern and positivistic sociology or social psychology.

In sum, different theoretical paradigms emphasize specific notions of what can be defined as identity; but whether these come from modern social psychology or post modern and narratively oriented approaches, the view that identities change over time and that they are socially constructed is widely accepted. From the concepts discussed above, this research will mainly draw upon the idea that identity is a social construction, relational and performed in interaction with others. Furthermore, that it is through discourse that individuals construct and emphasize ideas about themselves and others and that these are determined by context. Because context is so fundamental in understanding how individuals become who they are, this project will attempt to explore how they explain to themselves

and others “who they are” through the meanings that individuals themselves give to their actions and experiences in their life story narratives.

### **2.4.3- Narratives and Testimonials of women’s lives**

Testimonial literature has its place in the expression of marginal experiences in Latin America; and as it has been explained before (see footnote 3 in section 1.1), testimonials of the experiences of former political activists, revolutionaries and combatants of this region have been widely published, shared and disseminated among students of social movements and interested readership; but since this research project is concerned with ‘life story narratives’ of revolutionaries, it is important to understand whether testimonials serve a similar or different function from life story narratives. The following section presents a series of theoretical distinctions with the objective of disentangling this issue.

A starting point is to understand what is considered a testimonial. A well accepted definition of ‘testimonio’ is based on the rules of the landmark ‘Casa de las Americas’, literature prize<sup>40</sup>: ‘testimonios’ must document some aspect of Latin American or Caribbean reality from a direct source. A direct source is understood [to have] knowledge of the facts that comes from the author or his or her compilation of narratives or evidence obtained from the individuals involved or qualified witnesses. In both cases, reliable documentation, written or graphic is indispensable. The form is at the author’s discretion, but literary quality is also indispensable” (translation by Beverley, 2004, p. 103). In this definition, ‘testimonio’ emerges as a well-established genre where ‘personal narratives’ appear to function as a ‘source of ‘evidence’.

Coming from a different perspective, Rodriguez-Mangual (2004, p. 66f) talks about the ‘testimonial narrative’ as a genre that occupies a legitimate space in the power struggle by refuting dominant ideology and opening up a marginal space, but still facing a problem of representational authenticity. Beverley (2004, p. 22) deals with this problem by arguing that the important thing about ‘testimonial narrative’ is that it produces, “if not real, at least a sense of experience of the real, which creates certain effects on the reader, that are different from those of documentary and realist fiction”.

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<sup>40</sup> The “Casa de las Americas” award is a landmark recognition of excellence in Latin American literature. The award is an institution for Latin American writers, and typically the jury is composed of well renowned writers. It has been granted in Habana, Cuba since 1959. For more information, see: <http://www.casadelasamericas.com/premios/literario/>.

As it can be seen, Beverley's particular understanding of the 'testimonial narrative' does not treat narratives as evidence, or as facts (like the 'Casa de las Americas' definition) but rather as the construction of an understanding of a 'certain kind of reality' which is grounded on the experience of the individual that writes about it. Though both views take into account the 'witnessing' quality of testimonials, what makes a testimonial reliable or not is a core difference between these two perspectives. The "Casa De Las Americas" definition relies on the 'objective knowledge of the facts' as a source of authenticity, whereas Beverley's perspective resigns the idea that authenticity is the fundamental criteria of a testimonial, but rather its contribution lies on the world of meanings that it creates for an interested audience. Ultimately, the latter is a constructivist approach, which comes closer to the post-modern narrative perspectives that inform this research project.

A constructivist perspective is also shared by many social scientists, who regardless of a representational problem, and going beyond looking at testimonials as facts, have argued for their contribution in the making of social sciences:

"Testimonials illuminate the often stark picture painted by political economics, and gave such abstract processes and categories as 'relations of production', 'migration', and even 'gender hierarchy' concrete meaning – not only for those who experienced structures of inequality but for me and my readers... since conceptual categories are created in specific cultural and historical contexts, each time they are used must be given meaning in relation to a specific cultural and historical location. The use of narratives, life stories, testimonials and conversations helps to give meaning to the categories used in social science" (Stephen, 1997, p. 6).

Through the embodiment of social categories in the experiences of 'marginal' individuals, authors like Randall assume that we can know "the nation and the struggle as they [the women] have experienced them" (Randall, 1977). In her study of the life of Sandinista Comandante Doris Tijerino [*Inside the Nicaraguan Revolution*, Margaret Randall, 1977], Byron (2006) argues that Tijerino's life appears to be intertwined with the history of Nicaragua. The Sandinista struggle is represented –as Randall puts it- through the life story of a woman, a woman whose life has been shaped through the struggle. Because this woman is Nicaraguan, then, Nicaragua can be known and understood. Randall assumes that through the study of exceptional individuals the nation and the struggle can be known. In this sense, dialectically speaking, Tijerino is equated with the revolution itself (Byron, 2006, p. 106).

Concerning this first function of the testimonial in regards to the objective of this narrative study, it is important to mention that one of the objectives of this research project is to unveil 'inter-subjective meanings' of Central American radical feminists. These 'meanings' do not solely reside in the individual, but are rather shared by a whole of a community (Taylor, 1987). From this perspective, this narrative project shares the testimonial's view that socially constructed meanings that have shaped political struggles can be known through the stories of individuals who participated in them.

A second function of the testimonial genre is highlighted by Marin (1991), when she argues how testimonials and life stories collected through oral history practices are a 'kind of writing from the margins', where the testimonial serves as the means of the underprivileged to tell about themselves and their struggle against the powers that claim power over them. By contrasting the practice of those of the 'privileged class' who would engage in writing scripture, literature, autobiography or ethnography, Marin emphasizes an essential quality of the testimonials of revolutionary women in particular, in what she calls the 'eschewal of the first person singular subject' where women present a view of their selves 'as the other' and not 'separated from the other'. This position is supported by Casey (1996, p. 221) when she quotes Sommer (1988, p. 107) to emphasize the particular way in which the self is presented in this genre: "*testimonios* do not introduce the conventional first person singular subject of autobiography" but rather the so called 'plural subject' where the self is understood as a social construction that can be transformed –and usually is- by a collective project. In this process of articulating a common political discourse, individual isolation is overcome and identity is created in community. This particular view of the 'self in relation to others' was also emphasized by authors like Gramsci (1980) -who talked about a 'collective subjective'- and Stanley Fish's (1980) 'interpretive community' (Casey, 1996). Marin (1991, p.53) argues that Latin American women's testimonials foreground the struggle between the first person "I" –usually conceived as the male hero- and the diffuse, polyphonic, amorphous 'we' –traditionally conceived as the other- the force against which the "I" emerges and unveils the kind of politics these women are engaged in, claiming a space for the collective identity to exist in its own right.

This second function of the testimonial is consistent with the view of this research project that narrative research can be multifaceted and multivoiced; not just from the fact that the researcher and interviewee engage in collaborative construction of the story, but also because the interviewee is able to bring in multiple voices into her narration.

Furthermore, one of the methods used for narrative analysis in this study includes the identification of a “collective subjective” (see section 3.4.2.e in Chapter Three).

A third function of the testimonials may refer to how they allow their narrators to reconstruct and ‘perform’ their life stories by emphasizing their agency and creative capacities, and thus, rescuing them from the forces of trauma, when indeed, there are traumatic experiences that are part of the life story. As explained by Kumaraswami and Thorton (2007, p. 15) “out of these traumas came creativity, born of a need to narrate what happened, whether witnessed or experienced first hand or to create a record of many ruptures in the personal, social or national conflict produced”.

This third function of the testimonial is consistent with the view supported by narrative psychologists (McAdams, Murray, 2002) and incorporated into this study, concerning how individuals, in telling their stories, select and arrange events in a way that a valued endpoint is established as a way of bringing ‘order’ to ‘chaos’ which creates ‘meaning’ for disruptive experiences, such as trauma. Still, authors like Vasquez, Ibanez and Murguialday (1996, p. 96), who conducted research with former Salvadoran combatant women, warn us about the dangers of images that may uncover the complexities and inner contradictions of the movements in which Central American revolutionary women operated:

“The war is a ‘limit situation’ that creates a special sensitivity which reframes the meaning of life and its values; solidarity, uninterested and unconditional support are attitudes that emerge from human beings in particularly difficult moments; and testimonials emphasize these experiences, highlighting the capacity for self-sacrifice and renunciation. But in the name of those qualities, [the narrators] let go of other behaviors that may cause rejection, as if naming them were a symbol of betrayal of those [revolutionary] ideals or lack of consciousness. As a consequence, the ‘invincible spirit’ is over dimensioned, and discriminatory behaviors are forgiven.”<sup>41</sup>

Ultimately, it can be argued that testimonials have a place in the understanding of micro and macro social forces, and shed light not only into the experiences of individuals who participated in revolutionary action, but also, on the revolutions themselves. For most social scientists that have looked at radical women experiences in Central America, using testimonials and/or narratives as sources of information has been an obvious path for

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<sup>41</sup> Translation by Price, October 15, 2010.

understanding the meaning behind the actions and the identities of those involved, as these comments from Luciak and Golden attest to:

Luciak (2001:xxii) "It is impossible to fully understand the reality of the Salvadoran peace process without listening to the voices of the individuals who participated in the process..."

Golden (1991:193) "The testimonies of women in this book attest to that question of existence: how shall we live? If the war determines that many will die, the lives of Salvadoran women insist on deciding, until their last breath, how to live"

Finally, concerning the issue introduced at the beginning of this sub-section, namely whether narratives and testimonials serve similar or different functions, it can be argued that, both have the potential to serve those functions outlined above, but whether this is done or not, would also depend on the treatment of the testimonial given by the author, as well as the objectives established by a narrative researcher.

In the following section, an overview of the field of the study of women's lives from a 'narrative' and 'feminist' perspective is presented.

### **Narrative Research concerned with Women's Lives and Identities**

Traditionally, feminist scholars have focused on the experience of womanhood and the social construction of gender. But In recent years, the study of women lives has received considerable attention from narrative researchers who attempt to capture how women construct and deal with continuities and discontinuities in their life stories. Thus, the following section is concerned with looking at how scholarship in the study of women's lives has been informed by both feminist and narrative epistemologies in the pursuit of deeper understandings of gender identity construction.

Social scientists that attempt to understand women's experiences 'in flux' have been naturally interested in how women construct their life stories for the particular audiences that they want to address, be it the researcher, a small community or their overall societies. As Kenneth Gergen (2009, p. 66, 67) reminds us, much narrative research features first-hand accounts of people's lives. These works, which are highly varied, cut across disciplines and have been used by investigators who wish to avoid "manipulative and alienating tendencies of experimental research". Some classic feminist works such as Gilligan's „In a different

voice“ (1982) and Belenky et al’s „Women’s ways of knowing“ (1986) have demonstrated the effective use of first-hand accounts by using life stories that emerged from in-depth interviews to illuminate ways in which women approach issues in moral decision making and generating knowledge. Other investigators have centered on autobiography, hoping that people’s life stories can illuminate the economic and political forces affecting a particular society; and other researchers have used family stories, oral histories, journals, and letters to give insights into earlier historical times (Gergen, 2009).

Some narrative researchers consider that this way of doing research provides a more empathic orientation, by attempting to give voice to those unheard and marginalized in society, with the objective of generating understanding through sharing first-hand experience. People are encouraged to „tell their story“ in their own terms (see for example, Josselson, 1995; Rosenblatt Karis & Powell, 1995). The attempt here is to increase the public understanding of these lives and an appreciation for the challenges others have confronted. As it has been acknowledged in the case of the ‘testimonios’ (see section 2.3.3), the hope is to close the distance between social groups and to stimulate social or political action (Gergen, 2009, p. 66, 67).

Mary Gergen (2001, p. 11) has looked at the epistemologies that have evolved in the context of feminist psychology scholarship on women’s lives, paying attention to the paradigms that inform how scientists make sense of women’s lives and their accounts. She bases her analysis on the typology developed by feminist philosopher Sandra Harding, who in 1986 published “The Science Question in Feminism” in which she distinguished three feminist epistemologies: “feminist empiricism”, “feminist standpoint” and “feminist postmodernism”. These three positions are widely recognized within the humanities and social sciences.

It could be argued that looking at women’s lives and making ‘scientific’ inferences of their accounts is not a value-free exercise, which is also truth for any other kind of research. The epistemological position of the researcher sets the stage for multiple interpretations of those stories. A narrative scientist has to make explicit her assumptions as they will inform the selections of texts, how the analysis will proceed, and as some argue, even the most seemingly ‘pragmatic’ parts of the research process. This view is shared by the researcher of this study; who in later sections of this dissertation (See Chapters Three and Five) discusses her personal assumptions and interpretations in more detail.

#### 2.4.4- Turning points in life narratives

This study is concerned with life stories, and as it happens, life narratives and stories are filled with turning points and transitions, be it of small or large scale. Though transitions are part of an individual's life course, and most role transitions are anticipated (i.e. rites of passage), nevertheless, there are some transition processes that are not planned nor expected, which are usually triggered by a turning point, a juncture in time when an individual's life course is altered –by a circumstance or an event- and radically transformed. This research project is concerned with the latter kind.

Hareven and Masaoka (1988) define turning points as “perceptual road marks along the life course, representing the individual's continuities and discontinuities in their lives” and Clausen (1998) developed a classification of turning points, where he identifies aspects that define their impact on people's lives: 1. A turning point may occur when roles, relationships, activities are affected; 2. Whether these changes are perceived as expected transitions, conversions or as unexpected events or crisis. 3. The age and life phase of the individual when they occurred, and, 4. The ultimate consequences of the turning point in the person's life, whether they are perceived as positive or negative.

As it was said above, when narrating their stories, individuals select and arrange events in such a way that a goal state or a valued endpoint is established as a way of bringing ‘order’ to ‘chaos’ and create ‘meaning’ for the disruptive experience. When looking at transitions and turning points, Mc Adams and Bowman (2001) have introduced the notions of *redemption* and *contamination* as patterns that can potentially appear in life accounts. A ‘redemption sequence’ is a movement in story telling from an emotionally negative scene to an emotionally positive or good outcome. A ‘contamination sequence’, on the other side, refers to the reverse movement, from good to bad. In a contamination sequence, an emotionally positive experience is spoiled, ruined, sullied or contaminated by an emotionally negative or bad outcome. From this plot-development perspective, a life turning point can be simply defined as “a scene in which the participant experienced a significant life change” (Mc Adams & Bowman, 2001, p. 5). In this sense, redemption and contamination sequences can be viewed as narrative strategies used to make sense of perceived transitions in life. This ‘sense-making’ contributes to the construction of identity in adolescence and adulthood, as people attempt to integrate disparate elements of their lives into life stories (McAdams, 1985, 1993).

There is a complex relationship between what 'really happens' in a person's life and how the person chooses to remember and understand it. In depicting redemption and contamination sequences, the emphasis is on how the person chooses to construct his or her reality. Mc Adams and Bowman argue that this line of reasoning shows how real events from the past come to shape a person's adaptation to the present, but also that their psychosocial adjustment may be associated with the use of particular narrative strategies for making sense of the past (McAdams and Bowman, 2001, p. 28).

Another theoretical perspective when making sense of 'turning points' and 'life transitions' is looking at the 'agency' that individuals display during these particular processes. According to Holland and Thomson (2009, p. 453-455) epiphanies, turning points and critical biographical moments are a relevant analytic category of life history research. Particularly, Anthony Giddens (1991, p. 113) has suggested the concept of the 'fateful moment', a moment in which the individual reflects and makes choices that will have serious consequences for her/his future life trajectory. The key element in Giddens' theoretical construct of the 'fateful moment' is that it is recognized and acted upon and requires that the individual considers the consequences of choices and action, and assesses the risk of those choices. In Giddens' terms, fateful moments are times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands at a crossroads in their existence or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences. But it is taking control in the fateful moment and exercising agency that is crucial in the definition. The individual can respond by undertaking identity work, reviewing who he/she thinks is, drawing on experts and others for advice, undertaking research and developing new skills, recognizing the need for these responses given the consequentiality of the event. The focus is on the individual as a rational choice-making agent engaged in a 'reflexive project of self' (Giddens 1991: 244) where the individual is an agent constructing their self-identity through the choices she/he makes, based on reflecting on her/his life and choices. Though youth transitions to adulthood in general seem to be subject to constraints of class, gender and ethnicity, within Giddens framework, there is space for individual agency. In this sense, proactivity, independence and autonomy can be facilitated or restricted by social, cultural and institutional factors (Holland and Thompson, 2009, p. 461). I would argue that Giddens' 'fateful moment' is a type of 'turning point' where the individual has a level of awareness and the need to take control of a critical moment in her/his life; whereas in the conceptualization of 'turning point' developed by Hareven and Masaoka, the individual may or may not be conscious of the

relevance of this juncture in her/his life, and may or may not be able to develop a sense of agency about it.

In the end, turning points are moments during the life course at which the strains of personal change are felt; stages during which the self requires attention – a remapping in relation to others. With reference to autobiographical writing, Sheringham defines turning points as ‘sites of meaning’ which are necessary in accounts of identity or in any attempt to historicize a life: turning points occupy an intermediate zone between past and present, experience and writing (Hallam, 2002, p. 189). As Murray (2008, p. 114) has argued, the use of narrative is particularly pronounced in everyday understandings of disruption (e.g. Becker, 1997) because challenges to our daily routines encourage attempts by us to restore some sense of order, and narratives are primary means of doing so after the disruption (Murray, 2008, p. 114). Gaylene Becker (1997) has argued that Western ideas about the life course emphasize linearity, as we try to make sense of inconsistencies and when we try to explain our disruptions to another, we seem particularly keen to emphasize our reasonableness. Narratives help us do precisely this ‘congruency’ work after disruptions.

This research project bases its understanding of a ‘turning point’ in the Hareven and Masaoka’s (1998) definition presented at the beginning of this section, which emphasizes the idea that these instances of transition are perceptual marks that represent major transitions along the life course of individuals. From this perspective, looking at how turning points influence the construction of both life direction and identity is a fundamental interest of this research project; thus, one of the research questions that guides this study is concerned with identifying those key turning points that may influence the narrative identities of women who self defined earlier as radical guerrilla combatants and later as feminists.

The following section is concerned with how traumatic experiences –which are by definition disruptive- are dealt with in narrative terms.

#### **2.4.5-Trauma in life narratives of former combatants**

Addressing the impact of traumatic events in the lives of former female war combatants is beyond the scope of this study; nevertheless, as most of the women interviewed for this research project –if not all- underwent traumatic experiences during their participation in revolutionary wars, this section will attempt to shed light into how traumatic experiences may shape women’s narrative identities or the stories that they tell about themselves and their life experiences.

Though there are multiple conceptualizations of psychological trauma, Judith Herman's definition remains valid and widely used in psychological circles: "Psychological trauma is an affliction of the powerless. At the moment of trauma the victim is rendered helpless by overwhelming force. When the force is that of nature, we speak of disasters. When the force is that of other human beings, we speak of atrocities. Traumatic events overwhelm the ordinary systems of care that give people a sense of control, connection, and meaning" (Herman, 1992, p. 33). It is particularly in conditions of warfare that human beings face conditions that can result in extreme suffering, violence and death. In the case of the Central American revolutionary periods, massacre, prosecution and exile were experienced by entire communities that were unable to remain connected and functional, or even able to cope with what was happening. Among the revolutionaries, many women particularly suffered discrimination, sexual violence or multiple family losses. As Fontana et al. (1997, p. 169) have argued, historically, women in the military have been treated unequally in regards to men, with the consequence of having to face discrimination, harassment and sexual assault, which are not infrequent in military systems. Sexual traumatization in the military seems to be more common of what was previously supposed and seems to be of major importance to the etiology of posttraumatic stress disorder. For some women, having been sexually harassed or assaulted during their military experience may heighten their sensitivity to the stigmatization generated by societal stereotyping concerning combatant women (Fontana et al., 1997, p. 174). The previously stated arguments cast a light on the experiences underwent by some of the women interviewed for this study, who were on many occasions treated unequally, harassed or discriminated by their male guerrilla counterparts, and on some dramatic occasions sexually assaulted and tortured by members of the opposing forces.

But traumatization processes can go beyond the acts of violence committed during the conflict years, and as studied by Fontana et al. (1997, p. 174f) how women are received by family members after the war can influence significantly how they overcome traumatic experiences or post traumatic stress disorder. He particularly studied how the 'homecoming' experiences of former American military women in Viet Nam shaped the quality of their lives in the years following their return. In particular, supportive 'homecoming' receptions seemed to play a major meditational role between women's exposure to trauma and their development of posttraumatic stress disorder. During the transition from war to peace, it seems that experiencing psychological isolation at the time of homecoming is the strongest single predictor of current posttraumatic stress disorder. Particularly, when the homecoming

reception was unsupportive, women were deprived of this counterbalancing force –against their trauma experiences- and thus left with only their individual psychological resources to cope with their traumatic experiences. In this sense, how homecoming goes seems to be a critical event in determining whether acute stress reactions either diminish to subclinical intensity or remain altering life functioning and later recognized as posttraumatic stress disorder. In the case of Guatemalan and Salvadoran combatant women, ‘homecoming’ experiences were either prevented or produced mixed outcomes because of the women’s levels of distrust and their fears of openly revealing their previous clandestine identities. In some occasions, ‘homecomings’ were conflictive as they meant for mothers to come together with their offspring after years of separation, situations that were not free of conflict and sorrow on both sides.<sup>42</sup>

In addition to homecoming, social sanction seems to be a crucial variable in overcoming traumatic experiences. As it has been noted, if the country does not sanction the war effort, veterans are deprived of a shared, consensual basis for affirming the meaningfulness, worth and legitimacy of their behavior during the war. The social acceptance of the conflict prohibits the ‘sealing over’ of the traumatic experiences, whereby their immediate distressing potential is diffused and veterans are left alone to reconcile their behavior in extraordinary circumstances with standards that are applicable in ordinary circumstances. This type of homecoming burdens veterans with ‘sanctuarial traumatic stress’ (Smith in Fontana et al, 1997, p. 174).

The concept of ‘sanctuarial traumatic stress’ is particularly relevant when looking at the wars in Guatemala and El Salvador, where the revolutionary forces did not achieve victory and remained as clandestine forces for several years, extending significantly the time that those wars lasted, which led many sectors of society (i.e. civilian groups, political parties, business sectors) to express exhaustion and disappointment over the outcomes of those long and devastating wars. On many occasions, former combatants of both sides have questioned their participation on these ‘failed’ revolutions and wondered whether their efforts led to better societies. As their countries continue to struggle with the same problems that brought them to war in the first place, for many is difficult to see intrinsic value in their democratic aspirations of their governments, when social conditions for large sectors of society remain endangered by poverty or urban violence. As Salvadoran and

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<sup>42</sup> The story of “Dilsia” is particularly poignant and pertains to this issue, since she lost her sons during the Salvadoran revolutionary period, only to find them thirteen years after the war was over as adults who, deeply resentful, could not relate to the reasons of their mother’s separation.

Guatemalan post-combatant women operate in these discursive contexts, there is a real possibility that they are burdened with 'sancturial traumatic stress'. In this regard, the case of Nicaraguan women may be different as the 'Sandinista revolution' in 1979 was socially sanctioned as heroic and relevant for the better development of contemporary Nicaraguan society.

In addition to a lack of social recognition and support, Brown (1986, p. 15) has referred to another complicating factor when working through a trauma in what she calls the 'rule of silence', one that can be seen in many similar situations where post traumatic stress disorder becomes the diagnosis: concentration camp survival, incest and battering, for instance, all seem to worsen in their impact when the victims are abjured not to speak about their experiences. It seems that there is a negative synergy of trauma and silence, abuse and secrecy, that would lead women to feel and act 'crazy', when in fact it was the context in which they were forced to operate that was pathological.

The 'rule of silence' may also serve to understand societal behavior. In El Salvador, for example, Vasquez, Ibanez and Murguialday (1996) have argued in their study on former guerrilla women that there was not a proper reinsertion [of combatants] into civil life, and though mainstream public discourse was focused on 'national reconciliation', the idea of reconciliation was based on arguments emphasizing the need to "forget the past"; a 'past' which involved crimes of war such as massacres and a 'present' in which amnesty was granted to many of those who committed those crimes. In addition, the recommendations issued by the United Nations 'Truth Commission' for El Salvador, such as building a monument with the names of those who died during the war; honoring their memory; establishing a day to honor the victims and create a forum for the analysis of the Truth Commission report, have not taken place. As Vasquez, Ibanez and Murguialday argue: "though nobody wants to remember, nobody can't forget either" (1996, p. 98).

### **The impact of trauma on the story told**

For life historians, the nature of the traumatic memory has become a salient issue because of the effects of trauma upon story telling about the self. The life story gives the opportunity to explore the relation between the personal and the collective experience, and as a way of making sense and interpreting the experience of those who suffered. Yet, while life story approaches bring resources to the study of trauma, it also poses difficulties for those approaches. These center upon the effects of trauma upon life story narration. Particularly, survivors who have lived through the pains or disasters may silence their own

fears. It takes a particular form of courage, a painful effort to call to mind those phases in life in which excessive stress, sadness and violence have been experienced. Some experts (Robert Lifton, 1967) have spoken about the phenomenon of 'numbness', a psychic defense mechanism that consists of a long-term reduction of the capacity to speak and feel following trauma. Another metaphor for numbness is 'frozen memory', where a 'frozen' moment may exist that isolates this particular memory from a process of recovery, and this frozen quality complicates verbalization. Furthermore, some psychological researchers suggest that articulating and verbalizing trauma can re-traumatize and awaken terrors and depressions that were long blocked from the mind. These intellectual and emotional consequences of trauma affect deeply the narrative in survivor's life stories that are frequently fragmented and distorted by blocks and gaps in memory. In this sense, personal and social trauma may cause the self to split apart into disconnected fragments. In this sense, life stories of trauma survivors relate what is conscious and can be narrated, while at the same time providing insight into what is unconscious and remains unverballed and unintegrated with the other experience (Leydesdorff, Dawson, Bruchardt and Ashplant, 2009, p. 13f) .

It has been studied how a life story technique with non-interfering focus, such as a narrative interview may enable the person to share her most intimate traumatic experiences which may involve feelings of shame, guilt, pain, which are otherwise not easy to express. Among the researchers that have studied trauma using narrative interviews, one can count Labov (1972) studying stories of black youths; Bar-On (1994) and Dwork (1990) on Holocaust survivors; Lieblich (1994) on captivity experiences and Agger (1994) on women subject to sexual abuse and torture (BenEzer, 2009, p. 30). In the developing field of the study of the rhetoric of trauma, BenEzer (2009) looks at how traumatic experiences are expressed in narratives, by identifying signals that allow for the detection of trauma within narratives that emerge in interviews. He argues that even if an interviewee is recounting a traumatic experience which she has come to terms with, it will still produce particular forms of expression within the narrative. In this sense, 'traumata' are related differently from the rest of the story. He identified thirteen narrative signals of trauma in his study:

1. Self report: the individual reports that certain event was traumatic (carries a traumatic significance); or reporting 'images of horror'.
2. A 'hidden event': an event which is not narrated in the main story that comes later, accompanied by grief, mourning, shame or guilt.
3. Long silence: a long silence before or after the narration of a certain event.

4. Loss of emotional control: sobbing, rage, or other responses uncharacteristic of this persons recounting.
5. Emotional detachment or numbness: events which seemed to have a horrific quality are reported with a lack of emotion during the narration (frozen facial expression and body gestures).
6. Repetitive reporting: distressing experience is re-told with an extraordinary reiteration of its minute details, time and time again, as if the narrator is unable to move on.
7. Losing oneself in the traumatic event: the narrator sinks into the traumatic event, overwhelmed by the event, seems not to be in the present anymore. The person is not there, not experiencing the current situation of the interview.
8. Intrusive images: scenes or images of a traumatic event come up involuntarily as quick flashes which distracts the person from the train of thought and interrupts the flow of narrative.
9. Forceful argumentation of conduct within an event: narrators stress the reasons for their behaviour within a situation instead of narrating the event itself.
10. Cognitive-emotional disorientation: a disappearance of the boundaries between the event that is being recounted and the situation of the interview. For example, relating to the interviewer as a figure within the story.
11. Inability to tell a story at all: narrator is unable to speak, getting stuck at the starting point of the narration.
12. Changes in voice: the tone, its pitch, coloring will change while narrating a traumatic event.
13. Changes in body language: facial expressions and body posture during the recounting of a traumatic event, trying to cover themselves or clutch their legs strongly (Ben Ezer, 2009, p. 34-36).

On a final note concerning this section, it is important to emphasize that even though this research project is not concerned with the study of trauma in former combatant women, and it will not be looking at the emergence of the previously listed

markers of trauma in the narratives of the women interviewed (with the exception of marker 3-silence that is explored in deconstructive analysis); it regards trauma and discontinuity as significant influences in the narratives of individuals who have experienced warfare, and their impact cannot be ignored and should at least be noted as a significant variable that influences the 'telling' of a life story.

### **Resilience and Meaning Creation after Traumatic Experiences**

Recovering from trauma and suffering is regaining a sense of one's human embodied self and its connectedness with the world. The recovery process involves making sense of suffering and reintegrating it into an ongoing story, as described by narrative and biographical approaches to disease (Bradby and Lewando Hunt, 2010, p. 1). Despite the fact that Central American post-conflict societies continue to face the sequels of trauma, paradoxically, the women who participated in this study were able to tell stories characterized by their personal and collective efforts to change their own lives and their societies for the better through their feminist activism. How can these stories be understood in the context of their traumatic previous experiences?

It has been argued that human resilience to extraordinary levels of psychosocial stress associated with war experiences means much more than the absence of PTSD. There is a growing awareness of the importance of the role of psychological constructs such as 'hardiness', 'mastery' and 'thriving' in the face of adversity. Resilience is a core concept here, that refers to the capacity of individuals (or families or communities) to anticipate, withstand and /or engage with catastrophic events and or experiences actively making meaning out of the adversity, with the goal of maintaining 'normal' function without fundamental loss of identity. In this process, 'meaning-making' is critical to the process of adaptation to loss or trauma that helps restore the individual's functioning, and is a process which evolves over time and requires a retrospective and longitudinal analysis of those narratives that make meaning out of adversity (Almedom et al., 2010, p. 128f).

According to Mc Adams and Bowman (2001, p. 25f), narrative psychologists have argued that the kinds of meanings people draw from significant turning points have profound implications for their overall mental health and adaptation. Particularly, it seems that people who perceive benefits in adversity tend to show better recovery from and adjustment to the negative events that brought them the adversity. It seems that positive adaptational outcomes of what they call "benefit-finding" do appear in self-report indicators of psychological well-being of survivors of illness and trauma, who have reported increased

self-reliance and broader self understanding, enhanced self-disclosure and emotional expressiveness in relationships and a changed philosophy of life. Indeed, it is clear that major setbacks can challenge the assumptions that a person makes concerning her world, but “benefit-finding” can help to reconstitute that world by specifying an anticipated ‘redemption’ sequence in which bad events are expected to give way to good outcomes. According to Tedeschi and Calhoun (1995) those good outcomes tend to manifest themselves in three different areas (a) changes in self; (b) changes in relationships with others, and (c) changes in philosophy of life and spiritual-existential beliefs (Mc Adams and Bowman, 2001, p. 25f).

Furthermore, McAdams and Bowman predict that authors of life stories emphasizing redemption themes should show better psychosocial adaptation and mental health overall, compared to individuals whose stories are less ‘redemptive’. Conversely, contamination sequences in the life narrative accounts should be negatively associated with overall well being. It seems as if construals of benefit in the wake of adversity provide hope and sustain anticipations of a positive future. This position is partially shared by Vasquez, Ibanez and Murguialday (1996, p. 96) who argue that war as a ‘limit situation’ can also create a special sensibility that allows individuals to reframe the meaning of life and its values. For them, a positive aspect concerning the women who were part of the guerrilla in El Salvador, is that they felt empowered to act in order to defend themselves from the attacks of the army, as opposed to women who were part of civil population, who felt and were powerless to face army attacks. The traumatic experience was based on the loss of control given by the kind of participation that some women had during the war: “Civil population didn’t have the possibility to defend themselves, and their options were reduced to escape continuously, trust their defense to the FMLN or seek refuge.... whereas those who integrated the guerrilla army could defend themselves in other ways; their ideals were stronger, they had a cause to embrace and death was an ingredient of this option, but they were also able to defend and counterattack the enemy” (Vasquez, Ibanez and Murguialday, 1996, p. 94f).

The following section summarizes the major insights from the previous discussion concerning identity and the contribution of narrative psychology in the study of women’s lives.

#### 2.4.6- Summary

An overview of how the concept of identity has evolved in psychology during the twentieth century invariably points to how it has been informed by the cultural metadiscourses of modernism and postmodernism. Conceptualizations of identity as ‘fluid’ and ‘decentered’ –as opposed to fixed and situated- have shaped the methods used to study identity in the social sciences, particularly from constructionist approaches like ‘narrative psychology’. The following points summarize key issues reflected in the previous literature review, particularly those concerning how the study of personal life narratives –or the so-called ‘narrative testimonials’- may allow social scientists to understand identity construction in the life course of female revolutionary combatants.

1. As mentioned above, two major traditions emerged in the study of the concept of identity during the first part of the Twentieth Century: one, based on the works on ‘identity’ of Erick Erickson, with his concept of ‘identity crisis’ (e.g. 1959; 1963; 1964; 1968); and in a parallel development, the ‘identity theory’ paradigm that emerged from social psychology, drawing upon sociological theories such as ‘symbolic interactionism’ and ‘role theory’. Particularly this second theoretical perspective emphasized the relational, socially constructed and structured nature of identity and elaborated on the possibility and necessity of multiple identities in modern society (Simon, 2004). The postmodern break from traditional psychology (which had an impact in psychological science starting in the 1980s) was characterized by the decentering of the self, moving it from inside of the psyche to the text of the world. The assumption of a ‘psyche’ was replaced with views of subjectivity as an emergent property of discourse (Jones, 2007). In this postmodern moment, the works of Sarbin (1986) and other ‘narrative psychologists’ -influenced by concepts of narratology and socio linguistics- evolved into a framework known as “Narrative Psychology”. From this perspective, narratives were conceived as ways of creating a sense of continuity in our lives. As Ricoeur (1984) argued, narratives bring order and meaning to the constant changing flux of our experiences, defining our actions and ultimately, who we are. Indeed, social scientists began looking at “narrative identities” as a way of understanding how individuals actively create meaning and how this reflexive process provides structure to a person’s very sense of selfhood (Elliott, 2005). In addition, narrative psychologists expanded on the idea that individuals hold a variety of narrative identities, each of which is connected to different social relationships. Thus, these identities connect individuals to a set of

social relationships and provide them with a sense of localized coherence and stability (Murray, 2003).

2. Since the 1970s, Latin American testimonial literature has claimed a voice for those who are on the margins of society; those who demand 'power from below' and who communicate their experiences from a 'plural self' and as one person who is 'like many others' with whom they share a historical fate. Rodriguez-Manguel (2004) has spoken of the 'testimonial narrative' as a genre that refutes dominant ideology and opens up a marginal space, but still faces a problem of representational authenticity. For Beverley (2004) the important aspect about 'testimonial narrative' is that it produces a sense of experience of the real, which creates a different effect from documentaries and realist fiction. This understanding of the 'testimonial narrative' is not particularly concerned with the 'evidence' that supports the narrative, or with the 'authenticity' of the facts behind the story told; but rather with the construction of a 'certain kind of reality' that is grounded on the experience of the individual that writes about it. Ultimately, the study of the testimonials of those who tell their stories of sacrifice, revolution, trauma, martyrdom and transformation has an intrinsic value as long as it is concerned with the way these individuals construct meaning, not with some kind of 'ultimate truth' that exists out there.
3. Personal life narratives and stories we tell about ourselves are filled with turning points and transitions, be it of small scale or significant. Though transitions are part of an individual's life course, and most role transitions are anticipated, nevertheless, there are transition processes that are not planned nor expected, but usually triggered by a turning point, a juncture in time when an individual's life course is altered –by a circumstance or an event- and radically transforms his or her life. Particularly disruptive experiences are those which produce an overwhelming amount of suffering that can lead to psychological trauma. In the case of the Central American revolutionary women, many suffered –during and after the war years- discrimination, sexual violence or multiple family losses. In addition, given the particular circumstances in which peace was achieved in El Salvador and Guatemala, many of these women possibly suffered 'sanctuarial traumatic stress', as a consequence of their societies' impossibility to see intrinsic value in revolutionary movements, and thus, the roles and actions of these women as former combatants. In this regard, the case of Nicaraguan women may be different as the 'Sandinista revolution' in 1979 was socially sanctioned as heroic and

relevant for the better development of contemporary Nicaraguan society.

4. The women interviewed in this study narrated stories filled with intense experiences that they labeled as meaningful, transformative and radicalizing. While all the women discussed the painful and traumatic quality of those experiences, they also emphasized how these allowed them to build a sense of assertion of their own autonomy and the courage to fight for their human rights. In this sense, understanding the connections between trauma and resilience are also relevant for the purposes of this study. As mentioned above, there is a growing awareness of how some individuals develop a sense of 'hardiness', 'mastery' and 'thriving' in the face of adversity. Resilience is a core concept here that refers to the capacity of individuals (or families, or communities) to anticipate, withstand and /or engage with catastrophic events and or experiences actively making meaning out of the adversity, with the goal of maintaining 'normal' functioning without fundamental loss of identity. In this process, 'meaning-making' is critical to the process of adaptation to loss or trauma which helps restore the individual's functioning (Almedom et al., 2010). Mc Adams and Bowman (2001) support these ideas and argue that the kinds of meanings people draw from significant turning points and critical moments have profound implications for their overall mental health and adaptation. Particularly, it seems that people who perceive benefits in adversity tend to show better recovery from and adjustment to the negative events that brought them the adversity.

## 2.5- Reviewing the Research Questions

This project attempts to shed light on the psychological construction of women's radical identity in Central America. The question of why hundreds of Central American women from countries such as El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala went on to join revolutionary movements in the 1970s and 1980s and later developed a particular type of 'second wave' feminism – which has been associated with the so-called "Latin American feminist NGO boom of the 1990s" (Alvarez, 2009: 175)- has been studied from the traditions of political science, sociology and gender studies. The focus of the most empirical studies conducted has been on the structural aspects of women's collective identities, looking at the relationship between political mobilization and the role of political organizations; democratization outcomes; the role of the state and gender politics in neo-liberal post-conflict Central American societies of the 1990s and beyond (Stephen, 1997; Kampwirth, 2001; 2002; 2004; 2010; 2011; Luciak, 2001; Viterina, 2006, 2008).

Personalistic perspectives exploring how and why women took the path of political radicalization are presented in testimonials and biographies of revolutionary women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala (Carter et. Al., 1989; Stephen, 1994, Gorkin et al., 2000), that have been published and disseminated extensively since the 1980s allowing scholars -as Andrews (1991) would put it- the possibility to better understand the psychology of individuals who engage in political action. Still, even though these testimonials offer us a glimpse of the psychological makeup of these women activists, the task of unpacking the construction of radical identity of Central American revolutionary and feminist women has been rarely undertaken by those who write these stories, as they, either transfer the analytical task to the reader, by letting the women's narratives 'speak for themselves' as Gorkin et al., (2000) put it, or by using narratives as a platform for a political positionings, as it is the case of biographies of Central American revolutionary heroines such as Ana Maria Castillo from El Salvador, Rigoberta Menchu from Guatemala or Doris Tijerino from Nicaragua (Alegría, 1983; Burgos, 1994; Randall, 1977). Thus, the limited or almost absent literature concerning the study of radical identities in Central American women from a psychological perspective is one of the gaps that this research project attempts to address.

The following points explain in detail the specific ways in which this study explores radical identity construction in feminist and revolutionary women from Central America:

1. Looking into the psychological construction of radical identity, the questions asked by Andrews (1991: 113) when she studied radical identities in socialist activists from the United Kingdom, are also highly relevant ones, when attempting to understand the reasons behind the actions of radical activists: why is it that a particular group of people understand and respond to their environments by becoming radically politicized? And how does this process of radicalization take place? It can be argued that the focus of such questions is ultimately on exploring 'meaning making' processes in which individuals engage regarding the conditions as well as influences that shape their paths to radicalization. This study precisely attempts to explore these meanings, focusing on the "inter-subjective meanings" (shared by a whole community, although perceived as own) that these women constructed in the process of radicalization. It is also known that in their cases, they experienced transition from one radical collective identity to another, namely, from a revolutionary to a feminist identity. Hunt and Benford (2004:447) have explained how collective identities are meanings produced and reproduced, negotiated and renegotiated in the interactions of individuals in particular socio-cultural contexts. In the case of the women that this study is concerned with, contexts were given by the unique circumstances that shaped the interconnections between revolutionary and feminist movements in each one of the Central American countries selected for the study, namely, El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala (see sections 2.1 and 2.2 in this chapter). Thus, this study attempts, from a comparative perspective, to explore the inter-subjective meanings connected to the development and negotiation of women's their radical identities as revolutionaries and feminists in Central America, by asking the following question:

**How did feminist and revolutionary women from Central America experience the process of radical identity transition as they perform new forms of activism in their post conflict societies, and in which way was their radicalization linked to the national contexts in the cases of women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala?**

2. Very few have studied more extensively the social and political contexts of interconnectedness between revolution and Central American feminisms than Karen Kampwirth (2001; 2002; 2004; 2011), who has analyzed at length social, historical and personal factors that have influenced the revolutionary involvement of thousands of women from countries such as Nicaragua, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico (Chiapas) and Cuba. Though her work has significantly shed light on the different political cultures that have shaped feminism and revolution in Central America, hers are not psychological studies, but

sociological and political ones. Kampwirth (2004:3) has argued that despite the fact that revolutionary processes in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Chiapas (Mexico) did not make gendered but rather class based claims, they did plant the seeds of feminist consciousness and organizing. Moghadam (2003) explains that this has not always been the case with revolutions, which can also plant 'anti-feminist seeds' as it happened in Iran and more recently, in some "Arab Spring" revolutions. But in the case of Central America, Kampwirth (2004) has argued that 'second wave' feminisms that emerged during the 1990s, were deeply influenced by ideologies, experiences and affiliations connected to women's experiences within their revolutionary movements, such as: a strong desire to continue involved and fighting for egalitarianism; revolutionary women's new gained capacities for social organizing; pre-existing women's networks funded by guerrilla movements and the influence of an international environments characterized by foreign feminisms as well as international organizations from the political left and transnational feminist networks. In the end, strong neoliberal trends in the region during the 1990s influenced how these women's organizations came to exist and self-define. What Sonia Alvarez (1998; 1999; 2009) and others labeled as "the Latin American feminist NGO boom" (the emergence of hundreds of feminist non-profit organizations which institutionalized and professionalized mechanisms aimed at addressing feminist agendas in collaboration with international donor agencies) drew significant criticisms among feminists and observers who problematized the trend, as for many, these feminist NGOs seemed "veritable traitors to feminist ethical principles, by depoliticizing feminist agendas and collaborating with neo-liberal ones, becoming – as Castro (2001, in Alvarez, 2009:175) put it, institutional branches of the movement co-opted by the powers they once criticized, such as the state and transnational capital and their agents". The situation in Central America was no less complicated for these feminist NGOs as feminist women and former revolutionaries of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala had to negotiate autonomy by distancing themselves from their former revolutionary organizations, which at the same time increased their need to seek survival mechanisms and engage in collaborations with international donors and the state (Kampwirth, 2002, 2004) in these neoliberal contexts.

Thus, the researcher aims to explore how these social and economic trends were 'negotiated' at the individual level in terms of identity construction, as Central American feminist women's new positionings implied that they had to confront (oppose) and/or affiliate (engage) with new and possibly antagonistic partners, as well as develop new strategic alliances, sometimes in conflict with the ones that they had during the war period,

in a process that –one could hypothesize –demanded the “accommodation of multiple dimensions of identity difference as individuals had to readjust existing relationships between competing identities” (Andrews, 1991:23). Given the structural factors described above, this research project is concerned with exploring how did these women accommodate and negotiate the multiple dimensions of these competing identities, namely, revolutionary and feminist ones, as they had to readjust the relationship between them as they entered a post-conflict period in their home countries. One way of approaching identity accommodation from the perspective of this study, is to explore how Central American women come to define what ‘opposition’ and ‘engagement’ meant before, as revolutionaries, and means now, as feminists, and what are the accommodations made so that these meanings coexist simultaneously. Thus, this study attempts to answer the first subordinate question:

**How are the current notions of ‘opposition’ and ‘engagement’ sustained by radical feminist women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, given the existence of contradictory meanings that date back from their revolutionary periods? And, are there any similarities and differences concerning how this process takes place across women from the different countries?**

3. In the US and Europe, researchers who have conducted empirical studies of radical political identity or identity consciousness (Andrews, 1991; Polleta and Jasper, 2001; Hunt and Benford, 2004) have widely relied on the study of personal and movement narratives. Hunt and Benford’s research (2004:445) suggests that in a variety of movement contexts, participants engage in identity talk that tends to revolve around four moments of identity construction: becoming aware, active, committed and weary. Yet, in the case of radical Central American women, and regardless of the abundance of personal and movement narratives, there has been no psychological study focused on analyzing narratives in order to unveil such ‘moments’ of identity construction and/or identity transition. In the context of life course studies, these moments are labeled “turning points” and refer to junctures in time when an individual’s life course is altered –by a circumstance or an event- and radically transformed (Hareven and Masaoka, 1988) with potential impact on identity construction and transition. Thus, an additional objective of this study is to contribute to the existing literature on radical identity in Central American women by exploring key ‘turning points’ in the process of political radicalization in their life story narratives of women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. Drawing upon the uses of the narrative interview (Koro-Ljunberg,

2008; Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000) and literature on narrative psychology and narrative analysis (Sarbin, 1986; Polkinghorne, 1988; Bruner, 1991; McAdams, 1993; Josselson and Lieblich, 1993; Crossley, 2000) as well as literature from life course studies (Clausen, 1998; Hareven and Masaoka, 1988; Hutchinson, 2007) and in regards to exploring these turning points or key moments of identity construction, this study will attempt to answer the second subordinate question:

**What are the key turning points that influenced the process of political radicalization in the lives of revolutionary and feminist Central American women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and are there any similarities and differences concerning the factors that influenced these turning points across women from the different countries?**

### 3. Narrative Analysis of the Contemporary Narratives of Central American Radical Feminist Women

#### 3.1- Introduction: Research Design

This chapter introduces the epistemological standpoint of this research project as well as its research design and the methodology used for case selection, data collection and analysis of the life story narratives of Central American feminist women. The overall research orientation of this project falls into the tradition of social constructionist inquiry that departs from an empiricist, atomistic, representational accounts of meaning and knowledge. Social constructionist epistemologies emphasize the active role of the mind in the construction of knowledge arguing that human beings do not discover, but rather construct knowledge, and when they do so, they don't do it in isolation, but against a backdrop of shared understandings, practices and more importantly, language. Gergen (1986, 1994, 1997) subscribes to a relational theory of social meaning, and has argued: "it is human interchange that gives language its capacity to mean, and it must stand as the critical locus of concern" (Gergen, 1994, 263f). From this perspective, individuals' thoughts, feelings and experiences are considered the products of systems of meaning that exist at a social rather than an individual level (Blanche, Kelly and Durrheim, 2006, p. 278). Language in this context is understood as a range of activities in which humans express and realize a certain way of being in the world; thus, it is not seen as an instrument, but rather as what allows individuals to have the world that they have. In addition, social constructionists assume that knowledge is not disinterested, apolitical and exclusive of affective and embodied aspects of human experience, but rather ideological, political, and permeated with values. (Schwandt, 2000, p. 196f).

Concerning its epistemological research frame, social constructionist researchers conceive social life as complex and 'visible' in the ways in which people use language to reproduce events, relations and phenomena, and to constitute personal experience (for more on this topic, see: section 2.4.2-The Concept of Self and Identity in Narrative Psychology). Within the overall field of social constructionist scholarship, **narrative constructionist inquiry** is the epistemological framework in which this research project is situated (Sparkes and Smith, 2008, p. 295f). Regardless of internal differences within narrative constructionist inquiry<sup>43</sup>, what seems to unite the existing different perspectives

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<sup>43</sup> Sparkes and Smith (2008) introduce a distinction between the tradition of 'narrative constructivism' and

and research approaches are: first, a strong belief on the storied nature of human conduct, meaning that selves and identities are constituted via narrative. Thus, people understand themselves through 'story telling' and the stories they feel part of. Second, the notion that people have varying degrees of agency and freedom to construct the story that they tell about themselves, but are not free to fabricate narratives at will – people do not tell stories about themselves under conditions that they choose, but rather draw upon narrative resources that are at hand. Third, the idea that people act and are acted on by social and cultural contexts of a society in which interaction occurs. Fourth, a commitment and a point of contact with the body, and the importance of producing embodied social science where stories are 'felt in' and 'through' the body. Fifth, commitment to a qualitative orientation and practice that seeks to promote deep fidelity to the lived experience of those studies in all its variousness (Sparkes and Smith, 2008, 300f).

Social constructionist research methods are qualitative, interpretive and concerned with meaning, seeking to show how those understandings and experiences are derived from and feed into larger discourses. From this perspective, social constructionism clearly favors a move towards qualitative/interpretative research designs, and an emphasis on exploration and insight rather than measurement and hypothesis testing (Hackley, 2001, p. 61).

More concretely, the departing point in the present research project stems from a core idea of narrative constructionist inquiry and is the notion that human conduct has a storied nature, and people understand themselves through 'story telling' and the stories they feel part of, which allows them to construct their own selves and identities. Thus, this project explored how Central American feminist women construct their 'narrative identities', and make sense of discontinuities in their lives through the act of narrating their lives. Despite the fact that there is pre-existing literature exploring issues of feminisms and identity in the Central American region, nevertheless, there is not known research that attempts to capture how feminist women with a revolutionary background make sense of transformation in their lives, and how turning points have shaped their current narrative identities. In this sense, this research is not departing from previous assumptions regarding the identities of these women, but rather, to open space for an in-depth exploration of identity using narrative methods. Thus, the guiding questions that inform this study are the following:

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,narrative constructionism' being the first one more concerned with the narrative as a model of thought that deals with the inner self, functioning like a schema. The second one is more concerned with ,relatedness' and thus, narrative is conceived as a form of social action, that is performed, not owned. Narratives, from this perspective, generate meaning by virtue of their place within the realm of interaction.

How did feminist and revolutionary women from Central America experience the process of radical identity transition as they perform new forms of activism in their post conflict societies, and in which way was their radicalization linked to the national contexts in the cases of women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala?

And the subordinate questions are:

- a. How are current notions of 'opposition' and 'engagement' sustained by radical feminist women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, given the existence of contradictory meanings that date back from their revolutionary periods? And, are there any similarities and differences concerning how this process takes place across women from the different countries?
- b. What are the key turning points that influenced the process of political radicalization in the lives of revolutionary and feminist Central American women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and are there any similarities and differences concerning the factors that influenced these turning points across women from the different countries?

This exploratory project focuses on the lives of radical Central American women who committed their lives to transformational political projects through their revolutionary and feminist activisms. The agenda of this research is to interpret the intersubjective meanings behind their actions. These 'intersubjective meanings' refer to meanings not created by the individual, though they are perceived as "own", but are rather shared by a whole of a community. From this perspective, the life story narratives of these women do not just provide insight into their personal experiences, but because they say something about the cultural framework in which they emerged, there is a possibility for generalization. In Taylor's (1987) words:

"(Social) actors may have all sorts of beliefs and attitudes which may be rightly thought of as their individual, even if others share them... hence, they are not subjective meanings, the property of one or some individuals, but rather intersubjective meanings, which are constitutive of the social matrix in which individuals find themselves and act. The intersubjective meanings which are the background to social action are treated as consensus, but the two are not the same. Convergence of belief or attitude or its absence presupposes common language in which these beliefs can be formulated, and in which these formulations can be opposed. Much of this common language in any society is rooted in its institutions and its practices, and it is part of the intersubjective meanings.... intersubjective meanings could not be the property of a single person because they are rooted in social practice... This is what makes community.... they remain as common meanings because there is the reference point which is the common purpose, aspiration, celebration... we are aware of the world through a 'we' before we are through an 'I' ". (p. 56-60)

Methodologically speaking, the narratives produced by the women interviewed are the units of analysis of this research, and it is through the application of analytical methods to selected segments of these narratives, that the researcher interpreted and expanded understandings of their transition experiences. The population of this study is composed by women who identify themselves as feminists with a background in guerrilla involvement and/or radical political mobilization work in El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. Detailed information on how sampling at different levels proceeded is provided in section 3.2- “Introducing the Sample of Radical Feminist Women”.

The method used to collect the personal narratives was the ‘life story’ interview, which is a particular type of narrative interview. It is described in detail in the data-collection section (See section 3.3-Data Collection: The Life Story Interview). This kind of interview is considered within the constructionist tradition as a “dialogical performance, social meaning-making act and a co-facilitated knowledge exchange” (Koro-Ljungberg, 2008, p. 430). The implication here is that both interviewer-interviewee are considered knowing subjects and have a shared epistemological authority and ownership, meaning that if interviews are collaborative, then, the results are actively produced narratives (Koro-Ljunberg, 2008). Precisely because of the collaborative nature of the narrative interview, the importance of the perception of the researcher by the participants is significant. In the context of this study, that the researcher conducted the interviews in Spanish (her mother tongue), and is a Salvadoran woman working on her doctoral dissertation at a German University, played a role in the way the participants related and trusted her with personal parts of their life stories. Furthermore, ideas about the political and ideological “feminist affiliations” of the researcher were also expected to influence levels of disclosure of the participants. These aspects were considered when designing the ‘framing’ of the narrative interview for this study (in upcoming section, 3.3-Data Collection: The Life Story Interview, this issue is discussed in detail). An important aspect that is also addressed in this section pertains the nature of the data collected through the life story interviews. Due to the intrinsic constructionist nature of the data collected, it cannot be regarded as “actual facts” but rather, constructions and meanings attributed to the personal experiences of the interviewees, and it is exactly these meanings which are of interest in the context of the present study (for a discussion on constructionism and how it has informed research practices in post-modern psychology, please see Chapter Two, section “New directions in the study of identity” in page 109).

Concerning data analysis, it can be argued that the methodological contribution of this research project is the combined use of five techniques used for 'content' narrative analysis, which made it possible to consider multiple perspectives when disentangling the underlying meanings of the stories. One of these techniques, labeled "Storied Themes/Narrative Threads" was an adaptation developed specifically for this research project from a narrative methodology used to analyze 'large-scale complex social phenomena' by Liz Stanley (2008). For detailed information and a description of the methods used for data analysis, see section 3.4- "Selected Methods of Narrative Analysis".

This chapter ends with a discussion on the ethics of narrative research, particularly focusing on ethical considerations taken into account by the researcher when conducting this study.

### **3.2- Introducing the Sample of Radical Feminist Women**

A sample from the whole universe of women that fulfilled the selection criteria was selected in order to achieve “analytic generalization” representative in theoretical terms. As Yin (2003, p. 32f) has noted, in qualitative case studies, ‘cases’ should be selected as a laboratory investigator selects the topic of a new experiment. In this sense, multiple cases should be considered like multiple experiments and a previously developed theory is used as a template with which to compare the empirical results of the study. If two or more cases are shown to support the same theory, replication may be claimed. Based on these assumptions, in this research project, criterion sampling was used as a way of pre-targeting and including those ‘cases’ that met key selection criteria required to answer the research questions.

The idea of ‘analytic generalization’ implies a different kind of logic of ‘statistical generalization’, meaning that this is not generalization to some defined population that has been sampled, but rather generalization to a theory of the phenomenon being studied, a theory that may have much wider applicability than the particular case studied (Maxwell, 2007).<sup>44</sup> The issue of *external validity* or ‘*generalizability*’ or how far the findings relating to a particular sample can be generalized and applied to a broader population is a controversial one in narrative studies, which usually have small samples. Elliott (2005) draws upon Charles Taylor’s (1987) discussion of ‘intersubjective meanings’ (see Taylor’s quote in section 3.1) as a way of looking at how individual narratives allows social scientists to look at social phenomena that goes beyond the individual to the communal reality.

#### **3.2.1- Sampling of Feminist Organizations**

In order to answer the questions that guide this study, the overall sampling objective was to identify feminist women with revolutionary backgrounds from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua. These countries were selected on the grounds that their feminist movements were deeply influenced and inter-twined with the participation of women in the revolutionary wars of the 1980s in Central America (For detailed information on this topic, see section 2.2- “Feminism in Central America” in literature review).

In order to achieve the sampling objective, a series of strategies were used. Initially, it was necessary to gather information and initiate communication with feminist

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<sup>44</sup> For more on ‘analytic generalization’ see Robert Yin (2003).

organizations in Guatemala, El Salvador and Nicaragua. The sampling strategy used was chain referral or “snowball sampling”, which is a variation of purposive sampling. The idea when using this method is that a previous informant is asked to identify other potential participants with knowledge of a particular area or topic (Holloway and Wheeler, 2010, p. 141). For the purpose of this study, the researcher’s aim was to reach out to fifty percent (half) of the feminist organizations identified in each country. Once these organizations were identified, the following step involved establishing contact with potential “gatekeepers” of these organizations who would facilitate the process of finding out and arranging meetings with women affiliated to these organizations and also fulfilled the sample criteria, namely participation in a revolutionary movement as a combatant or political cadre and a later feminist affiliation with the local feminist movement. This was the only way to reach out to this particular group of women as they tend to distrust outsiders, since some of them are – to this day- harassed by government representatives, mainstream media and other social groups because of their radical feminist activism and even for their previous revolutionary involvement<sup>45</sup>.

After reviewing data based on research conducted by Montenegro, Herrera and Aguilar Theissen (1997), it became possible to estimate the amount of grassroots feminist NGOs that operate in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala (see Appendix I, item A for a list of feminist NGOs per country). For the purposes of this research, it was necessary to distinguish among the different types of feminist organizations that exist:

1. “Grassroots feminist NGOs” and “Colectivas” (“Collectives”) which attempt to provide welfare provision to women and conduct political activism.
2. “Redes Feministas” or ‘feminist networks’ which are small structures that coordinate communication and action among feminist NGOs.
3. “Programas con enfoque de genero” (social programs with a gender perspective) that address women’s needs and perspectives in government sponsored projects or international cooperation agencies
4. “feminist autonomous groups” which are small structures that support specific causes, such as ‘prevention of violence’.

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<sup>45</sup> Some the risks that radical feminists face in Central America include: ‘femicide’ or systematic killing of women in Guatemala and El Salvador; harassment of feminists who support abortion rights by the current Sandinista government in Nicaragua and harassment of lesbian feminists by radical Catholic groups (i.e. Opus Dei) in the three countries.

Each of the ‘feminist organizations’ that were part of the sample selected for this study fit one of the categories described in the typology above.

In order to protect the anonymity of the women that are part of this study, the names of the organizations selected as part of the sample is not provided. The following table summarizes the sampling results, providing information about the amount of women who come from a particular ‘affiliation category’. In addition, the amount of women who did not affiliate themselves with a particular feminist organization is included in table 3.1:

**Table 3.1: Affiliation of the Women Included in the Sample**

| Types of affiliations represented in sample        | El Salvador | Guatemala | Nicaragua |
|----------------------------------------------------|-------------|-----------|-----------|
| Grassroots Feminist NGOs                           | 5           | 2         | 4         |
| Feminist networks or offices (different from NGOs) | 1           | --        | 1         |
| Non-feminist NGOs with a gender component          | --          | 2         | --        |
| “Independent” feminist women                       | --          | 2         | 1         |
| Total                                              | 6           | 6         | 6         |

### 3.2.2- Sampling of Participants

The criteria defined for the selection of participants of the study were the following:

- Females from either El Salvador, Guatemala or Nicaragua
- They should be active feminists currently working or with prior work experience with feminist organizations of at least five years.
- They should have a history of involvement with former guerrilla/leftist organizations or have engaged in radical political leftist activism during the revolutionary period of the 1980s in Central America.
- If they label themselves as ‘independent feminists’, they should be active and well known within the feminist milieu of their countries. In addition, they should either participate in organizing and/or attending feminist events.

Factors that were not controlled for in the selection of participants were:

- Type of revolutionary activism/involvement, meaning that some women may have experience as combatants, whereas others may have more experience in grassroots mobilization; as messengers; as political cadres, etc.
- Type of grassroots feminist organizing/activism, meaning that some women may work in

administrative matters, whereas others may engage in feminist protest, and others, in working directly with other women.

- Demographic factors such as: age, social class and place of origin within her country.

Ideally, each woman selected to participate would come from a different feminist organization in each of the countries considered for the study; nevertheless, the number of organizations represented per country ended up being significantly reduced due to the following factors: 1. Lack of availability of some of the women considered for participation; 2. The fact that some organizations tended to recruit more women who met the selection criteria and were available to participate in this research project; and 3. Some women who met the selection criteria did not affiliate themselves with a particular feminist organization and rather regarded themselves as “independent feminists”. The inclusion of women who saw themselves as ‘independent feminists’ expanded the representation of feminist diversity that the researcher had in mind initially; as these so-called “independent feminists” who had been involved in feminist organizations in the past, were well known and respected by other feminist peers. Their comments and views reflected opinions that were less bounded by loyalty to specific organizations, groups or affiliations.

In the end, after establishing the appropriate contacts through gatekeepers, the researcher engaged in data collection, interviewing twenty-eight women between January and March 2008 in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala; and out of those interviewed, eighteen women’s life stories fulfilled the criteria for data analysis (six for each country). The criteria used to select these narratives for further analysis were the following: 1. *Extensive* involvement during the revolutionary period including military and/or political participation in the guerrilla movements. 2. Affiliation and a *sense of belonging and commitment* to one of the revolutionary organizations that existed at the time of the war. 3. *Active involvement* in feminist organizing since the early 1990s.

The following sub-sections provide a detailed account of the sample selected for El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

### 3.2.2.a- Selected participants from El Salvador

Ten women were selected as part of the sample of feminist women from El Salvador. Nine out of the ten women were affiliated to a feminist NGO at the time of the data collection. The remaining woman was affiliated to a university's gender unit. All of these women had different levels of political involvement during the revolutionary war in El Salvador: some of them as military combatants; others as political cadres and others were involved as members of 'mass organizations' or unions. One of the women interviewed was involved as a church member who provided support to war refugees. All the women interviewed were 40 years or older, which suggests that they were somewhere in their mid-twenties when the war started in El Salvador.

Out of the ten interviews, six were selected for data analysis. Table 3.2 summarizes major characteristics of all the women considered for data collection:

**Table 3.2: Characteristics of the Sample from El Salvador<sup>46</sup>**

| Name of Participant | Personal background                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Revolutionary affiliation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Feminist affiliation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Selected for data Analysis          |
|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Carolina            | A university graduate, comes from a very poor family of nine siblings. Her brother was murdered during the war. Later in life, after the peace agreements, she has participated in electoral politics and has been elected twice for local government positions. | Initially attracted by student movements, she radicalized and joined a revolutionary organization after the death of her brother – who was also in the guerrilla movement. Her role during the war was mostly of coordination and support of military actions. She was active in a committee of families of the disappeared, during the war. | Though she had heard during the war about women's issues, it was not until a few years later after the peace agreement were signed, that in 1996 she joined a feminist organization. She began working with rural women, while at the same time went to the university and obtained a degree. After entering electoral politics, she combined her political positions with her feminist affiliation. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Raquel              | A university graduate and mother of two. She is the oldest of five siblings, from a modest family.                                                                                                                                                               | Joined revolutionary organizing being twelve years old. Her involvement included participation in logistical and military actions with the urban                                                                                                                                                                                             | Joined a feminist organization in 1992 as a founding member. Currently remains affiliated to her feminist organization but works in programs for the                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

<sup>46</sup>

The names of the participants have been changed in order to protect their identities.

|        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           |                                     |
|--------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|        |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     | guerrilla.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  | political participation and economic support of women with a local government.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |                                     |
| Dilsia | A high school graduate and mother of three. Comes from a rural large family of ten siblings, where she was the second youngest. Her husband was murdered during the war, and her two sons were sent away to the US while she was a combatant. At some point was involved in formal politics and became a deputy member of the Legislative Assembly. | Joined a religious group supportive of liberation theology when she was twelve years old. Later in life, after she got married to another revolutionary, she joined the guerilla as well. Her involvement included participation in logistical and military actions with the urban guerrilla until the war ended. She was very committed to her revolutionary organization but resented not being promoted to higher ranks. | In 1992, she joined a feminist organization where she still currently works. She started there as a volunteer, but now is a founding member working in programs pertaining to health, women's political participation and economic initiatives. At the same time, she participated in legislative projects, trying to support projects that would favor women's condition in El Salvador. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Sara   | A university graduate and a mother of three. She comes from a middle class small family, and was the youngest daughter .                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Joined revolutionary organizations being fifteen years old, through the student movement and later, after marrying a revolutionary, she joined the guerrilla, mostly working at the logistical and political levels. Her involvement mostly took place in another Central American country.                                                                                                                                 | In 1992 she joined a feminist organization as a volunteer and eventually developed a career within the organization until she became the Director. She currently works in programs concerning political participation of women, economic initiatives and institutional support.                                                                                                           | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Mireya | Currently holds two masters degrees. A mother of four, she was the oldest daughter in her middle class family of origin. At some point became involved in municipal politics supporting a woman's office. She lost two partners during the war.                                                                                                     | Joined political movements at the age of fifteen. She was involved in military action as well as administrative and political coordination with the urban and rural guerrilla as well as social movements during the war. She lost two husbands during the war.                                                                                                                                                             | She developed an interest in feminism in 1990 when she, along with other women founded a feminist NGO. She has a long trajectory working with 'colectivas' and feminist networks. Currently she has developed an economic initiative for rural women and works on women's political participation. She is well respected within the movement and regarded                                 | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

|         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                     |
|---------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | as one of the key women of Salvadoran feminism.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                     |
| Sonia   | Holds a bachelors degree. A mother of three, is the oldest in modest family of five siblings. Well known as a writer and feminist poet.                                                                                                                                  | Joined a revolutionary organization at the age of twenty-three, when she started her university studies. Her partner was also a revolutionary. She was involved in administrative tasks with the urban guerrilla and worker movements.  | In 1989, she joined a feminist 'colectiva' where she became responsible for the administration of projects. For a long time, and up to this day, she has worked in project development and as a researcher.                                                                                                                                                              |                  |
| Pamela  | Holds a bachelors degree. A mother of three, though her family lives far away from her. During the war, she had to leave El Salvador for Europe in the early 1980s as a political refugee. She returned to El Salvador by the end of the war, leaving her family behind. | Joined a revolutionary organization at the age of nineteen. She was involved in administrative and coordination tasks within the urban guerrilla, until she left the country as a political refugee in the mid 1980s.                   | In Europe, she became interested in feminism through her affiliation to migrant associations. When she returned to El Salvador, decided to join feminist organizations, but felt that she didn't belong to any of the established ones. Thus, she regards herself as an independent feminist and currently works with a university fostering social and gender projects. | DID NOT MEET CRITERIA: she spent most of EL Salvador's war as a political refugee in Europe.        |
| Zoraya  | Holds a bachelors degree. Has no children. Mostly involved in labor movements all her life since she was a child.                                                                                                                                                        | Joined leftist cause through unions and worker movements, being thirteen years old. During the war, she was mostly connected to union and labor movements.                                                                              | In 1992, she joined a group of women that began a feminist organization as a volunteer. She later was offered a job and has worked with the same feminist organization in developing labor and economic access programs for women.                                                                                                                                       | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: she was a labor activist politically involved but not a guerrilla member |
| Isadora | Holds a bachelors degree. A mother of one, she is the youngest of her family of origin. Throughout her activism, she has tried to bring together two interests, religion and feminism.                                                                                   | She never joined a revolutionary organization during the war, although was active within the social movement. During the war, she worked as a member of a church supporting victims of war. She has always held a pacifist perspective. | In 1999 she joined a group of feminist women who came together in a so-called "concertacion feminista". She started as a volunteer and currently holds a position as coordinator of a women's program focused on political participation of rural women and prostitutes.                                                                                                 | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: She was not a guerrilla member, but rather involved in social movements  |

|         |                                                                                                                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                               |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Mariana | Holds a bachelors degree. Lost both her mother and her brother during the war. Her mother was a unionized high school teacher, murdered in the violent days before the war started. | She was arrested – along with her mother – being fourteen years old, during a teacher meeting. She eventually entered a revolutionary organization, and did not participate in military action, but rather as a political cadre. Eventually she became critical of her guerrilla organization and found a more fitting space in social organizations | Being still a revolutionary affiliated to a social organization, she began talking to feminists, and supported the creation of a space for women. After the war, she has remained as an ‘independent feminist’ not affiliated with any feminist organization, as she does not share the feminist perspective of the organizations. She writes and researches extensively on women. | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: did not have a strong sense of affiliation with any of the guerrilla organizations |
|---------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

As it can be noticed in table 3.2, most of the women interviewed were able to conclude an academic degree at the bachelors level, despite their revolutionary activism. Also true for almost all of them is that their activism during the revolutionary period was mostly concerned with logistical/political/administrative matters within the guerrilla groups, and their type of feminist activism involved work as coordinators of feminist projects regarding the political participation of women and economic development.

### 3.2.2.b- Selected Participants from Nicaragua

Ten women were selected as part of the sample of feminist women from Nicaragua. Five out of these women were affiliated to a feminist NGO at the time of the data collection. Concerning the remaining women, one was affiliated to a ‘Colectiva’, another one to a ‘research institute’ and the other three regarded themselves as independent feminists. Their involvement during the revolutionary period was a combination of logistical/political/administrative work as well as military involvement. The majority of the women in this sample were between 40-55 years old at the time of the interview, which suggests that they were in their middle to late twenties when the Sandinista revolution succeeded in 1979.

Out of the ten interviews, six were selected for data analysis. The following table summarizes major characteristics of all the women considered for data collection:

**Table 3.3: Characteristics of the Sample from Nicaragua<sup>47</sup>:**

| Name of Participant | Personal background                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Revolutionary affiliation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Feminist affiliation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Selected for data Analysis          |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Tamara              | Holds a bachelors degree and a masters. She grew up in a middle class family of three siblings. Joining the Sandinista movement meant for her breaking up with her family of origin.                                              | She did not join the Sandinista revolution, but abandoned her school when she was sixteen years old in order to join the national literacy campaign after the revolution succeeded. She later worked with the Sandinista army and fought against the 'Contras'. She remained part of the Sandinista structure until 1990. | Learned about feminism through women of AMNLAE and other foreign feminists who visited Nicaragua during the mid 1980s. Joined feminist initiatives challenging Sandinista patriarchy. After 1990 she supported feminist initiatives and created her own organization. She has published extensively on feminist matters.                                                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Elina               | Mother of four, she comes from a large peasant family with thirteen siblings. She lives in a province in the inner part of Nicaragua.                                                                                             | She began joining revolutionary affiliations at the age of fourteen. A strong collaborator of the Sandinistas, she was involved in logistics, military and coordination during the revolution.                                                                                                                            | She developed her interest in working with women during her participation in AMPRONAC, and later with AMNLAE, but she considers that she became a feminist in 1988. She was one of the founding members of AMNPRONAC in her region and has remained affiliated to this institution, focusing on women's health, violence against women and political empowerment of women. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Selma               | Holds a bachelors degree, she is the daughter of a military officer, and was the youngest of a family of nine siblings, six brothers and three sisters. Had a conflicting relationship with her mother, which only improved close | Joined the revolutionary student movement while she was studying at the university. She didn't engage in military action until very late in the revolution. Her brother – a member of the army- was killed in 1979. After the revolution succeeded,                                                                       | Entered in contradiction with the structures of the Sandinista revolution and created along with other feminists the "Erotic Left Party" as a way of confronting the system. After 1990, she created her own feminist organization, and advocated for a structured feminist                                                                                                | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

<sup>47</sup>

The names of the participants have been changed in order to protect their identities.

|         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 |                                                                                       |
|---------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|         | to her mother's death.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | she worked in the Sandinista structures until 1990.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                         | movement. She has written extensively on feminism.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                       |
| Maribel | Holds a bachelors degree. The youngest daughter of well established European immigrants in Nicaragua, she has been mostly devoted to her writing and poetry. She is a mother of three children who are the product of two marriages.                                 | Joined the revolutionary student movement being nineteen, undergoing significant risks in her political activism against Somoza. After getting married, her first husband pressured her to abandon politics, but in 1979 when the revolution succeeded she came back to work with the Sandinista structures until 1990. She participated in the Contra war. | In 1985 she joined the group of women of the "Erotic Left party". After 1990 she joined a feminist network and has collaborated with different initiatives particularly concerned with violence against women; nevertheless, she regards herself as an independent feminist with no affiliation to a specific organization.                                                                                                     |    |
| Leda    | Holds a bachelors degree. A mother of four, she is the youngest daughter of a middle class family of three siblings.                                                                                                                                                 | She became involved being twelve years old in a catholic group inspired with theology of liberation. When she entered the university, she joined the revolutionary student movement, and from there, the Sandinista guerrilla. After the revolution succeeded, she became a member of the Sandinista structure until 1990.                                  | In the mid 1980s, influenced by Basque feminists, she started to read about feminism and joined a group of Nicaraguan feminists who were very dissatisfied with the condition of women during Sandinismo; nevertheless, she has always supported feminist action without affiliating to any feminist organization. At the time of the interview, she remained as an independent consultant and collaborating with the movement. |    |
| Edith   | Holds a bachelors degree. A mother of two, she is the fifth daughter of a family of seven siblings. Her parents were well established migrants from China. Her brother was murdered by the Somoza army during the revolution because of his political participation. | She joined the revolutionary movement in 1976, after the murder of her brother, but she had previously been a member of a group that supported theology of liberation. She fought hard during the revolution and after 1979, she joined the Sandinista army and fought in the Contra war.                                                                   | By the end of the Sandinista regime, in 1990, she joined a feminist organization, where she worked for ten years. At the time of the interview, she had created her own feminist NGO that was focused on political participation of women and reproductive rights.                                                                                                                                                              |  |

|          |                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                                                                                               |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                       |
|----------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Paula    | Holds a bachelors degree. She is a mother of four, and the third daughter of a family of six siblings.                                                                           | She joined the Sandinista revolutionaries in 1977, mostly engaging in political and coordination actions. She remained involved with the Sandinista structures after the revolution succeeded in 1979.        | Became interested in feminism in 1992 when she joined a feminist 'colectiva'. She has been involved in feminist action and currently works as a volunteer and has been involved in the campaign for the right of therapeutic abortion                                | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: Did not fully engage as a revolutionary or participated in the revolution                  |
| Valeria  | Holds a bachelors degree, a mother of four children, she comes from a family of six siblings. She is a well known and established Nicaraguan poet who has published extensively. | Like many Nicaraguans who were supportive of Sandinistas, Valeria collaborated extensively with the Sandinistas, being already thirty-two years old. She supported the struggle with logistics involvement.   | She became interested in feminism in 1977 when she joined a group of women interested in theology. She has continued supporting feminist causes through her writing and by organizing workshops on theology and gender.                                              | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: Did not fully engage as a revolutionary or participated in the revolution                  |
| Alicia   | Holds a bachelors degree. She has two siblings, and no children of her own.                                                                                                      | Joined the struggle against Somocismo when she was fifteen years old through the revolutionary student movement, providing support with logistics.                                                            | In 1988, she became interested in feminism and joined existing feminist networks. At the time of the interview, she worked with a feminist NGO focusing on research and other programs supporting women's political participation.                                   | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: She was a member of student movements but did not join the Sandinista guerrilla.           |
| Josefina | Holds a bachelors degree. A mother of one, she comes from a family of six siblings.                                                                                              | She joined the revolutionary struggle being fourteen years old through the revolutionary student movement, initially and later, through the labor movement, by engaging in coordinating action and logistics. | In 1994, she joined a feminist network that fought against women's violence. She started as a volunteer and at the time of the interview, she served as political coordinator of a women's organization. She has mostly focused on political participation of women. | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: She was a member of student and labor movements but did not join the Sandinista guerrilla. |

As it can be noticed in table 3.3, nine out of ten women interviewed were able to conclude an academic degree at the bachelors level, despite their revolutionary activism. Most of them focused their feminist work on supporting the participation of women in politics and promoting economic development. Furthermore, three out of the six women selected for data analysis created their own feminist NGOs.

### 3.2.2.c- Selected Participants from Guatemala

Eight women were selected as part of the sample of feminist women from Guatemala. Five out of the ten women were affiliated to a feminist NGO at the time of the data collection. Two of the remaining women regarded themselves as independent feminists and the third one, as a 'women studies' scholar. All of these women had different levels of political involvement during the revolutionary war in Guatemala: five of them as military combatants; one as a 'mass organization' affiliate; another one joined a revolutionary organization by the end of the war, and one of the women participated in demonstrations, although she did not join any revolutionary group. Almost all the women interviewed were 40 years or older, with one exception of a woman who was in her mid-thirties at the time of the interview.

Out of the eight interviews conducted in Guatemala, six were selected for data analysis. The following table summarizes major characteristics of all the women considered for data collection:

**Table 3.4: Characteristics of the Sample from Guatemala<sup>48</sup>**

| Name of Participant | Personal background                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Revolutionary affiliation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | Feminist affiliation                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Selected for data Analysis          |
|---------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| Nelly               | Holds a bachelors degree, a mother of two, her family of origin comes from the inner parts of Guatemala, and experienced extreme political prosecution. After the war, her daughter was victim of sexual abuse by a former revolutionary combatant. | Influenced by the political prosecution that her family experienced when she was a child, and later by a revolutionary religious group, finally joined the student revolutionary movement being twenty-one years old, when she entered the university, working on logistics. After the war ended, she kept her connections with her political organization. | She became affiliated to Guatemalan feminists around the year 2000, when she joined a Guatemalan women's group. Because of her personal experiences with gender violence, she became concerned with the topic and founded an organization to fight violence against women and to construct a culture of peace. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Leticia             | Holds a bachelors degree, she has no children, and comes from an upper middle class family of four siblings,                                                                                                                                        | At sixteen she decided to do an internship with priests and nuns who were working with the indigenous in the mountains of                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | In 1986 she met feminist women in Mexico who introduced her to theoretical body of feminism. When she returned to Guatemala,                                                                                                                                                                                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

<sup>48</sup>

The names of the participants have been changed in order to protect their identities.

|         |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      |                                     |
|---------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
|         | from the capital city.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            | Guatemala. The experience changed her views, radicalized her and she joined the guerrilla for ten years, until 1984. Her work was mostly logistic and of political coordination. She lived in Mexico for a while after her involvement.                                                                                                                                                                              | along with other women, she founded a feminist organization, where she worked for almost twenty years. At the time of the interview, she regarded herself as an independent feminist, but continued to be involved in feminist activities and has remained very influential in the movement.                                                                                                                                         |                                     |
| Clarisa | Holds a bachelors degree. She has one non-biological child. Comes from a modest family of a single mother and two siblings. She openly came out as a lesbian during her time in the guerrilla.                                                                                                    | She joined the revolutionary student movement in 1989, being nineteen years old. Her work was mostly of coordination with the social movement. Coming out as a lesbian within the guerrilla proved difficult and after six years of revolutionary engagement she left the movement.                                                                                                                                  | She became interested in feminism while still being involved in her revolutionary organization. She joined a feminist 'colectiva' as a member, but later, along with other women worked hard in creating a space for lesbian feminists in Guatemala. Currently she is the coordinator of a lesbian feminist NGO which focuses on political action and fights sexual violence.                                                        | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Lilian  | Holds a bachelors degree. A mother of one, she comes from a large family with a strong tradition in leftist organizing. Her father was killed when she was seven and the whole family of eight siblings along with extended family members had to migrate to Cuba, where she spent her childhood. | She joined the revolutionary student movement when she started working at the university. Her brother was killed in revolutionary action, which influenced her level of political engagement. She worked with unions and the guerrilla both getting involved in military action and coordination. Due to an injury, she was exiled to Mexico, where she stayed for a long time, though still affiliated to the left. | She became interested in feminism during her stay in Mexico, where she joined a group of exiled Guatemalan women. She joined as a volunteer and worked there for many years. After Mexico she lived in El Salvador where she also worked in a feminist organization. Upon her return to Guatemala she worked for women's rights with the post-conflict government and at the time of the interview with a human rights organization. | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |
| Odilia  | Holds a bachelors degree, a mother of one, she comes from a modest family of El                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | When she left for Guatemala with her partner, she joined a guerrilla organization being eighteen years                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Being in Mexico, in 1983 she joined a 'colectiva feminista' where she learned about feminism. She stayed four more                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> |

|           |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                                                  |
|-----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
|           | Salvador, but migrated to Guatemala following her partner who was a revolutionary there.                                                                                                                                                                                                 | old, working with urban guerrilla coordinating political activities. After her partner was killed in revolutionary action, she stayed with the guerrilla some more years until she eventually migrated to Mexico because of political differences within revolutionary groups.                                                                                                                                                                     | years in Mexico and returned to Guatemala with the idea of developing a feminist NGO along with other women. Eventually she left that NGO and joined a feminist journal. At the time of the interview, she regarded herself as an 'individualist feminist' and even though she does not belong to any organization, she remains active in the movement as part of a methodological commission. |                                                                                                                                  |
| Paulina   | She was born in 1973, which makes her the youngest of the women interviewed. Holds a bachelors degree and is a mother of two. She grew up in a household characterized by domestic violence. Her mother had to leave the house, and she was taken care of by her grandmother and father. | As an adolescent, she joined religious groups that followed theology of liberation, but she left for the US being eighteen years old to be with her mother. There, she learned the hard situations that migrants face. Upon her return to Guatemala, she decided to enter the University, where she joined radical revolutionary student groups. This was at the end of the war, but she got engaged in logistical support of her guerrilla group. | Being still a member of her leftist organization, she was invited by a feminist group to visit and learn what they were doing. She became engaged in feminist action as a volunteer. Eventually this organization offered her a job and she began developing a career with this feminist NGO. At the time of the interview, she was working as general coordinator of the organization.        |                                               |
| Ana Maria | Currently involved in doctoral studies, is the mother of two. She comes from a family of a single mother and five siblings. Her mother had to leave to the US, which meant that her grandmother had to take care of her until she was seventeen years old.                               | She began working at the National University, and though she got involved in demonstrations of revolutionary student groups, and shared their ideas, she didn't affiliate to any of the guerrilla organizations but rather kept her activism independent.                                                                                                                                                                                          | As part of her academic work, she wrote a thesis focused on 'women and work' which allowed her to obtain a scholarship to do more research on the topic. Ever since, she has been involved in the development of research projects concerning feminism and studying the feminist movement in Guatemala. She conducts a radio program supported by feminists.                                   | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: She did not have a strong affiliation with any guerrilla organization during the revolutionary period |

|        |                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                               |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Susana | Holds a bachelors degree. She has no children. Comes from a family of three siblings | Being fourteen years old she got involved in student movements, which eventually lead to her affiliation to 'political mass movements'. Her involvement ended when the peace agreement was signed. | She became interested in feminism during the war, and joined a social organization where she began working as a volunteer. She has remained actively involved in the feminist movement ever since, and at the time of the interview, she was coordinating a program with a sector of women concerning organizational leadership. | DID NOT MEET THE CRITERIA: She did not have a strong affiliation with any guerrilla organization, but rather with student political movements |
|--------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

As it can be noticed in table 3.4, seven out of ten women interviewed were able to conclude an academic degree at the bachelors level, and one was pursuing doctoral studies at the time of the interview. In addition, four out of the eight women selected for data analysis were founding members of feminist NGOs in Guatemala.

The following section describes in detail the process of 'data collection' through the life story interview.

### **3.3- Data Collection: The Life Story Interview**

The interviewing process took three months from January to March 2008, including the time devoted to establish contacts with organizations; with gatekeepers and finally with the women that were part of the study. During this period, the countries visited were El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. In El Salvador, the interviewing process took place in the cities of San Salvador and Suchitoto from January 16-31 2008, for the first round of interviews. A second round took place between February 20-29, 2008; and a third round of interviews was conducted between March 17-28, 2008. In Nicaragua, the interviewing process took place in the cities of Managua and Rivas between February 4-17, 2008.

Finally, in Guatemala, the interviewing process took place in Guatemala City between March 5-16, 2008. The data collection method used was the “life story interview”.

#### **Methodological Considerations**

The Life Story interview, being one kind of narrative interview, is considered a form of unstructured, in-depth interview with specific features that emerged conceptually as a critique of the ‘question-response’ schema that takes place in most interviews. In the ‘narrative interview’ the influence of the interviewer is minimal and the pre-structuring of the interview is avoided further more than in any other kind of interview. The objective is to let the participants tell their stories in an uninterrupted fashion, in order to allow the story to evolve and take shape (Jovchelovitch and Bauer, 2000, p. 61). (See section 3.1 Introduction: Research Design, for a discussion on narrative interview in the context of social constructionism). Through the life story interview, inter-subjective meanings can be tackled when individuals refer to experiences that are grounded in social action, or that have a reference point pertaining a common aspiration or purpose among a collectivity.

It is a well-established practice for researchers interested in working with narratives to use the life story interview both as a resource and as a topic of research. The idea behind this type of interview is to encourage the participants to provide extended accounts of their lives, in order to produce narratives that will provide insight on their life experiences and the meanings attached to them (Elliott, 2005, p. 17-20). Through this interviewing process, “first order narratives” can be collected. These can be defined as stories that individuals tell about themselves and their own experiences. The significance of these narratives is that they can be understood as constitutive of individual identities (Elliott, 2005, p. 12f).

Furthermore, Polkinghorne (1996) has discussed the significant differences between the life story as it is lived and the story as it is told. Told stories are affected by the audience

to whom they are communicated, whether it is family, friends or research interviewers. When told stories are produced as part of a conversation or interview, they are shaped by the responses of the person to whom they are told. The resulting story is not a product of the teller alone, but rather co-authored by the teller and the listener. From this perspective, it can be argued that the results that the life story interview yields are strongly influenced by the nature of the interaction between the researcher and the interviewee. In this sense, the outcome of the interview cannot be regarded as a factual account that offers a “realist” history of what actually “happened” to the interviewee, but rather, it produces an account that portrays the meaning-making process -regarding her personal biography- that the interviewee constructs in the context of the narrative interview.

### **The Life Story Interview in the context of this study**

Conceptualizing, developing and applying an Life Story interview scheme used for data collection was accomplished through a process that merged aspects from a ‘Narrative Interview scheme’ focused on the ‘content’ of the interview developed by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) and a model that focused on the ‘process’ of the interview (relationship between interviewer-interviewee) developed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000). As a result, the interview frame developed for this study integrated these two approaches, taking into account the importance of these two dimensions in narrative interviewing, which are described in more detail below:

#### **a) Interpersonal component in Narrative Interviewing**

Because of the sensitivity of the topics that were expected to emerge from the participants in this study (i.e. their early political activism; their entrance into clandestine guerrilla organizations; the influence of war in their family life; traumatic war experiences; their disappointment with the leftist project; their activism as feminists and its connection with self-perceptions; conflict with feminist project), it was perceived of high relevance to develop an interview setting that would foster trust and development of rapport between the participants and the researcher. These aspects were taken into account when the ‘interview frame’ was developed and the idea of having more than one session for the interview emerged in the literature. As some researchers have pointed out, sometimes it is necessary to meet with some participants on a number of occasions, in order to win their confidence and to encourage them to reflect on life experiences (Murray, 2003, p 117). As a result of these considerations, the interview frame used for this study integrated an

approach developed by Hollway and Jefferson (2000) that favors having two interview sessions instead of one with each participant of the study, in order to facilitate the development of rapport and trust. The overall objective of this model can be summarized in the following way: a first interview enables the researcher to establish a preliminary symptomatic reading of the life story, whereas during the second interview, the researcher interrogates critically what was said in order to seek further material and test provisional hypotheses. Ideally, the second interview would be fixed one week after the first one, and in between interviews, the researcher would listen to the recording of the session. In addition, based on notes taken during this process, the researcher would construct a series of tailor-made narrative questions for the second interview based on issues that appeared to be symptomatic of tension or conflict in the account given the first time. This arrangement would allow the researcher to explore absent themes, and help promote a gradual build-up of trust over two interviews. The second interview, in this sense, would feel like resuming an established relationship rather than starting out as strangers as in the first interview (Hollway and Jefferson, 2000, p. 43f).

#### **b) Content in Narrative Interviewing**

For the purposes of this study, Jovchelovitch and Bauer's (2000) 'narrative interview model' was adapted in order to construct a 'narrative interview scheme' fit to the needs of this study. Their model is structured in the form of a five-phase procedure that flows in the following way: first, there is a 'preparation' period, which allows the researcher to explore the field by preparing a list of 'exmanent questions'. 'Exmanent' issues in this context are those that reflect the interests of the researcher, where formulations and language are based on the researcher's own inquiries and interests. During the preparation period, an initial topic for narration is identified, which represents the interest of the interviewer. What follows is the first phase or 'initiation', where the context of the investigation is explained to the participant, and she/he is asked for permission by the interviewer to record the interview. During this phase, the introduction of the central topic triggers the process of narration. Then, the second phase involves eliciting the 'main narration' from the participant. At this moment, the interviewer abstains from any comments, not interrupting and offering non-verbal encouragement to the interviewee in order to continue the story telling. The third phase involves a 'questioning' that takes place when the narration comes to a 'natural' end. Here, the 'exmanent' questions are translated into 'inmanent' ones; 'inmanent' questions in this context are those formulated by the researcher using the

language of the participant. These questions refer both to the experiences mentioned in the story narrated by the informant and also to the topics of the research project. Finally, the fourth phase, the 'concluding talk' refers to the interesting discussions that develop in the form of small talk when the tape recorder is switched off. This information can offer context crucial for the interpretation of interviewee's accounts.

### **Life Story Interview frame constructed for this study**

The interview frame used in this study is a two-session life story interview that merged essential characteristics of the two models described above. The fundamental idea when developing this frame was to conduct the life story interview in two sessions that had different purpose and objectives. In the process of adjusting this model, a pilot interview was developed and conducted in English with a female whose personal experiences resembled those of the actual participants in the study. The person selected as a participant in this pilot interview has a history of political and feminist affiliation in the city of Bremen, Germany, where the researcher is based. The pilot interview process is described below:

1. In the preparation phase, which focused on exploring the field, the researcher gathered information on the cultural/political scene of feminists in Germany, and particularly from the city of Bremen.
2. During the first session, the initiation phase started when the researcher explained the objectives of the study to the interviewee and asked permission to record the interview. Following, the researcher formulated initial topics for narration (which then triggered the process of narration). This initial topic represented the interest of the researcher and was framed in the following question: *"Having worked some years now for equal opportunity rights for women here in Bremen, could you please tell me about your experiences first, as a young woman and later, as an adult concerning your personal interest for women rights? Do you see a connection between your early interests and how you ended up in this position? Please feel free to tell me about everything that you feel is relevant..."*.
3. The phase of main narration started when the interviewee answered to this topic with a life story narrative. The researcher attempted to offer minimal verbal interventions and provide as much freedom as possible. At the end of the narration, the researcher thanked the interviewee and agreed to meet for a

second interview a week later.

4. After the first interview, the researcher listened to the tape recording and translated the exmanent question into inmanent ones using the language of the informant.
5. A week later, during the second session, the questioning phase started when the researcher presented a series of inmanent questions to the interviewee in order to complete the gaps in the story. The inmanent topics that emerged were the following<sup>49</sup>:
  - *Early life influences*, some of the topics that emerged were: family values concerning gender and significant events that marked her childhood.
  - *Early Ideas about self*, some of the topics that emerged were: ideas about a gendered self (perceptions of what was expected of her as young woman in her family) and about personal agency.
  - *Early adult influences*, some of the topics that emerged were: the importance of affiliation to political and social (student) groups, and significant personal events.
  - *Work and Present position*, some of the topics that emerged were: career development; path as a feminist and connections with political standpoints.
  - *The position of engagement*, some of the topics that emerged were: connections to local feminisms; engagement to a feminist agenda and current political involvement.
  - Feminist activism, some of the topics that emerged were: feminist identity and the development of a life path informed by feminist theory.

After the questioning phase was over, there was a brief moment of 'concluding talk' and the session ended.

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<sup>49</sup> For a detailed list of questions that emerged from these topics, see "Interview Guide for Pilot Interview" in Appendix I, item B.

Table 3.5 presents a synopsis of the Jovchelovitch and Bauer/Hollway and Jefferson ‘narrative interview’ models and how they were merged for the purposes of this study, in order to conduct the pilot interview:

**Table 3.5: “Life Story” Interview frame used for Pilot Interview**

| “Two-interview” approach developed by Hollway and Jefferson’s (2000)                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          | Phases of the Narrative Interview by Jovchelovitch and Bauer (2000) |                                                                                                                                              | “Life Story” frame adapted for the “Pilot Interview”                   |                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>First Interview:</b><br>Establishes a preliminary symptomatic reading, interrogating critically what has been said picking up the contradictions, inconsistencies, avoidances and changes of emotional tone                                                                                                                                                | <b>Preparation</b>                                                  | <b>Exploring the field. Formulating exmanent questions</b>                                                                                   | <b>Preparation</b>                                                     | Gathering information on the cultural/political scene of feminists in Bremen.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |
|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                               | <b>1. Initiation</b>                                                | <b>Formulating initial topic for narration. Using visual aids</b>                                                                            | <b>First interview:</b><br>‘Initiation’ and ‘main narration’ phases    | Question for first interview: Having worked some years now for equal opportunity rights for women here in Bremen, could you please tell me about your experiences first, as a young woman and later, as an adult concerning your personal interest for women’s rights? Do you see a connection between your early interests and how you ended up in this position? Please feel free to tell me about everything that you feel is relevant... |
| <b>Second Interview</b><br><i>(Fixed one week later after the first, which allows researcher to listen to the recording of the first interview.)</i><br>From notes taken, interviewer constructs a series of tailor-made narrative questions based on issues which appeared to be symptomatic of tension, conflict, contradictions, avoidances or hesitations | <b>3. Questioning phase</b>                                         | <b>Translating exmanent into inmanent questions; not “why” questions but only those concerning events; avoid pointing to contradictions.</b> | <b>Second Interview:</b><br>‘Questioning’ and ‘concluding talk’ phases | Exmanent topics translated into inmanent questions:<br>Early life influences<br>Early Ideas about self<br>Early adult influences<br>Work<br>Present position<br>The position of engagement<br>Feminist activism                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |

After the pilot interview was conducted, the researcher prepared a report with major findings concerning the interview scheme in order to adjust it and reframe how questions were formulated and what was learned about the participant as a result of the process. The final result was a “Life Story Interview Scheme” that was then translated and adapted to Spanish in order to be used with the participants of this study (See English version in Appendix I, item C).

As part of the ‘initiation’ phase in each of the interviews, the objective of the study was explained to the participants, and they were asked to sign a ‘consent form’ and to fill out a ‘complementary demographic data’ sheet. They all agreed to these requisites (To see

“Consent Form” and “Complementary Demographic data sheet” in Spanish, as used with participants, go to Appendix I, items D and E respectively).

### **Procedure while conducting Interviews in Central America**

During the field work conducted in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and due to limiting circumstances, such as how long could the researcher work in each of the countries selected for the study, as well as time availability of the participants, the interview procedures were modified to fit the different situations. As it turned out, some participants chose to meet the researcher for one interview instead of two, as they preferred the option of having a single extended interview. Others preferred meeting twice, and yet others were interested in participating in the study, but had limited time even for one interview. As a result, there was significant variation among participants in terms of the duration and amount of interviews in which they participated, as it can be seen in table 3.6:

**Table 3. 6. Duration of the Life Story Interview**

| El Salvador |                                | Nicaragua   |                                 | Guatemala   |                               |
|-------------|--------------------------------|-------------|---------------------------------|-------------|-------------------------------|
| Participant | Interview data                 | Participant | Interview data                  | Participant | Interview data                |
| Carolina    | 1 hour 52 minutes. 2 sessions  | Tamara      | 53 minutes, 1 session           | Nelly       | 1 hour, 20 minutes, 1 session |
| Sonia       | 2 hours, 2 sessions            | Elina       | 1 hour, 9 minutes, 1 session    | Leticia     | 1 hours, 4 minutes, 1 session |
| Raquel      | 2 hours 05 minutes, 2 sessions | Selma       | 3 hours, 52 minutes, 2 sessions | Clarisa     | 1 hour, 23 minutes, 1 session |
| Dilsia      | 3 hours, 2 sessions            | Maribel     | 1 hour, 35 minutes, 1 session   | Lilian      | 1 hour, 9 minutes, 1 session  |
| Sara        | 1 hour 49 minutes, 1 session   | Leda        | 1 hour, 58 minutes, 1 session   | Odilia      | 1 hour, 34 minutes, 1 session |
| Mireya      | 1 hour 30 minutes, 1 session   | Edith       | 1 hour, 20 minutes, 1 session   | Paulina     | 1 hour, 54 minutes            |

Concerning the environment where the interviews were conducted, in the cases of the Salvadoran women, Sonia, Raquel, Dilsia and Sara preferred to be interviewed in their offices or working places. In the case of Mireya, the first interview took place in her office and the second at her home, whereas Carolina chose to have it in a restaurant, where the noise sometimes became a problem. All of them agreed to have their interviews recorded. The women who were interviewed at their offices in their feminist organizations seemed to

feel more at ease and able to openly express their emotions than the ones in restaurants. In a few occasions, some of the participants cried, whereas others, switched topics when they felt overwhelmed. In those occasions, as a researcher, I followed the emotional need of the participant, whether it was to go deeper into the topic (like in the case of Dilsia who used a long period of time during the interview to refer to her family losses during the war or Raquel, who openly said that she did not want to discuss in deep terms her war experiences). In neither of these meetings, these women tried to conceal the fact that they were being interviewed. In the case of Carolina, who chose the restaurant, nobody seemed to notice that an interview was taking place, as the restaurant was a fast-food place, filled with families busy with children and apparently inattentive of what was happening around them. All the women seemed to react positively –even enthusiastically- to the idea of a Salvadoran researcher based in Europe collecting data about their lives and using it for her doctoral dissertation.

In the case of the Nicaraguan women, Tamara, Elina, Selma and Edith preferred to be interviewed in their offices. In the cases of Leda and Maribel the interviews took place at their homes. Also, all of them agreed to have their interviews recorded. The women who were interviewed at home felt very comfortable and expanded on the information provided: Leda spoke for two hours and Maribel even confided secrets (which she then later asked to be removed from the transcription); but also the women who spoke from their offices –with the exception of Tamara, who actually insisted on keeping the interview short, as she had many other work appointments- also took their time to tell their stories and answer questions. Particularly exceptional was the case of Selma, who devoted the longest period of time to the two interviews expanding in family matters and her own political positions. Most of the women were able to openly tell their stories of dissatisfaction with the Sandinista regime as they gradually became feminists during the post-revolutionary period (1979-1990), a topic that was sensitive at the time of the interviews, given the fact that the Sandinista party still held political power and had a open policy of questioning feminist activities. Thus, expressing their critical opinions about the Sandinistas openly, reassured me as a researcher that these women trusted me enough to share their political opinions at the time. In the case of Maribel, one traumatic experience emerged when she spoke of her time fighting against the ‘Contras’ during the post-revolutionary period, where she seemed emotionally affected. Overall all the Nicaraguan women found valuable that a fellow Salvadoran –feminist researcher was interested in Nicaraguan feminisms.

Finally, in the cases of the Guatemalan women, Nelly, Lilian and Paulina were interviewed in their offices, whereas Clarisa and Odilia in restaurants where they felt comfortable. Leticia preferred to be interviewed at her home. Again, all of them agreed to have their interviews recorded. In the case of Clarisa, as a lesbian feminist, it was important to be reassured of the fact that I was an academic researcher and that she would be safe confiding personal information<sup>50</sup>. After I mentioned a few contacts (gatekeepers) within the Guatemalan feminist movement, she felt reassured and safe, and in her interview she was open about her experiences both as a revolutionary and a lesbian feminist. We met in a restaurant widely attended by other lesbian women in Guatemala City. It is important to notice that all the women who were interviewed in their offices seemed comfortable and took their time to tell their stories and answer questions. Leticia, who met me at home, was particularly kind and invited me to visit her the next time that I would visit Guatemala. Out of all the women interviewed in Guatemala, Nelly seemed to be the one who more openly expressed signs of trauma, through her facial expressions, pauses, tone of voice and general demeanor. And finally, Odilia, I would argue, really enjoyed being interviewed, and did not mind being in a restaurant, actually welcoming any kind of attention that she could get. Again, as in previous cases, Guatemalan feminists seemed positive and enthusiastic that a 'fellow' Salvadoran academic feminist seemed interested in their life stories.

The interviews were conducted in the mother tongue of the participants, which is Spanish. These were fully recorded and transcribed verbatim into Spanish. The parts of the interview transcriptions that were considered for narrative analysis were translated verbatim into English, meaning that the transcriptions presented in this study are left in their original form in Spanish. In addition, the transcriptions only covered verbal material, leaving aside those 'contextual features' identified by Cook (1995, p.37) such as *paralanguage* (any meaningful behavior preceding or interpolating the words, such as voice quality, gestures, facial expressions and touch); *situation* (features of the immediate physical surroundings including features of the participants); *participant knowledge* (of the cultural context including knowledge of other participants and of other speech events and written texts affecting interpretation); and *participants attitudes towards all of these*. As a researcher, I considered that these 'contextual features' were embedded in the context of the regional particularities of the Spanish spoken in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and the transcription and eventual translation of some of those 'features' selected for narrative

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<sup>50</sup> Clarisa shared during the interview how sometimes women from her Lesbian feminist colectiva get death threats via telephone calls.

analysis into English language would alter their context and possibly deform the meanings behind them. In the transcription, both, the participation of the researcher and answers given by participants were included.

Despite the rich information that paralinguistics can offer concerning identifying –for example- trauma features, since this thesis is not concerned with exploring meanings associated with traumatic experiences in former revolutionary and feminist women, these markers were not analyzed, though, silence (one trauma signal according to BenEzer, 2009, p.34) was analyzed in the context of discourse analysis.

In the following sub-section, a detailed description of the methods used for conducting narrative analysis on some selected parts of the narrative's transcriptions is presented.

### **3.4- Selected Methods of Narrative Analysis**

The methods selected for conducting narrative analysis in this study were applied to selected narratives of the transcribed interviews and sought to capture and interpret the experiences of the participants in order to understand the shaping of their narrative identities, and to “forge connections between personal biography and social structure – the personal and the political” (Kohler Riessman, 2004, p. 708). The methods used in this study fall into the tradition of thematic analysis, which emphasize what is said more than how is said. Social scientists have distinguished between narrative interviews with a focus on content and/or structure. A focus on *content* stems from a naturalist approach, fundamentally interested in treating interviews as a resource for collecting detailed information from respondents; whereas a focus on the *interactional form* considers the interview interaction itself a topic for investigation and the emphasis is placed on understanding how people “construct” their lives through meaning making practices. Many researchers have taken a middle ground position, where they pay attention to the interactional form of the interview, which is also included in the research agenda and analyzed in conjunction with the content, but does not replace the substantive content of the interview as the research focus. (Elliott, 2005)

When it came to analyze the content of the interviews, it was important for the purposes of this study to look at the evaluative function of content, that is, the meaning and referential function that events and experiences have had in the lives of the participants (Elliott, 2005, p. 38; Holloway and Freshwater, 2007, p. 84). This was crucial when exploring how Central American feminist women framed notions of engagement and opposition and whether those reference points have changed over time, and how their understandings of lived experiences has had an impact in their identities (For a detailed discussion of ‘engagement’ and ‘opposition’ from a political perspective, see points 2., 3. and 4. from 2.2.5- ‘Summary of Feminism in Central America’ in Literature Review). The following is a detailed description of each of the methods selected for narrative analysis, with a focus on how they were used in the context of this study.

#### **3.4.1- Mapping of Narratives**

Starting from a thorough reading of the transcriptions, the researcher proceeded to identify the narratives that were present in the material. The definition used to establish which portions of text were considered ‘narratives’ was based on Hinchman and Hinchman’s (1997, p. xvi) concept: “narratives are discourses with a clear sequential order that connect

events in a meaningful way for a definite audience". In addition, and for the purposes of this study, 'texts' were defined as "utterances that do not follow the structure of a narrative". Thus, the first analytical step of this process was to "map" the 'narratives' and 'texts' identified in the transcriptions and register them in a grid created with this objective. As the mapping proceeded, the following information was assigned to each narrative:

1. An identification Number
2. A title that summarized the content of the narrative
3. As part of the analysis, the researcher identified the 'developmental phase' in which each narrative took place. These 'developmental phases' were conceptualized by the researcher earlier in the 'preparation' phase of the narrative interview and are the following:
  - a. **Pre-revolutionary Period:** includes childhood, adolescence and early adulthood experiences in which the narrator discusses particular junctures, situations, self-reflections and turning points that influenced their later involvement in revolution.
  - b. **Revolutionary Period:** includes adolescence, 'early-adult' and adult experiences in which the narrator discusses junctures, situations, self-reflections and turning points regarding her life as a member of a guerrilla group or as a radical political leftist activist.
  - c. **Post Revolutionary Period:** includes the developmental phase in which the narrator discusses particular junctures, situations, self-reflections and turning points regarding the transition from being a guerrilla member or a radical political leftist activist to her re-insertion in mainstream society.
  - d. **Feminism:** includes the developmental phase in which the narrator discusses particular junctures, situations, self-reflections and turning points regarding her life as a feminist activist after her revolutionary involvement.

This method was applied to all the narratives that were identified in the life story transcription of each one of the participants.

### **3.4.2- Methods applied to ‘Narratives of Change’**

Once all the narratives that emerged in the life story transcriptions were identified and mapped, the following step was to select the so-called “Narratives of Change” out of this group of narratives. For the purposes of this study, “Narratives of Change” were defined as those that included or represented a period or a moment of life transition. Life transition was conceptualized as a point along the life course where the person’s sense of integrity (what he/she claims to be) or the sense of direction (where the person is headed) may be subject to challenge and to readjustment (Giele and Elder, 1998, p. 192). For the purpose of this thesis, ‘turning points’ are considered as such points of transition in life.

Once the narratives of change were identified from each life story transcription, they were analyzed using an approach labeled „Storied Themes“ (explained in upcoming section 3.4.2.a- “Storied Themes”). Finally, out of all the ‘Narratives of Change’ identified for each life story transcription, a group of five narratives per participant were selected for further analysis. The selection of these five narratives was based on two criteria: first, all developmental phases should be represented in the narratives selected; and second, each narrative should present a “turning point” or a moment of change or life transition, whether this was voluntary or not.

Out of the eighteen interview transcriptions of the participants considered for narrative analysis, ninety ‘narratives of change’ (five for each woman) were selected for further in-depth analysis. The analytical methods that were applied to these narratives were: storied themes; life story chart; dynamics of plot development; semiotic analysis and deconstruction. The results were presented and life story summaries. A detailed explanation of these methods is provided in the following sections 3.4.2.a; 3.4.2.b; 3.4.2.c; 3.4.2.d and 3.4.2.f.

The following are examples of ‘narratives of change’ identified in the mapping of narratives:

“Leda” from Nicaragua

| Narrative Number | Title of Narrative                                      | Developmental Phase | Content of Narrative Selected                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| N1               | Pre revolutionary beginnings, youth and early adulthood | Pre Revolutionary   | In this narrative of Leda's pre-revolutionary years, she described the influence that she received from Catholic religion, student movements and her stay in Guatemala, -where she witnessed racial discrimination for the first time-. Through her religious work with prostitutes she developed a sensitivity for the work with women. |

“Raquel” from El Salvador:

| Narrative Number | Title of Narrative                                | Developmental Phase | Justification of selection of narrative                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                            |
|------------------|---------------------------------------------------|---------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| N17              | Psychodrama sessions in her feminist organization | Feminism            | Narrative from Raquel's feminist period in which she discussed the healing power that psychodrama had, in the sense that it allowed her to process the losses and traumatic experiences of her revolutionary life. In this narrative, Raquel became more open about the quality of her emotions before and after the intervention. |

### 3.4.2.a- “Storied Themes”

As explained above, all the “Narratives of Change” (not just those ninety selected for in-depth analysis) were analyzed using an approach labeled „Storied Themes“, an adaptation from a narrative method used by Liz Stanley (2009) to analyze large-scale complex social phenomena. For each participant, the researcher identified a series of ‘storied themes’ that appeared in her narratives of change. These ‘storied Themes’ were defined as “themes that recur and can be directly traced across narrative testimonies” (Stanley, 2009, p. 438). This method was adapted by the researcher as a way for finding ‘core storied themes’ that appeared across the participant’s life narratives. In order to explain how the method was adapted, first, Stanley’s method is described below:

- a) In her research of Boer women’s testimonies, she looked at a wide array of material from different sources, such as official records, published testimonials and photographs in order to trace interconnections across the women’s testimonies and other publications.
- b) Her analytical interest focused around stories from different sources (in her case testimonials and commemoration documents) looking at whether and how these were interconnected, as well as looking at the wider meta-narrative that, analytically speaking, these might interpretationally add up to.
- c) Concretely, Stanley looked at women’s testimonials and photographs, and created separate levels of analysis for both textual and visual data. For the textual data, she derived ‘storied motifs’ from the testimonial text, which then added to a ‘meta narrative’ that was her own analytical interpretation of what these texts added up to. For the visual data, she derived a ‘primary narrative’ from the captions given to the photographs, and a ‘secondary narrative’ using the visual image of the photographs and also, she came up with a meta-narrative which was an analytical interpretation as well.
- d) Following, Stanley developed ‘storied themes’ which recurred and could be directly traced across testimonies as well as their respective ‘narrative threads’ which were analytical interpretations that were implicitly present within the testimonies.
- e) Then she worked these ‘narrative threads’ into ‘meta-narrative threads’

The model described above was adapted for the purposes of this research in the following way:

- a) Storied themes were identified for all the ‘narratives of change’ of one participant at

the time. In Stanley's case, the "storied theme" is presented in a "third person" voice (since it refers to a variety of accounts with different authors), while in this study it is presented in "first person" voice, as it refers to the body of 'narratives of change' of one participant.

- b) The "storied themes" were presented as cohesive storied units and attempted to capture the subjectivity of the narrator. The function of these storied themes is to retain and make explicit the 'core story' underlying many of the stories told by the narrator.
- c) In addition to what Stanley presents in her article, the researcher listed the narratives that can be directly traced to each storied theme. This process was labeled "narrative tracing". The purpose of generating this methodological step was to allow readers of this study to be able to review the narratives that were subsumed in each one of the "storied themes".
- d) Finally, the researcher developed 'narrative threads' for each of the "storied themes". Borrowing Stanley's definition, these 'narrative threads' are "analytical interpretations implicitly presented within the testimonies and explicitly presented by the researcher" (2009, p. 441) that reflect an abstraction from the "storied theme", thus is not presented in storied form. The function of these narrative threads is to make explicit core ideas underlying the storied theme. In this study, the 'narrative thread' is presented in either first or third person voice, depending on how the storied theme is phrased.

The following example illustrates how the process was carried out by the researcher:

1. The first step consisted in identifying 'storied themes' (recurrent themes in narratives that can be directly traced in the text) in all the 'narratives of change'. These 'storied themes' emerged as the researcher read analytically all the 'narratives of change' selected for each participant. Indicators for selecting these themes involved detecting 'keywords' or similar underlying meanings within these narratives. The following example is taken from the narrative analysis of "Leticia" from Guatemala: A 'storied theme' concerning Leticia's views of feminism was identified in three narratives of change: N4: "Rape attempt and its connection with later feminist involvement"; N5: „Grief over guerrilla's loss and feminist engagement in Mexico“ and N14: „Return to parental home: reconstruction of relationship with

parents and creation of feminist organization“. An excerpt of each of these narratives is presented below in order to illustrate how the researcher identified the storied theme and derived its indicators:

| Narrative Number and Title                                                                                        | Text from narrative:                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Indicators of underlying storied theme                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| N4: “Rape attempt and its connection with later feminist involvement“                                             | “It was the valuable openness of feminism, the knowledge, beginning to understand the world in a different way, that was the background of my feminist organization“                                                                                                                                                 | “new understanding of the world”<br>“openness”<br>“work with feminist organization”                                                                            |
| N5: „ Grief over guerrilla’s loss and feminist engagement in Mexico“                                              | “In the context of my participation in the organizing committee of the Feminist encounter in Taxco, I isolated myself because I didn’t want any contact with the [politically] organized people in Guatemala...In the feminist encounter we designed a workshop on women, violence and war”                          | “abandonment of previous revolutionary affiliations”<br>“new affiliations associated with feminism”<br>“new theoretical productions concerning gender and war” |
| N14: „ Return to parental home: reconstruction of relationship with parents and creation of feminist organization | “When I returned to my parents house, in the city’s downtown, my dad was most surprised: “are you sure”? he said, “yes, I want to return” [I said]... that was my reflection in my contact with the feminists.... there we had the first meetings of our feminist organization, we started the documentation center” | Return home to work with feminists<br><br>Start new work<br><br>Desire to start all over again with parents healing relationship                               |

2. The second step was to construct the ‘storied theme’ retaining a narrative form. This is illustrated using the previous example from “Leticia’s” narratives:

| Narrative Number and Title                                            | Indicators of Underlying storied theme                                                                                                                         | ‘storied theme’ that emerged from indicators:                                                                                                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| N4: “Rape attempt and its connection with later feminist involvement“ | “new understanding of the world”<br>“openness”<br>“work with feminist organization”                                                                            | Feminism gave me a new understanding of the things that had happened in my past. It allowed me to heal what was wounded. It gave me a new reason to work for change. |
| N5: „ Grief over guerrilla’s loss and feminist engagement in Mexico“  | “abandonment of previous revolutionary affiliations”<br>“new affiliations associated with feminism”<br>“new theoretical productions concerning gender and war” |                                                                                                                                                                      |

|                                                                                                                   |                                                                                                                          |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| N14: „ Return to parental home: reconstruction of relationship with parents and creation of feminist organization | Return home to work with feminists<br>Start new work<br>Desire to start all over again with parents healing relationship |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|

3. The third step involved the creation of a “narrative thread” as an analytical abstraction for the each of the “storied themes”. This thread was not presented in storied form. The ‘narrative tracing’ (listing the narratives that are connected to this narrative thread) was also included as part of the information for each storied theme. This can be seen in the previous example concerning Leticia’s storied theme:

| Storied Theme                                                                                                                                                           | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Thread                                                                           |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Feminism gave me a new understanding of the things that had happened during the war. It allowed me to heal what was wounded. It gave me a new reason to work for change | (N4, N5, N14)     | Feminism gave me the opportunity of a “new life” both internal and external after the war. |

#### Critical Considerations concerning the use of this Method:

The fundamental strength perceived in the use of this method is that it appears to provide a solution concerning the question of identifying themes within narratives while retaining their storied/narrative form, which is less likely to occur when using methods such as coding or content analysis as a way of abstracting themes out of texts. In the context of this study, retaining narrative form is important, because of the following reasons: 1. It sustains consistency within the narrative framework of the data analysis. 2. It offers a way of staying close to the ‘inmanent’ language presented by the participant during the interview. 3. It offers the possibility to locate meanings that appear in individual stories in relation to a wider context of national and trans-national stories by abstracting connections relevant for the study. 4. The ‘core storied themes’ summarize fundamental constructions within the narratives.

On the other side, potential difficulties in the application of the method, may lead to a problem highlighted by Stanley (2009: 445) who in her work argued how, when dealing with large and complex amounts of data, applying methods grounded in narrative inquiry, can lead to create extremely large amounts of analytical material tied to particular stories,

where at some point, working in-depth is not possible, and less so to ‘tell it all’. Therefore, a potential risk may involve the creation of large amounts of themes which may be difficult to process in analytical terms.

In order to respond to this challenge, the researcher proposed the categorization of storied themes into two areas: “progression/regression” and “opposition/engagement” in order to look for ways of reducing the amount of data and systematize findings in regards to the research questions. These two classifications are described below:

#### 3.4.2.a.i- Progression/Regression in “Storied Themes”

The category “Progression/Regression” refers to a theoretical distinction of narrative form developed by Gergen and Gergen in their early works (Gergen and Gergen, 1986, p. 27), when they elaborated on the ‘plot development’ of narratives as a way of categorizing the sense of direction in narratives. A narrative arranges a sequence of events as they pertain to the particular goal state. From this perspective, there are three prototypical or primitive narrative forms: those in which progress towards the goal is enhanced; those in which is impeded; and those in which no change occurs. When events are linked in such a way that one steadily progresses toward a goal we may speak of a **progressive narrative**. If its one is continuously moving away from the valued state it may be called a **regressive narrative**. In addition, the **stability narrative** is a narrative that links incidents, images or concepts in such a way that the protagonist remains essentially unchanged with respect to an evaluative position. An additional type of narrative has been conceptualized for the purposes of this study; namely the **mixed narrative**, where progressive and regressive instances are present without leaving a clear sense of direction. In the context of the analysis of ‘storied themes’ this classification allowed the researcher to establish their plot development of each storied theme in order to interpret their sense of direction. This can be seen in the example concerning Leticia’s storied theme:

| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                 | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                           | Progression/Regression                                                                                                               |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 2<br>Feminism gave me a new understanding of the things that had happened in my past. It allowed me to heal what was wounded. It gave me a new reason to work for change | (N4, N5, N14)     | Feminism gave me the opportunity of a “new life”, both internal and external after the war. | Progression:<br>Feminism becomes <i>the</i> personal project that gives a new meaning and dimension to individual and social change. |

### 3.4.2.a.ii- Opposition/Engagement in “Storied Themes”

The category “Opposition/Engagement” refers to whether the narrator is opposing or seeking engagement with the worldview of a particular political institution (government, guerrilla, feminist organization) that is mentioned in her narrative. This can be seen in the example concerning “Leticia’s” storied theme:

| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                 | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                           | Progression/Regression                                                                                                            | Opposition/Engagement                |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------|
| Theme 2<br>Feminism gave me a new understanding of the things that had happened in my past. It allowed me to heal what was wounded. It gave me a new reason to work for change | (N4, N5, N14)     | Feminism gave me the opportunity of a “new life”, both internal and external after the war. | Progression: Feminism becomes <i>the</i> personal project that gives a new meaning and dimension to individual and social change. | Engagement to the feminist movement. |

### 3.4.2.b- “Life Story Chart”

The construction of life story charts is a well established procedure in the field of life course research (Giele and Elder, 1998; Smith and Watson, 2010). Their objective can be both to summarize the data collected for each individual or to use them as an analytical tool for interpretation. For the purpose of this research, each of the narratives of change produced by the participants in the study was ‘mapped’ in “life story charts”, with the objective of furthering the interpretation of ‘turning points’, ‘developmental phases’ and plot development. These three indicators were included in each one of the charts:

- a) **“Turning points”** were marked and placed in the life stages in which they occurred. The operating definition of a ‘turning point’ (see section 2.3.4-“Turning Points in Life Narratives”) is “a perceptual road mark along the life course. They represent individuals’ subjective assessment of continuities and discontinuities over their lives”. (Hareven and Masaoka, 1988). These need to be distinguished from role transitions, in the sense that they represent a substantial change from the direction in which the person is heading and can be only recognized as the person looks at the past (Clausen, 1998).
- b) **The “Developmental Phases”** (see point 3 in 3.4.1- ‘Mapping of Narratives’) were organized in the life story charts based on a distinction between the “telling” and the “told”, introduced by Elliot Mishler (1986). The “telling” refers to how individuals

narrate the story of their lives often digressing from a temporal order and a unitary story line or by making comments without clear temporal markers. The “told” refers to the process of reassembling selected episodes into chronologically ordered series constructing an order of the told from the telling. For the purpose of this research, the “Developmental Stages” and their episodes were organized in chronological order according to “the told” by the participants.

- c) **“Plot Development”** Furthermore, the episodes that belong to each life stage were classified as progressive, regressive, mixed or stable. (See 3.4.2.a.i- ‘Progression/Regression in Storied Themes’). This classification was conducted based on the previous reading of all the narratives of change for each participant conducted by the researcher (while doing the mapping of narratives) where it was possible to assign all these narratives to one of the plot development types listed above. This process of labeling is not an in-depth analysis of plot development as the one conducted in the following section (see 3.4.2.c-Dynamics of Plot Development).

Critical Considerations concerning the use of this Method:

Turning points are considered as a crucial area of interest for the purposes of this research project, as this study is concerned with identity transition that is informed by a radical change of direction in the life course, which is the case in the lives of many Central American women revolutionaries, who found themselves getting involved in guerilla movements and later in feminist organizations, given certain experiences and junctures which, at a given point in their lives, represented a discontinuity from a ‘traditional’ life path. As argued by Hutchison (2007:18) life course trajectories are seldom smooth and predictable, involving discontinuities, or sudden breaks, and events that become turning points produce lasting shifts in the life course. Inertia is a force that tends to keep us on a particular trajectory, but turning points add twists and turns or even reversals (Wheaton & Gotlib, 1997). Indeed, one of the strengths of life course studies is to make visible the various forces (social, political, economic, cultural) at play influencing human lives. More concretely, and for the purpose of this study, the advantage and strength of creating “life story charts” for each of the participants in the study lies on the fact that it reduces complexity and functions as a visual summary of the insights gained through the various research methods, while at the same time, displays them in the form of an evolving life, consistent with a narrative inquiry.

A potential limitation of this method is that the “life story chart” per se, only summarizes analytical information, serving as a tool for interpretation rather than becoming the interpretation itself. Thus, it can be concluded that a life story chart without accompanying interpretation by the researcher offers limited information to the reader.

### **Methods Applied for In-Depth Narrative Analysis:**

The following methods were applied only to those ninety narratives of change (five per participant) selected for in-depth analysis:

#### **3.4.2.c- Dynamics of Plot Development**

As mentioned before, all “Narratives of Change” identified in the transcriptions were analyzed using the method of “Storied Themes”; and as part of this method, “Dynamics of Plot Development” were identified for each of these “Storied Themes”. Nevertheless, as part of a further analytical step, all the five narratives selected for detailed inquiry were also analyzed in terms of dynamics of plot development, looking at whether they could be classified as progressive, regressive, stable or mixed (For theoretical reference, see 3.4.2.a.i- ‘Progression/Regression in Storied Themes’).

In addition, and drawing upon the works of two narrative psychologists, McAdams and Bowman (2001) who further expanded Gergen & Gergen’s framework of “plot development”, this analysis involved the identification of sequences of ‘redemption’ and ‘contamination’ in the stories studied. (For a detailed account on this topic, see 2.3.4- Turning points in life narratives in Literature Review, p. 106).

#### **Application of this method in the context of this research:**

This study is concerned with exploring how key life turning points have shaped the narrative identities of revolutionary and feminist women in post-conflict Central America. In the context of this part of the analysis, the researcher will look at whether narratives of early revolutionary years; revolution; post revolution and feminism were constructed as **progressive**, **regressive** or **stable** plot developments, as well as whether transitions were constructed as **redemption** or **contamination** movements allowed the researcher to establish the meaning and the sense of direction behind the stories. In this section, differently from section 3.4.2.i, the focus is on identifying whether each narrative is progressive or regressive, not looking at the storied themes within which may emerge within

each narrative. The questions that this analysis attempts to address are: were these stories of success or failure? Did the turning points that lead to revolution and later to feminism contribute to progressive or regressive understandings of the self? How were these changes constructed? Thus, the starting point of this analysis was to classify these narratives of change into one of the four following categories: **progressive**, **regressive** and **stable**. In this sense, experiences of personal growth and achieving 'self-understanding', 'congruency' and having of 'meaning' were used to make sense of "**progression**". The categorization of a **regressive** narrative was applied to situations that the participants evaluated as "limiting", "deteriorating", "destructive", "against one's will", "traumatic"; that fostered an internal sense of "incongruence" or that prevented the person from experiencing a "sense of agency". The narratives that fell into the category of **stable** referred to those where the protagonist evaluated her situation as essentially unchanged. Finally, a new category was introduced for the purposes of this study, as it appeared frequently in the participants' narratives. This was the **mixed** narrative, which referred to those stories where both progressive and regressive elements were part of the story, and even though the position of the protagonist changed, there was not a clear sense of progression, regression, nor stability, but rather a sense of undergoing change without a clear sense of direction.

When classifying the narratives, a hermeneutic stance was privileged by paying close attention to how the women themselves evaluated their own experiences. Those evaluations were explicit or implicit. When implicit, it became necessary to provide arguments for classification.

Critical Considerations concerning the use of this Method:

What kinds of stories do revolutionary women turned feminists construct about their lives? Are these stories of progression, namely, of personal growth, achievement, agency, self-understanding? Or are these stories of deterioration, limitation, destruction and passiveness? This question led to the decision of using this method, which aims at identifying the plot development in the narratives of revolutionary women turned feminists.

McAdams and Bowman (2001:11f) have argued that adults tend to provide their lives with a sense of unity and purpose by constructing and internalizing self-defining complete life stories with settings, scenes, characters, plots and themes. Some of his studies have focused on how the prevalence of progressive narratives are connected to a growing, developing construction of a self that not only wants to survive, but also to improve, whose

stories are filled with redemption sequences. On the other side, contamination sequences suggest that progress will not occur, resulting in stagnated life plots.

The strength of this method lies on the fact that it allows the researcher to derive from the narrative analysis of the story a concrete indicator (a sense of story direction) directly connected to the construction of the self and grounded in narrative. It also allows for the study of the directions of life transitions (or turning points) looking at the kind of narrative sequence that the narrator creates for it, be it of redemption or contamination.

In spite of the value of the method, it must be applied with a cautionary note in mind: McAdams and Bowman (2001:29) have argued that individual differences in the ways in which people narrate life transitions and turning points reflect both differences in their objective past as well as differences in the styles and manners in which people choose to make narrative sense of life. The individual styles used, furthermore, are likely to be both the causes and the consequences of different levels of psychosocial adaptation. Thus, people who feel relatively satisfied with their lives may be especially prone to narrating them in redemptive terms, which in turn may enhance further their sense of well being. This means that, for example, satisfaction, may not be necessarily the result of an objective “satisfactory” reality, but rather the product of other socio-psychological factors. Thus, from this method is only possible to establish that if individuals interpret life in a certain way (be it progressive or regressive), this enhances either positive or negative perceptions of their sense of self, which cannot be seen as factual and objective aspects of their past, but should be regarded as unique constructions of reality (for more on narratives as constructions, see earlier section 3.1 in this chapter).

#### **3.4.2.d- Semiotic Analysis: Greimas Semiotic Squares**

In recent years, narrative researchers have used a model developed by Lithuanian/French linguist A.J. Greimas known as “actantial analysis” that offers possibilities for the analysis of underlying narrative meanings and has the potential of generating and mapping a wide variety of syntactic manifestations. In the context of this research, the contribution of actantial analysis is that it makes it possible to unveil how the participants constructed the internal conflicts lived during the particular life periods that emerged in their stories, as well as to identify the internal key oppositions that they faced in those conflicting moments.

### Theoretical Considerations

At the heart of his 'actantial model of narratives' is what Greimas called the "elementary structure of signification" also known as the 'semiotic square'. Every semiotic unit acquires meaning within this elementary structure in relation to its opposites ("actants" in the model). Thus, each position in the square represents an actant (or actantial role). Concerning Figure 3.1, the upper-left cell in the figure corresponds to a subject within a narrative and the other three possible relations that can be generated in narrative are the contrary, contradictory and complementary positions (Wang & Roberts, 2005, p. 53-55). In a semiotic square, horizontal dimensions are contraries, vertical ones are complementary and diagonal ones are contradictory, showing key oppositions (Cortazzi, 1993, p. 132-133). Binary positions reflect typically contradictory actants ("male" as opposed to "female") but contradictory actants can be considered the negatives of these two dominant terms, for example "non-male" or "non-female", but each includes far more than either (thus, "non-female" means more than male and viceversa)<sup>51</sup>. Within a narrative more than one character can realize a single actant or vice versa, one character can take more than one actantial position.

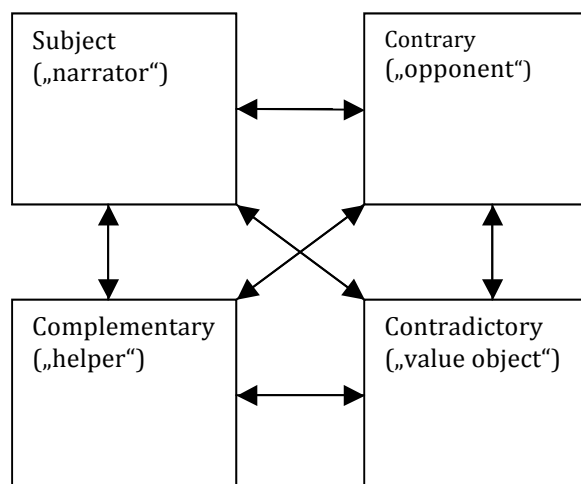
When conducting actantial analysis, an important departure point consists of identifying the "value object" for the narrator. This "value object" is an actant role represented in the lower-right cell of the semiotic square, and can be identified by asking the following: what did the narrator want to achieve in this story? What was desired? To detect this value object is crucial, as it allows to discriminate the opposing positions of the "helper" and the "opponent" in regards to the narrator's end goal. This goal can be explicit or implicit in the narrative. The following step is to identify the "helper" of the narrator, which is located in the lower-left cell of the semiotic square, by asking questions such as: what/who helped the narrator in order to achieve her end goal in this story? What was useful? This "helper" enters in contradiction with the "opponent" actant force, which is located in the upper-right cell of the semiotic square. The opponent can be represented by "forces of nature", "internal forces" and/or a particular character, and can be identified by asking questions such as: What stops the narrator from achieving her end goal? What makes it difficult? Who or what resisted the achievement of this end goal? Thus, the "opponent" represents views that would enter in conflict with those of the helper. These roles constitute cultural descriptions of the situations of conflict experienced by the narrators (Cortazzi,

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<sup>51</sup> For more on the Greimas Semiotic square, see:

<http://www.cla.purdue.edu/english/theory/narratology/modules/greimassquare.html> retrieved on January 7, 2012

1993). The following represents a model of a semiotic square, which depicts the information described above. Greimas developed it as a template with the potential for generating and mapping a wide variety of syntactic manifestations:



**Figure 3.1: Greima's elementary structure of signification**

Source: Wang & Roberts, 2005, p. 55f

#### **Application of the Actantial Model in the context of this research:**

For the purposes of this research, Greimas' "Actantial Analysis" was applied into the narratives of change selected for analysis. Thus, a "semiotic square" was constructed for all the selected narratives in order to look into their structure of relations. The following steps were followed in order to conduct actantial analysis in the context of this study:

- a) Since each position presented in the "semiotic square" represents an actant (or actantial role), the first step was to identify the actants or actantial roles that appeared in the narrative in question. As explained above, actants and characters didn't need to have one-to-one relations.
- b) Secondly, the researcher provided a brief summary of the main characters and elements involved in the story with the objective of setting the context for the analysis.
- c) Third, a semiotic square was constructed for the narrative in question, mapping the narrator's position as well as contrary, contradictory and complementary positions, which are taken by the "opponent", "value-object" and "helper" respectively, as it can be noticed in figure 3.1.
- d) Finally, an interpretation of the relations expressed in the semiotic square was offered. The objective here was to highlight the types of relations and key

oppositions from the perspective of the narrator, who had the focal position.

Critical Considerations concerning the use of this Method:

The particular application of actantial analysis proposed by Wang and Roberts (2005:53) selected for data analysis provides cues to power differentials among narratives, because it depicts character, narrative positions, links among those positions and trajectories of narrative utterance sequences. One of the strengths of this method is that it offers an alternative way of analyzing narratives that allows for the exploration of relations among the so-called “actant” positions (narrative characters identified within the stories, such as narrator; contrary or opponent; complementary or helper and contradictory). In this way, identifying actants and their relationships sheds light in on power relations among these narrative characters (or forces), as perceived by the narrator. Another possibility that this method offers, as highlighted by Wang and Roberts (2005: 72), is that actantial analysis produces results that are replicable and can be compared across texts.

Limitations concerning the use of actantial analysis in the context of this study are mostly based the researcher’s decision to use a simplified version of the method relying solely on interpretations derived from the application of the Greimas’ “elementary structure of signification”. The researcher has opted for a simplified version of the model, in order to facilitate the integration of this method’s findings into the results produced by other methods, with the objective of avoiding an overload of information.

#### **3.4.2.e- Deconstruction**

Deconstruction is both a philosophical school and a method for analytical inquiry, which originated as a strategy of critical analysis developed by philosopher Jacques Derrida to examine unquestioned metaphysical assumptions and internal contradictions in philosophical and literary language. Scholars from different disciplines of the social sciences have advocated its use as the so called ‘deconstructionists’ tend to focus on close readings looking at how texts refer to other texts in order to uncover what is left or ignored, or silenced, trying to reveal the illogical and paradoxical aspects it (Silverblatt and Eliceiri 1997, p. 47).

In a way, deconstruction ‘interrogates’ a text with the intention to find what it does rather than what it says. Deconstruction has been considered a kind of philosophy, a tool for subversion, or a technique of reading (Czarniawska, 2004). As a form of analysis, as it is

taken in this study, Johnson's (1980, p. 5) frequently quoted definition emphasizes the contribution of deconstructive practice: "deconstruction is not synonymous with destruction. It is in fact much closer to the original meaning of the word analysis, which etymologically means to 'undo' – a virtual synonym for "to-deconstruct". The deconstruction of a text... proceeds by the careful teasing of warring forces of signification within the text itself. If anything is destroyed is the claim to unequivocal domination of one mode of signifying over another. A deconstructive reading is a reading that analyzes the specificity of a text's critical difference from itself".

### **Application of this method in the context of this research**

In the context of this research, the contribution of deconstructive analysis is that key oppositions and conflicts that emerged from the texts were further explored, in order look at the complexity of the forces of signification in the women's life story narratives, and thus, understand how identity negotiation takes place. Following a deconstructive approach for narrative analysis proposed by B. Czarniawska (2004, p. 97) the following analytic strategies were used in deconstructing or analyzing at the micro-level the selected group of narratives of change. These techniques included:

- a) **Examining silences**, noting what was not said in the narration, looking at who or what was excluded; for example by the use of pronouns such as 'we'.
- b) **Attending to disruptions and contradictions**, by looking at places where a text failed to make sense or did not continue further.
- c) **Interpreting metaphors as a source of meanings**, in the context of this study, by looking and analyzing the *source* and *target* of these metaphors. Metaphors are conceptual categories that can be defined as poetic linguistic expressions where a linguistic form is used outside of its normal conventional meaning. A conventional metaphor is a partial mapping of one conceptual domain (source domain) to another conceptual domain (target domain) (Dobrovol'skij and Piirainen, 2005, p. 122).
- d) **Collective/subjective**: as it has been argued previously (see section 2.3.1- 'Overview of main concepts of identity formation and development' in literature review) identity is created in community. Narrators often express an internalized 'community' in the form of a "collective subjective". In the context of this study, the 'colective subjective' was identified and analyzed using indicators, such as:

- A **“plural subject”**: in some cases, stories do not introduce a first person singular subject of autobiography, but they present a plural subject. In this sense, “singularity achieves its identity as an extension of the collective... meaning that the singularity represents the plural not because it replaces the whole, but because the speaker is a distinguishable part of a whole” (Sommer, 1988, p. 108).
- **Making explicit instances of “collective self”** by drawing/extrapolating/infering them (when not made explicitly clear) in the participants’ life stories.

Critical Considerations concerning the use of this Method:

As Czarniawska (2004:100) has argued, both structuralist and post-structuralist analysis have managed to change the central question of narrative analysis from: “What does a text say?” to “How does a text say it?” Deconstructivists – she argues- show that the ‘how’ [a narrative is presented] contains a ‘why’. Thus, in the context of this study, deconstructive methods are considered as a way to analyze the discursive choices that participants made (the how) in order to destabilize a ‘one-sided’ reading of their stories and the meanings that they constructed for their lives (the why).

The strength of conducting deconstructive analysis has been outlined by Gregory Eiselein (2006) in his course on “Literary Criticism” when discussing deconstructive reading as a way of unveiling how texts say something different from what they intend to mean, or do not always mean what they say. This analytical task, in his view, is best explored when looking at “errors, gaps, ironies, silences, paradoxes, shifts or breaks, contradictions, conflicts, fissures, digressions, ambiguities, puns, multiple meanings, linguistic quirks, inter-textuality, repetitions, corruptions...” To put it in the context of this research study, a potential advantage of applying deconstructive techniques to life story narratives is that it opens the possibility to explore critically the discourses that the women attempted to legitimize through the selection of their words, the meanings conveyed, what was said in their stories, and equally important, what was not said. In their narratives, women that participated in this study constructed a certain sense of reality emphasizing worldviews that prioritize ideological positions that ought to be critically explored. This exploration takes the form of deconstructive analysis.

In spite of the previous discussion, deconstruction as an analytical tool is not free of criticism itself. Sometimes deconstruction has been equated to destruction, particularly when deconstruction unveils absurdities, oddities, unmask strategies, and tears apart what

has been said in a text without “resituation” (Boje, 2001). Resituation refers to what the ultimate purpose of deconstruction should be, namely, to re-author a text so that a balance of views is attained, restoring the plot beyond dominant hierarchies. In other words, it could be argued that deconstruction well conducted, opens a story for resignification by the deconstructionist, which implies going beyond discovering what the text does, and why does it do it, but more importantly, to create new directions, which can ultimately be deconstructed again. From this perspective, the risk lies on carrying deconstruction without resituation. In the context of this study, again, a challenge is to incorporate the insights gained through the various methods in the framework of a narrative analysis that can integrate and benefit from the various insights gained through the multiple methods used.

#### **3.4.2.f- Life Story Summaries**

After conducting the analysis of the ‘storied themes’ and applying the analytical methods described above to the narratives of change, a ‘life story summary’ was elaborated the analytical process, and presents a description of the most relevant aspects of the participant’s life, incorporating elements of their life story which are constructed chronologically, as well as the impact of turning points during the life phases.

#### **3.4.3- Putting the Methods Together: A Pluralist Narrative Analysis Approach**

As argued by Squire, Andrews & Tamboukou, (2008, p. 1f) differently from other traditions of qualitative analysis (i.e. content analysis or grounded theory), narrative research does not offer overall rules such as categories in which to focus, or clear accounts on how to analyze the data, or rules about the best level at which to study stories, just to mention a few. Furthermore, there is currently a wide variability in how researchers conceptualize what is narrative, how to study it and why it is important - as material, method or route - to the understanding of psychological or social phenomena. There are different forms of narrative research and depending on the particular assumption on how to consider the data, then the focus is on how to interpret and make sense of it may change.

One of the ways in which narrative analysis can be conducted is rooted on ideas coming from narrative psychology, as it is the case with this study. This approach has a strong focus on the content of the narrative, particularly looking at specific events that feature significantly in a person’s life and are the driving force for the production of narrative (Crossley in: Lyons & Coyle, 2007). Narrative psychology researchers are interested

in learning something about the light that those narratives shed upon psychological and social (constructed) realities, which is not data transparently available through an interview, a transcript or a biographical script. These data have to be achieved through a process of interpretation and engagement with the text that requires a series of analytical steps, that have been outlined by Crossley (2007, p. 135f) as a narrative psychologist, and that can illustrate what is it that the combined use of analytical methods seek to achieve together in this study. A more detailed explanation follows:

The first step in Crossley's schema refers to the importance of the researcher's reading and familiarizing with the text that will be analyzed. In the case of this study, this step was achieved through the method of 'mapping of narratives'. After the mapping, the second analytical step involves identifying important concepts to look for in the narrative texts (themes and images), which in this study was achieved through the identification of 'storied themes' on one side, and of metaphors, as a way of paying attention to the language used by the narrators. The third step involves identifying the narrative tone conveyed in the content, form or manner in which the story is told, which in this study was achieved through the exploration of the dynamics of plot development and semiotic analysis, along with the study of silences, inconsistencies and the plural self through deconstruction. A fourth step, involves trying to draw a 'rough map' of the picture that emerged from the interview. This was achieved through the creation of 'life story charts' which visualized and put together the different insights gained from the previous steps. Finally, the fifth step involves weaving all this together into a coherent story, which was achieved through the creation of the life story summaries for each of the participants stories selected for analysis.

Ultimately, as Crossley points out (2007, p. 142) narrative psychological analysis is all about the quality of the interpretation and the researcher's ability to put together a coherent understanding of personal and cultural meanings conveyed by the story tellers. One way of achieving this can be through the combined use of a variety of methods which can contribute to the extraction of a wider range of meanings, but also offer a form of within-method triangulation that encourage the viewing of narrative data from several perspectives, broadening the number of findings made into the texts (Frost, 2009, p. 23f). This approach is called plural narrative analysis, which has been widely supported by researchers studying the changing identities of women and has informed the methodological approach of this study.

### 3.5- Ethics in Narrative Research

Conducting narrative research entails a different type of ethics from studies that use statistical data, as personal narratives deal with individual's life meanings and personal identity. Furthermore, getting involved in this kind of research has the potential to become a significant transformational experience for participants (Holloway and Freshwater, 2007, p. 56). The kind of participant involvement that narrative research entails comes with a greater responsibility for the researcher, who needs to be aware of the impact of this approach onto those who narrate their life experiences.

Despite the fact that narrative research seems to give participants the opportunity to ,control' and ,assert' their own views and experiences as they choose to, as opposed to other kinds of methodologies where ,data collection methods' are more structured, because of the reasons previously discussed, there are clear risks involved when working with narrative methodology. Elliott (2005, p. 135-144) presents a comprehensive overview of potential pitfalls that come with the territory and can be summarized as follows:

- a) **Elicited suffering:** Painful or overly stressful themes can emerge in narrative interviews, where participants are not able to protect themselves from the wounds of re-telling a difficult or even a traumatic experience. This requires that the interviewer is experienced enough to manage the interaction as to minimize any long-term effect of the research experience on the participant. This also demonstrates that the interview can be difficult for the interviewer as well.
- b) **Variable impact:** The research interview does not have the same impact on all respondents. Some individuals may find the experience helpful, as it gives them a chance to reflect on their lives and make decisions. For others, it may be a difficult experience that confronts them with failures or flaws in their lives.
- c) **Problematic interpretations:** The recognition that personal narrative is firmly bound up with individual identities raises questions about the impact of the data analysis on the research participant. In this sense, a researcher's deconstruction and interpretation of personal narratives, if not presented sensitively, may undermine the participant's attempt to maintain his or her ontological security. If the analysis

and interpretation of the interview focuses not on the content but rather on the structure or form of the narratives, and if the analysis includes a discussion of the participant's identity, the participants may sometimes feel deceived.

- d) **Confidentiality:** it is a key ethical principle that confidentiality and anonymity of those who participate in a research process should be respected; however, once a combination of attributes and experiences is ascribed to a case, it can be very difficult to ensure that the case does not become recognizable by those who know them. In case studies, it is clear that even if a few details are changed and a pseudonym is used to disguise the individuals involved, it is likely that they will be recognized by family and friends.

#### **Ethical considerations in the context of this research**

Protecting ethical rights and the emotional well-being of participants in this study has been of significant interest for the researcher, but as Elliott has argued, finding the 'best possible' solutions to risks involved in narrative research does not guarantee that informants may not experience some kind of impact from this experience one way or the other, particularly given the fact that the participants of this study were expected to disclose war-related experiences. What follows is a description of some considerations and measures taken by the researcher when protecting the rights and well-being of the participants of this study:

- a) **Regarding control of what is told and elicited suffering:** while reviewing the "consent form" before starting the interview, the researcher emphasized to the participants some of the key points of the terms of their consent:
- Their participation is voluntary, and there is no pressure to participate in the study
  - They have the freedom to decline answering questions that they don't want to answer
  - They can decide at any time during the interview that they do not want to participate any longer and that the information given would not enter the study.
  - They would have access to the transcript after the interview and they can veto

any portion of the text if they wished to do so.

As a result of openly stating the terms of their consent, participants in general felt more comfortable; though some, more than others, kept a guarded attitude. Some of them openly declined to talk about war experiences. On one occasion, a participant cried when remembering her losses during the war. On another occasion, a participant asked the researcher to remove from the transcription a paragraph pertaining to her private life. In the end, most of the women interviewed showed the capacity to state their needs regarding disclosure, but it is also possible that some may have felt the pressure of “social desirability”, and the wish to have their life experiences acknowledged. As a protective factor, the researcher has training in counseling psychology, which allowed her to provide supporting and protective interventions when needed throughout the interviews.

- b) **Confidentiality:** The researcher told the participants that she would make the effort to protect their identity “as much as possible”, acknowledging the possibility that some of the life features presented may be recognizable by other(s) who may come across this study. The researcher was clear about the fact that though there was an interest in protecting their identities, there is always a possibility to be identified. All the women understood and complied with this situation, acknowledging the potential risk. This prompted in some participants a paradoxical reaction such as stating that they didn’t care about confidentiality or that they had already told many of these personal aspects of their experiences to other interviewers. Some participants were particularly curious about other potential participants, and suggested names and provided contact information of other women to the researcher. A problematic aspect regarding confidentiality in this study is that most of these women know each other, as many of them hold relevant positions within their feminist organizations and are widely known within the Central American feminist milieu, thus, the participants themselves may be able to recognize each other from the data provided, though an effort to conceal their identities has been made by using synonyms and avoiding to describe some aspects of their identities that will make them more likely to be identified by others; for example, by not providing the name of the cities where they come from; or the names of the revolutionary guerrilla groups in which they fought; or the name of their feminist organizations (with the exception of one Nicaraguan participant from AMNLAE, since disclosing her affiliation to this organization was crucial for the analysis).

- c) **Problematic interpretations:** Because exploring identity is at the heart of this study, the researcher took some time to explain to the participants how 'narrative identity' is conceptualized and the role that life stories play in constructing identity. The participants of this study were well aware that 'identity' would be a category explored in their life narratives. In addition, the researcher is committed to presenting a narrative analysis that demonstrates sensitivity to the participants, protecting their sense of security and situating her interpretations within a hermeneutic tradition. Still, it may be unavoidable that some participants may experience disappointment or concern regarding some interpretations.

#### 4. Results from Narrative Analysis

The following section presents the results from the narrative analysis conducted in the life story narratives of participants from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala.

The data presented in this chapter summarize the results obtained from the detailed narrative analysis conducted in all the narratives of change selected for further study. These results, which are the outcome of the application of the analytical methods described in Chapter Three, are presented for each participant in the following order:

- a) A table with the list of all the identified “narratives of change” that emerged from the life story narrative transcription.
- b) A second table with the “storied themes” that emerged from these “narratives of change” which includes the description of the “opposition/engagement” and “progression/regression” analytical categories for each of these themes.
- c) The “life Story Chart” constructed from the information obtained through various narrative analytical methods (please see section 3.4.2.b- “Life Story Chart” in Chapter Three).
- d) The life story summary that would present a holistic view of all the insights gained through the different methods, placing them in the context of the unique story of each participant.

In addition to the presentation of the results of narrative analysis at the individual level, a country synthesis characterizing each group of women has been included at the end of each country section, drawing upon two sources of analysis: first, a summary of what characterizes this group of women in relation to the criteria informing selection, which is the following: extensive military involvement during the war; a strong sense of affiliation to one of the revolutionary organizations that existed at the time of the war and active involvement in feminist organizing since the early 1990s. A second source of analysis draws upon the application of narrative analysis methods such as storied themes and life story charts (for more information on these methods, see Chapter Three, sections 3.4.2.a and 3.4.2.b respectively).

Finally, at the end of Chapter four, a summary concerning similarities and differences across women of all the countries from a comparative perspective is also included.

Note: For a detailed account of the application of the all the narrative analytical methods in the five narratives of change per participant selected for in-depth analysis, please see Appendix II.

#### **4.1- Feminist Women from El Salvador**

This section presents the summarized results obtained from in-depth narrative analysis of the life stories from selected revolutionary/feminists of El Salvador. The results are presented for the following participants in the study: Carolina, Mireya, Sonia, Raquel, Dilsia and Sara. At the end of this section, a synthesis of what characterizes this group of women from El Salvador is presented.

##### **4.1.1- „Carolina“ from El Salvador**

###### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Carolina's interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: “Description of family life and brother's death before the war”:** An introductory narrative to Carolina's life, it has been selected to represent her pre-revolutionary period because here Carolina reflects on the conditions that led her political activism and describes the turning point of her brother's killing at the beginning of the war.

**N2: Her political involvement during the 1980s and grief over those who died:** This narrative from Carolina's revolutionary period was selected because it describes how she became involved in political action with revolutionary organizations and her reflections upon the losses of those years.

**N8: “Early influences”:** a narrative of Carolina's childhood and adolescence that was selected because it describes the impact that social class differentiation and discrimination had on her view regarding social consciousness.

**N14: “Feminism after the war”:** This narrative from Carolina's feminist period was selected because here she reflects on how she came to know feminist ideas after the war and these shaped her through the acquisition of new knowledge, new

relationships with other feminist women, and the development of emotions associated with inequality and injustice.

**N15: Political consciousness in women: the role of feminist organizations:** Narrative from Carolina's post revolutionary period selected for analysis because it presents the role that feminist organizations had in developing a new consciousness in women –like Carolina- who participated in the war.

**b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”**

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Carolina's life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.2: Carolina's Storied Themes**

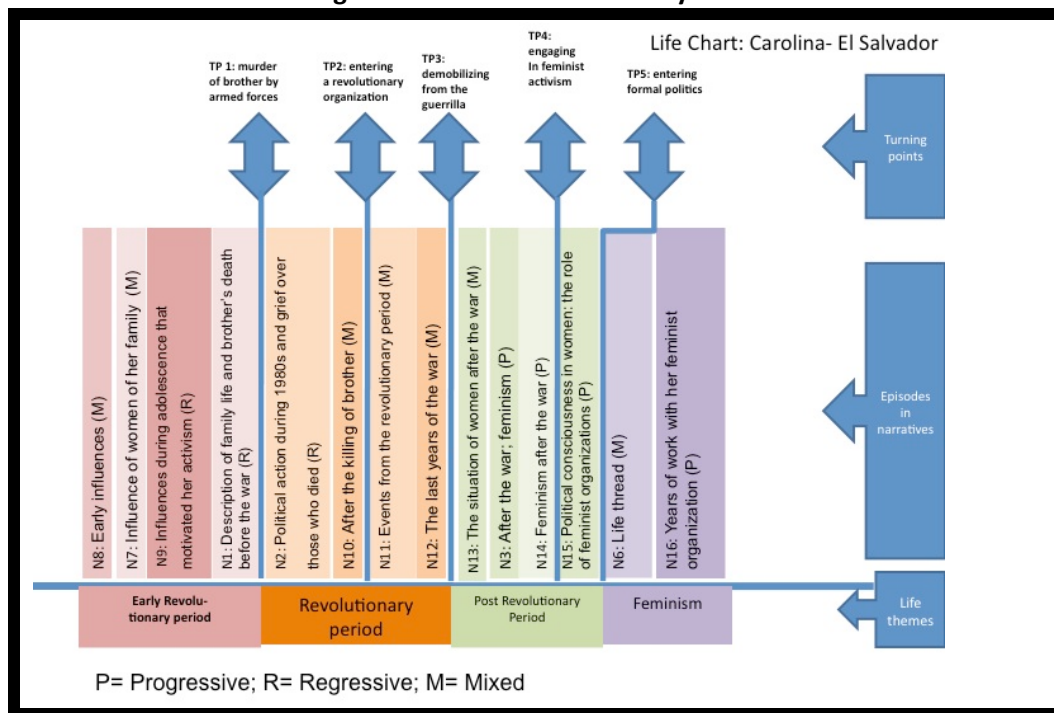
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                    | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                        | Progression/Regression                                                                                          | Opposition/Engagement                                                             |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Entering revolution is not something I looked for, but that came to my life as a consequence of the killing of my brother.                                                        | N1, N8, N9        | Experiencing loss prompted my desire to become politically involved                      | Regression: Entering the revolutionary process was marked by the pain and anger of a family loss.               | Opposition: To oppression by the armed forces.                                    |
| Many people died, and they cannot tell the stories. The wounds of these losses are still there, and I have a commitment to those who contributed to the process but are not here. | N1, N2, N6,       | Those who sacrificed their lives for the revolutionary cause must not be forgotten       | Regression: There is an unmet responsibility for those who died for the revolutionary cause during the war.     | Engagement: To a commitment towards those revolutionaries who died during the war |
| I grew up with strong ideas of religiousness connected with the right to demand justice                                                                                           | N6, N8            | My religious views were concerned with a right for justice                               | Progression: People can search for justice through a religious view                                             | Engagement to a religiosity that supports ideas of justice                        |
| I have the influence of women in my life; they taught me how to be strong, and never depend on any man. They gave me a vision for life                                            | N7, N8, N9,       | Through the women in my family, I learned to develop independence                        | Progression: Through the influence of women, I have learned how to be strong and independent in life.           | Engagement to family of women who encouraged independence in women                |
| You had to learn how to live with danger and survive a situation with constant risk. We distrusted many situations during and after the war. We didn't trust the peace agreements | N10,N11, N12,     | The war created extremely dangerous situations where distrust was necessary for survival | Regressive: The war was full of risks and even the peace agreements didn't feel like a safe place               | Opposition to a war system that oppresses revolutionaries.                        |
| A constant in my life has been the fight for human rights, and to stand against discrimination                                                                                    | N3, N6            | I have been involved in the fight for human rights against discrimination                | Progression: Fighting for human rights and against discrimination has been something that has stayed in my life | Opposition against systems that violate human rights and discriminate             |

|                                                                                                                                                   |              |                                                                                      |                                                                                        |                                                                |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|
| My women's organization had a history during the war, but I learned about feminism only after the war. With feminism we have gained consciousness | N14,N15, N16 | Though women organizing existed before the war, I gained consciousness with feminism | Progression: Through feminist organizing women come to gain a collective consciousness | Engagement to a feminist movement that promotes consciousness. |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------|

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Carolina's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

**Figure 4.1- Carolina's Life Story Chart**



### d) Life Summary

The case of Carolina highlights the experience of a woman who entered revolutionary action motivated by the need to vindicate her brother's death by the Salvadoran army that occurred at the beginning of the war. It could be argued that the revolutionary involvement of some of the men of her family had a significant influence on her decision to join radical leftist activism, but it was really the older women of her family –her grandmothers- who inspired values that she associated with social change and solidarity, two aspects that seemed to be at the core of her revolutionary involvement

Coming from a very poor family that promoted traditional gender values, Carolina grew up in a household of nine siblings, four of them males. Since her mother was most of the time working away from home, she grew up partially parented by her older brothers, who promoted traditional patriarchal values and emphasized gender difference. Carolina was a rather compliant adolescent, who developed awareness of class difference very early in life when she understood the differences between the way her family lived as opposed to her mother's employers, a rather wealthy family. This early experience with class inequality prompted her desire to succeed

professionally and financially in order to help her family cope. This was a significant goal that was at the basis of her academic performance during her adolescence. But in a dramatic turn of events, one of Carolina's older brothers –the one closest to her– was murdered because of his political involvement with revolutionary organizations in the early eighties. At that time, other young men and women from their social circle were also killed or disappeared. Carolina's reaction to his death and to the social change that was taking place at the time was to engage in revolutionary action as a way to both vindicate her brother's death and to be part of a historical situation that she felt could not avoid anymore. This was a significant turning point that determined her life direction and demanded her to 'sacrifice' her personal goals for collective ones. Carolina's involvement with a revolutionary organization, and the conscious decision to support revolution at the expense of her own goals, was clearly stated in N2: "I was immersed in two realities: my financial reality, my reality of advancement, my student dream, wanting to graduate and all that... but there was another reality that prevented this situation... The political situation deepened to the point where many childhood friends started to disappear, and I began to join and participate in the student [political] processes and to offer support to the people who were leading those processes back then. At that moment, I was studying, working, and getting involved [in revolutionary action]". Quickly, Carolina found herself supporting the logistics and communication of student movements initially, and eventually of the urban guerrilla. Though she was not involved in military action, her undercover work demanded her to move constantly and to limit the contact with her family, as well as protect her own identity. Interestingly, during the interview and the narration process, Carolina seemed to 'protect' information regarding her family and personal life, almost as if she was 're-enacting' this period of her life, limiting the disclosure of private information to the minimum.

During the war, she also suffered because of her father's incarceration due to his political involvement, which prompted her to join a group of family members of the dead and disappeared and eventually other civil society groups which conducted 'political work' during the revolutionary years.

Adding to her sadness because of her experiences with the loss of family and friends that she had endured, Carolina was also deeply moved by the high number of fellow guerrilleros who died in the 1989 final offensive.

Distrusting and doubtful, she was demobilized in 1992 under the protection of the peace agreements. During this period, many women decided to cut ties with their previous revolutionary organizations, but Carolina instead became an active member of the recently created 'FMLN' party, extending her connection to her revolutionary organization way into the post-conflict period, possibly seeking some sense of safety and continuity.

During the post-revolutionary period, Carolina was exposed –like many other former combatant women– to the emergence of a large number of feminist organizations. Despite the fact that she knew about women's groups supporting the cause of women's rights during the war, the concepts and ideas of feminism were relatively new to her. She became an avid student of feminism and in 1996, she finally joined one feminist organization as a full time employee. It was during her period working with this organization that she finally found the opportunity to meet other foreign and local feminists who taught her about feminist theory and as she expressed it in N14: "I felt angry when I learned about all this". In the end, she seemed to channel her 'anger' in working for projects that supported gender equality and policy change.

In 2003, Carolina decided to leave her full time position in her feminist organization in order to pursue electoral politics under the assumption that women needed to be at the center of decision making processes. She has been elected for 'City Hall Trustee' twice and continues to integrate both her political interest with her continued feminist activism trying to promote the development of government policies that support the rights of women. For Carolina, both her political and feminist activism are equally important in determining where she comes from, how she has lived her life and giving her a sense of direction and life meaning; this is why she talks about "having two navels, a feminist and a political one".

#### 4.1.2- „Mireya“ from El Salvador

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Mireya's interview that reflect experiences of change in her life, and have been selected for analysis:

**N2: "From University activism to combat in the mountains":** narrative selected because it describes the turning point when Mireya went from student activism to a clandestine revolutionary life. She also discusses gender perspectives concerning the life in the guerrilla movement.

**N4: "Captured, released and recovering legality":** a narrative from Mireya's post revolutionary period, describes the turning point that led her to make the decision to re-enter civil life at the end of the war.

**N5: "The birth of a women's organization":** this narrative also from Mireya's post revolutionary period describes a turning point in her life, when she and other women decided to found a women's organization.

**N6: "Influences of foreign feminism and confronting the left":** In this narrative, Mireya describes how she gradually started to confront the authority of its revolutionary organization and how being influenced by foreign feminism informed and changed the work in her women organization

**N12: "Childhood and early adolescence influences":** In this narrative Mireya talks about her parents' influence on her personality, and how these experiences shaped her interest in political activism.

##### b) Storied Themes in the "Narratives of Change"

The following "storied themes" were identified from the "narratives of change" identified from Mireya's life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.4: Mireya's Storied Themes**

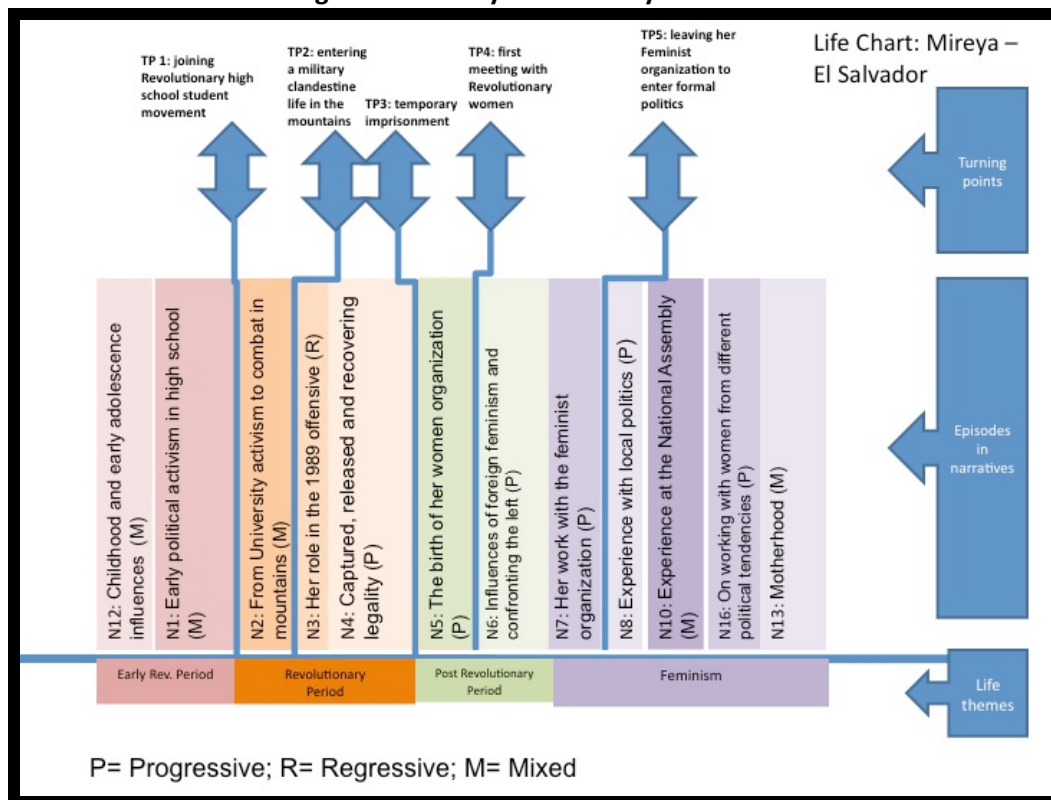
| Storied Themes                                                   | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                   | Progression/Regression                               | Opposition/Engagement               |
|------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------|
| I have had a strong desire to fight injustice throughout my life | N1, N2, N3, N12   | Fighting injustice has been a strong motivation throughout my life. | Progression: people can be moved to change injustice | Opposition to an unjust system      |
| I, like other women coming from the left, shared a unique        | N5, N6, N7        | Women who come from the left share                                  | Progression: women from the left can                 | Engagement to a group of women from |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                          |              |                                                                                                                                                             |                                                                                                               |                                                                                            |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| experience that had value only for us, and this is what we wanted to share in our feminist organization                                                                                                                                  |              | a common bond and find through feminist spaces the opportunity to share their experiences with war and violence                                             | understand each other's experiences and share their commonality                                               | the left who shared similar experiences                                                    |
| To develop autonomy from a leftist organization, many women, like I did, had to break ties with personal and organizational structures. We still negotiate our autonomy from the FMLN                                                    | N5, N6       | The development of autonomy from the left was a necessary step in order to create a feminist space for many women                                           | Regression: breaking ties with the left meant to end long lasting relationships, in order to achieve autonomy | Opposition to rigid structures from the left that did not support women's autonomy         |
| When we signed the Peace agreements, we agreed to transform the state by means that are not violent. Women need to look at institutions and understand that they have a role. Women need to have impact at different levels of the state | N8, N10, N16 | Engaging with the state is another way to fight gender inequality and patriarchy. Women can engage in challenging the state through political participation | Progression: for women, it is possible to transform the state via political participation.                    | Engagement with political participation of women across the different levels of the state. |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Mireya's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.2- Mireya's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Mireya highlights the experience of a woman with a strong commitment and engagement with radical political organizing since her adolescence years, who underwent significant identity transformations, going from revolutionary involvement to feminism and later, engaging with the state through her participation in electoral politics. Coming seemingly from a family that promoted traditional gender values, Mireya felt nevertheless called to do things in a 'less traditional' way than what seemed to be expected of young women at the time. Both her parents promoted in her the value of education and performance: she was taught to read early in her life by her father, and her mother always insisted on the value of good grades and academic effort. These influences prompted Mireya to develop the early perspective that she had to be capable to 'manage on her own'. Nevertheless, it was her experience as a summer worker in a factory that opened her eyes to a common reality in El Salvador: extreme class inequality. As a young worker (she started working in this factory being only twelve years old) she was moved by the extreme class differences between the 'owner' of the factory and how workers had to struggle with transportation and food. Though Mireya 'lacked' the words to make sense of these class differences, she possibly developed a very early perception of what social injustice was about. These early influences shaped her strong engagement with the revolutionary student movement of the 1970s in El Salvador. She joined students protesting for the raise of prices of public transportation, and from there, she only deepened her political participation: she entered the "Revolutionary Action of High School Students", followed by her affiliation with Ecclesiastical Base Communities which promoted the views of

Theology of Liberation. Later, Mireya joined the group of Mothers of Convicts and Disappeared. Being nineteen years old, Mireya had a history of committed political activism in a time where political action against the government was extremely dangerous in El Salvador. In her life narrative, Mireya remains silent concerning the possible impact that her actions had on her family, but she briefly referred to a strong argument that she had with her father (possibly when she was nineteen years old) concerning her political involvement. Her father did not approve of her engagement and this prompted a breakup with her family for the years to come. Mireya did not mention if this argument influenced separation from other family members. Mireya, nevertheless, frames her youth story as of someone who either had 'no one else' or didn't seem preoccupied with this issue, as she emphasized her political and military action over other personal aspects in her life.

She entered the National University of El Salvador around 1979-1980 during a highly conflictive period, as the university experienced transition from being closed and ruled by the government to regain autonomy and re-open its doors again to students. Mireya was one of the students who literally forced their way into the University, breaking locks and removing chains from the gates. Though she matriculated in psychology, the university became for her a venue for radical political action, and she barely attended her classes. Mireya had probably by then assumed the position that revolution was her life priority, and postponed academic achievement. Nevertheless, as she had been prompted early in her life into the value of education, Mireya found ways later to re-enter the university and achieve academic success later in her life. Still, in her early twenties, the center of her interest was radical political action.

In 1981, though Mireya became pregnant with her second daughter, she participated in the organization of the 1981 guerrilla offensive. Possibly by then, the father of her first daughter had been killed in war. In her life narrative, Mireya tended to present a fuzzy picture of her early family life, and only later in her narrative addressed the experience of losing her romantic partners and having daughters from different romantic relations. As her situation in San Salvador became increasingly problematic, Mireya decided to escape to the 'mountain front', where she engaged in teaching at the "Political School" for guerrilla members. She was later assigned to become a liaison person between the guerrilla and the settlers of the mountain region. Though she did not talk about it openly, Mireya's found ways in her narrative to communicate that she achieved an influential position within her military organization, which supported her feelings of achievement regarding her political activism. Her life as a leading guerrillera was all about these achievements and gave her less space for family life, and for her daughters, who grew up apart from her. During her mountain years, she helped organize the "Women's Organization 'Lil Milagro Ramirez'" which aimed at helping women to organize around war activities. Despite the fact that she had a sense of dissatisfaction concerning the situation of guerrilla women during the war (particularly lack of recognition for their work) Mireya did not think of 'using' the creation of this organization as a platform to vindicate the rights of women in the guerrilla. The fact that she had also 'suppressed' parts of her life that had to do with womanhood (namely her motherhood) because of her revolutionary involvement may indicate that for her, acknowledging the problems of women during war was possibly both painful and problematic in regards to her revolutionary identity. This issue was not solved until she decided to 'gain back her legality', and therefore, give up her identity as a clandestine guerrillera which occurred in 1990, after she underwent a brief imprisonment with her third daughter. At the time, it became

clear for her that it was not possible for the Salvadoran guerrilla to achieve military victory, and the Sandinistas –considered the great supporting rearguard of the Salvadoran revolution- had been defeated in elections. Mireya then moved back to the capital city, and Despite the fact that Mireya had decided to give up her clandestine life as a combatant, she remained connected with her guerrilla organization. In this context, she was asked to help organize a group of former combatant women into a woman's guild promoted by her guerrilla organization. As Mireya explained: "that meeting changed the life of many... the women expected us to bring the party guidelines, and we didn't have it, so we came and said to them: 'why don't we ask ourselves what is it that we want, and if this is a women's thing, why don't we talk about what has meant to be a woman all these years. Thus, the only question that we asked was: what did it mean to be a woman. All of us were women from the left... and that question was like taking the lid to a pressure cooker. We spoke all day of the horrible situations connected with abortion, discrimination and marginalization in the context of the left. And that was the origin of our feminist organization...then, we started to ask ourselves what is it that we want to do as a group... we didn't have a name and we couldn't answer what is it exactly what we wanted to do, but we were able to answer what we didn't want to do" (N5).

This meeting, in Mireya's words: "changed the lives of those who attended". It was in that meeting that Mireya realized that the "question of woman" as well as women's priorities and rights had been relegated by the guerrilla organizations and the women themselves who had been fighting for revolutionary change. From there, Mireya re-negotiated her relation with her guerrilla organization favouring her work for women. In the context of women organizing, Mireya became acquainted with foreign feminism and developed an intimate, close relationship with her woman's organization, which gradually achieved autonomy and declared its feminist agenda. After the war, Mireya worked and coordinated this organization for ten years, until she decided to leave in order to engage in electoral politics.

In 2000 Mireya ran for City Councillor and in 2003 for Substitute Deputy for the National Assembly supporting the moderate left party. As an elected civil servant, her work emphasized both a feminist agenda and the idea that people from opposing factions were able to work together and achieve alliances –a perspective rejected by some feminists and colleagues from the left- which also attest to her change from a position of opposition to engagement with the state.

#### 4.1.3- „Sonia“ from El Salvador

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Sonia's interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N5: "Revolutionary beginnings – university activism"**: narrative selected because it deals with a turning point in Sonia's early revolutionary life period where her political activism went from student affiliations to military clandestine activity.

**N6: "Crisis in Cuba during militant years"**: narrative selected because it describes a turning point in Sonia's revolutionary life period where she experienced an existential crisis and questioned the issue of choice in her political involvement.

**N7: “Changes in self-perception due to activism”:** narrative selected because it describes how Sonia’s personality, perspectives and priorities changed due to her revolutionary involvement.

**N10: “After the war ended”:** narrative selected because it describes a transition period in Sonia’s life after the Salvadoran war ended and she started to seek autonomy from her revolutionary organization by declining to ask for compensation rights.

**N12: “Transition from violent to non violent methods”:** narrative selected because it describes how Sonia’s way of relating with peers changed from a ‘hierarchical’ to a ‘horizontal-more inclusive’ approach throughout her feminist involvement.

#### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Sonia’s life story interview transcription:

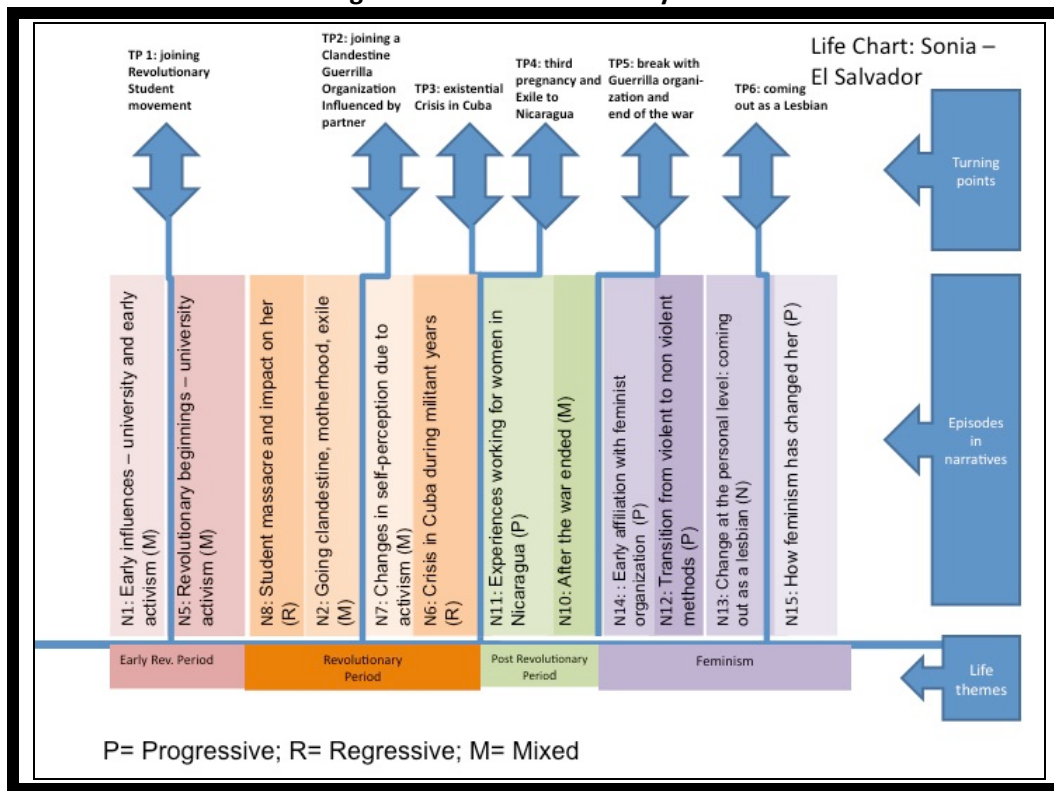
**Table 4.6: Sonia’s Storied Themes**

| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | Narrative Tracing    | Narrative Threads                                                                                   | Progression/Regression                                                                                                       | Opposition/Engagement                                                                                                |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| When I felt revolutionary, I wanted to change the world, the reality, the structures that we had. You thought at the time that you had to make this sacrifice and risk your family and your life.                                                                 | N5, N7, N8           | Changing the structures of an unjust society demanded sacrifices from those involved in this quest. | Mixed: change is possible, but at a high personal cost.                                                                      | Opposition to structures that need to be changed                                                                     |
| I got involved in revolution because of love; it was difficult to disentangle my political involvement from my personal life. There was no clarity between my desires and the desires of my partner. My life objectives went from being individual to collective. | N1, N2, N5, N6, N11, | My involvement in revolution was informed by my relations and expectations of others                | Regression: I lost the sense of self in my political involvement because it was not disentangled from the desires of others. | Engagement (ambivalent) to the idea of having to prioritize revolution and collective objectives over personal ones. |
| If being in the guerrilla was partially determined by circumstance and others, working for women was my personal desire                                                                                                                                           | N11, N12,            | Working for women was experienced like a personal choice, unlike entering the revolutionary process | Progression: working for feminist women felt truly like my choice.                                                           | Engagement to the idea of having inner motivation to work for women                                                  |
| After the war, I wanted to have autonomy. I didn’t want to have anything to do with my revolutionary organization. I wanted to rebuild everything in my life on my own.                                                                                           | N10, N12, N14, N15   | Gaining autonomy after revolution was a major personal goal in the process of rebuilding my life.   | Progression: I needed to free myself from revolutionary commitments in order to be able to rebuild my life.                  | Engagement to an autonomous life after revolution                                                                    |

#### c) “Life Story Chart”

Sonia’s life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.3- Sonia's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Sonia highlights the experience of a woman who found herself engaged in the collective goal of revolutionary change, partially because of circumstance and romantic involvement, and it was not until her later encounter with feminism when she was able to develop autonomy and the search of more personal and satisfying goals.

Coming from a middle class family, Sonia had a very traditional upbringing in which she experienced the stability of a certain status quo: her father was the breadwinner – he was barely at home- and her mother was in charge of the house. She spent her adolescence in a Catholic boarding school where the influence of outside world was rather limited. Perhaps because her family and personal worlds had been so protective and of limited scope, the University life opened Sonia's eyes to a new social world: the world of ideas and the world of dissidence.

Sonia only learned about political debates, poverty and the need to transform society when she entered the highly politicized Salvadoran National University by the end of the sixties. Soon, she was drawn into revolutionary student activism that involved a great deal of danger, which seemed almost natural in this particular social group. Gradually, as Sonia deepened her participation in student revolutionary groups and became emotionally close to a guerrilla member, the collective goals of this revolutionary organizations seemed to take over her personal life project, and after a few years in the university, under the influence of her romantic partner, she entered the clandestine world. Sonia felt at the time as if fully devoting herself to revolution and military activism was something she 'had to do', a

'sacrifice that had to be made' and entered without fully reflecting upon the consequences on her personal life. After three years, and two sons conceived clandestinely, Sonia experienced a personal and health crisis. Sonia had managed to continue her militancy, as she had left her children under the care of her parents. In her words: "When I was in Cuba preparing for the guerrilla...I had a crisis [questioning] what was I doing. I had children, I had a family, and [wondered] what was I doing in the midst of all that... I could not resolve it, and I became very ill with migraine". Sonia used the metaphorical expression: "I could not resolve that... my body resolved it" to express the emotional and bodily experiences of dealing with pain and confusion concerning separation from her family and other aspects of her life due to the demands placed by her guerrilla involvement. Possibly Sonia's severe migraines signalled that her priorities had changed, and that personal concerns became more important than revolution. Other 'identities' (mother, daughter, family member) seemed contradictory to her 'revolutionary' one. Despite this crisis, Sonia remained –probably conflicted about her military affiliation– involved in war for six more years. It was not until she became pregnant with her third child that she decided to prioritize her personal life, and decided to leave for Nicaragua. After having her daughter there, Sonia resisted returning to El Salvador, which led to a punishment and eventually creating a sense of distance from her organization. As Sonia entered in closer contact with organizations from the Nicaraguan civil society and worked in a women's project, she became aware that feminist work produced in her a sense of personal gain that was missing in her revolutionary work.

Her return to El Salvador was a regressive period in her life, as she found herself unemployed, alone, without a house and in need to reconnect with her sons and parents. This period was marked, nevertheless, by a strong desire to retain a recently gained autonomy from her former guerrilla organization. This need for independence led her to resign seeking compensation rights after the Peace Agreement was signed in 1992.

In the end, Sonia gradually entered the civil society milieu, found her first job with a cooperative association, and later, heard about a feminist organization that was organized by women who had been former guerrilla combatants. Sonia felt immediately called by this group, and joined the organization. At the time of the interview, she has worked for eighteen years with this feminist organization, and as she reflected, it has been difficult to overcome long established patterns of hierarchical and rigid communication among women who had been socialized in war for so many years, yet the sense of collaboration and appreciation for the subjective world, as well as the therapeutic processes that her organization has undertaken, has helped sensitize her and other women to the importance of building a supportive community without neglecting personal goals, which had long been an aspiration in Sonia's life. Particularly important is that in Sonia's case, only her feminist years feature an exclusively progressive narrative (which could also be the case for other women from El Salvador). This is possibly so, because she has finally – through feminism– been able to find congruency between her own goals and that of her movement. In her own words: "It is [important] to try to harmonize the personal and the collective too, and learn that we all can collaborate to this struggle"(N15).

#### 4.1.4- „Raquel“ from El Salvador

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Carolina's interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: “Beginnings of revolutionary action and facing the deaths of significant others”:** narrative selected because it describes the early pre-revolutionary years in Raquel's life and how the political violence that her family and other relatives experienced informed her decision to join the guerrilla.

**N4: “Remembrance from the war and the demobilization period”:** narrative from the revolutionary and post-revolutionary period from which Raquel looks back critically to her revolutionary years and presents the moment in which she encountered a feminist combatant who introduced her to feminist discourse and the impact that it had on her.

**N6: “Her feminist affiliation and problems with the FMLN”:** narrative from Raquel's post revolutionary period where she describes how her feminist interests entered in contradiction with the interests of the FMLN, which prompted a separation from her party”

**N16: “Feminism during and after the war”:** narrative from the revolutionary and post revolutionary period where Raquel discusses the turning point in which she – and other women- decided to start a new fight focused on women's rights.

**N17: “Psychodrama sessions in her feminist organization”:** narrative from Raquel's feminist period in which she discusses the healing power that psychodrama had for her, in the sense that it allowed her to process the losses and traumatic experiences of her revolutionary life. In this narrative, Raquel becomes more open about the quality of her emotions before and after the intervention.

##### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Raquel's life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.8- Raquel's Storied Themes**

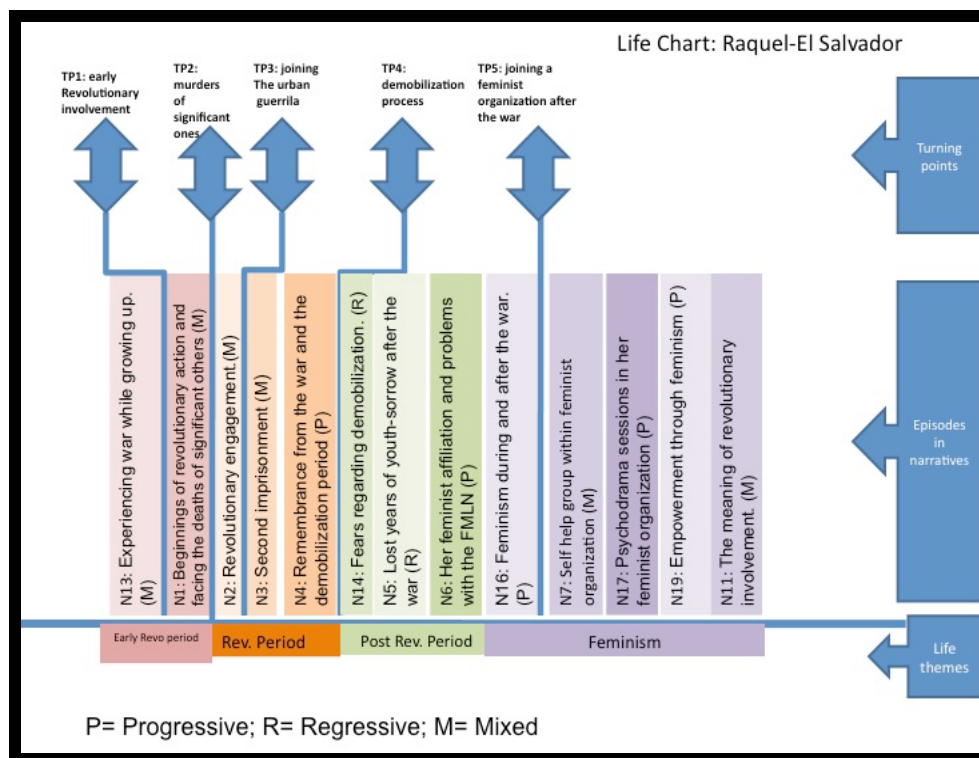
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                        | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                                            | Progression/Regression                                                                                                                            | Opposition/Engagement                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I come from an organized family with a history of political participation. My mother supported our revolutionary collaboration. She promoted consciousness in all of us. This was supposed to happen. | N1, N2, N13       | Some families have a history of revolutionary participation that supports the involvement of the descendants | Mixed: People coming from a family with a strong background in political organizing were socialized into revolutionary action. Choice was limited | Engagement with the political position of a family who has traditionally challenged the state |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                       |                                                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                  |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Participating in the war was necessary. It had to be done, like a commitment. You could not live ignoring that others were leading difficult lives and facing injustice                                                            | N1, N2, N3, N5, N11,  | Participating in the war felt like an ethical mandate for those who couldn't ignore injustice                                                                | Progression: Participating in the war was based on a strong commitment to the wellbeing of others                                                                | Opposition to a system that has oppressed and committed injustice against others |
| Regarding gender inequality, there were always things where I felt discriminated since I was a child. I didn't agree with this inequality. I rebelled against it, even in my own political party, including the men from the left. | N3, N4, N6            | Some women have felt discriminated because of their gender since their childhood and seek to liberate themselves by rebelling against patriarchal mechanisms | Progression: Women did not have to accept discrimination, they could challenge it through rebellion                                                              | Opposition to gender discrimination                                              |
| After the war, combatants were on their own. I felt insecure and pressured during the demobilization process. It was a painful period for many of us.                                                                              | N4, N5, N14,          | The demobilization process did not provide former combatants with safety warranties for the transition from clandestine to a mainstream lifestyle.           | Regression: the demobilization was a difficult process for those who participated in it, as combatants felt insecure and not supported by their political party. | Opposition to the way in which the demobilization process took place.            |
| Feminism started as a position against patriarchy, but now is a way of living, a way of thinking, an ideology that you live and reproduce. I have healed through feminism.                                                         | N6, N7, N16, N17, N18 | Alternative lifestyles that challenge gender discrimination are promoted through feminism                                                                    | Progression: Women embrace feminism as a way of life that supports their rights.                                                                                 | Engagement to a way of life that supports women's rights                         |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Raquel's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.4: Raquel's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Raquel highlights the experience of a woman who was 'socialized' into revolutionary involvement since her early adolescence. Coming from a modest family from the Chalatenango province with a history of leftist involvement in the peasant and worker's movement, Raquel was expected to follow the footsteps of her family's revolutionary activism. Her mother, also a union activist, contributed to this purpose by involving her very early as a 'post-girl' and later, as logistical support of revolutionary action.

Despite their political activism, the family – in Raquel's words- was traditional in every other sense: with a strong religious background, and supportive of traditional gender roles, their ideas of transformation seemed to focus mainly on social and economic structures, assuming that different rules determined what took place in the 'private sphere'. As an expression of these conflicting worldviews, Raquel grew up both rebelling against social macro-structures, but at the same time submitting to the authority of the men in the family, even if she had an early awareness of how unfair this was for her. She also experienced ambivalence towards her revolutionary involvement: on one side, she felt extremely afraid of the dangers that she could clearly perceive were involved; but on the other side, she felt also that her participation was necessary in order to claim justice for all the deaths and disappearances that surrounded her during the eighties. In those years, she lost a cousin, a friend of the family -who was a priest- and a boyfriend –as well as other family relatives- to the political repression carried by the armed forces.

Knowing what was demanded from her as part of a family of revolutionaries, and feeling that the struggle made sense –even if the most likely outcome was her own death- it could be argued that Raquel possibly developed a 'sacrificial mentality' where she saw the risks that she had to undergo as part of a life path that she had

to endure for the benefit of the cause, and that she could not question. Still, a rebel at heart, another part of her yearned for a 'normal life' where she could enjoy living and be just like others.

Being 18/19 years old, her life changed when she finally joined the urban guerrilla, which demanded more risk taking than she was used to, as she had to engage in military action. Her life became highly unstable, having to move from one place to the other; always 'surrounded by the enemy' as she put it. During this process, Raquel had to give up a job in a school and her university registration, because her revolutionary involvement demanded all her time. She agreed to what she was asked for, but later reflected upon the losses, all that she had to leave behind for the sake of her commitment.

In her guerrilla organization, Raquel also experienced frustration regarding the gender discriminatory policies that guided the behavior of her male fellow revolutionaries. She found another fellow *compañera* who introduced her to feminism. Raquel vaguely knew of its existence. Whatever her fellow revolutionary told her contributed to deepen her understandings of power imbalances between men and women, but as Raquel pointed out, "that was not the time or there wasn't too much time to learn about feminism during the war".

In 1989 she was imprisoned with a group of university students, but she –and the others- were liberated a few days later. Her second imprisonment in 1991 – shortly before the truce between the army and the guerrilla was agreed- was much more dangerous. In this case, she was shot, captured and taken to the headquarters of the National Guard at the time. Because Raquel's mother took a proactive role and decided to ask for support of ONUSAL, Raquel was publicly identified by her mother and transferred to the National Women's Jail, where she was kept with other political prisoners.

In December 1991, she was released from jail, and instead of travelling to Mexico – as she was offered- she decided to stay in El Salvador and join a 'concentration' of her guerrilla organization in order to wait for the demobilization process.

During the next six months, Raquel struggled with the idea of whether to follow the request of her revolutionary organization, that is, to join the newly formed National Civilian Police, or to do something else. Reluctant and distrusting of the peace agreements, for the first time in her life, Raquel went against the demands of her revolutionary organization and decided not to join the police. She also asked to be demobilized with the first group. She left feeling unsupported, scared and having to struggle on her own. Still wanting some level of connection with the FMLN, Raquel got involved in working with a youth program for a while, and also, supported by a demobilization program, she entered the university again in order to finish what she had started years ago.

After deciding not to work with young people anymore, as it only exacerbated her sadness about her lost youth, Raquel asked to work with women, and soon found in a recently founded women's NGO the opportunity to work for women's rights. Raquel became highly enthusiastic about the project, which at the time was conceptualized as a fund-raising organization for the FMLN, and became one of the founding members of the organization. Soon –like many other women's organizations with ties to the left- Raquel realized that the interests of feminist women and the FMLN were contradictory, and reflected at times conflictive world views. Again, she found herself in disagreement with and angry towards the leftist party, but also torn about leaving it behind. In the end, her organization pursued autonomy and she decided to make the quest of women's rights one of her life priorities.

Being part of a feminist organization opened a possibility for Raquel to explore her subjectivity, given the fact that the environment was opening these opportunities for its membership. Raquel overcame her initial reluctance and joined a support group and later a psychodrama group for two years. Here, she found opportunities for expression and reflection upon her life experiences: "I felt that there were many things, because all that was concerned with the war... it always brought to my mind the courage, the negative aspects of war, all that happened. Because many things happened... in the group all that was talked about. [Also about] my anger, I had lots of anger towards my mother, because she was never at home, because her priority had been the Front. That was her life. She was also captured, and we didn't know. We knew that she was part of the Front until she disappeared... I felt that it was necessary to have a space where I could put all that out there. Other fellow women had told me how much these groups had helped them. Around a hundred women have participated in these spaces. Even though I resisted at the very beginning. The first time I came to a group, everybody started crying, and I cried too. I spoke of all those situations, of my frustrations. I wanted to stand up and leave, but I didn't do it. The group lasted for two years. It's over now. I did that for two years, and it helped me a lot... We still feel that there are things that are still pending". (N7)

In those spaces, Raquel and other women were finally able to reflect upon the big dramas of their lives during the war. For Raquel, the experience was liberating, as she finally opened up and shared what had been kept inside for many years. Altogether, Raquel worked nine years in this organization, and has remained an affiliate for fifteen.

Feminism has been a transformational force in Raquel's life, as she acknowledged in the following excerpt: "At the beginning, feminism seemed to be a position against patriarchy, but now I feel that is a way of life, a way of thinking, an ideology that one has and reproduces with one's family or wherever you go".

#### 4.1.5- "Dilsia" from El Salvador

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Dilsia's interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: "Early impressions of war and injustice"** and **N2: "Growing up: social demands, strikes"**: these two narratives were selected because they describe the early influences that shaped Dilsia's interest in political activism and also provide a glimpse of how images of war shaped Dilsia's childhood and adolescent world. In this case, two narratives are analyzed as one, as the separation from one part of her life from the other would have interrupted the natural flow of the narration and would have not reflected the interconnection of these periods.

**N4: "Boyfriend accused of murder; beginning clandestine life"**: this pre-revolutionary narrative presents Dilsia's account of a murder that she witnessed, a turning point in her life, as it affected those close to her, like her boyfriend, and their eventual entrance into clandestine life.

**N10: "Loss of and re-encounter with her two sons"**: this narrative describes a painful episode that took place during Dilsia's revolutionary years, where she

narrates how she lost contact with her two sons and re-encountered them again fifteen years later. She also emphasized the crucial role that her feminist organization had in the re-encounter process.

**N15: “Fears and processes when becoming independent during the peace agreements”:** This narrative deals with a transition moment from war to the post-war period where Dilsia joined a women’s organization while feeling fearful for her life and insecure about the future. The narrative also describes her beginnings as a feminist activist.

**N29: “Working for changes that benefit other women and myself”:** This narrative addresses Dilsia’s self perceptions as a feminist and former revolutionary combatant and describes the moment in her feminist organization where she questioned core-identity values that she had acquired as a revolutionary.

#### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Dilsia’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.10: Dilsia’s Storied Themes**

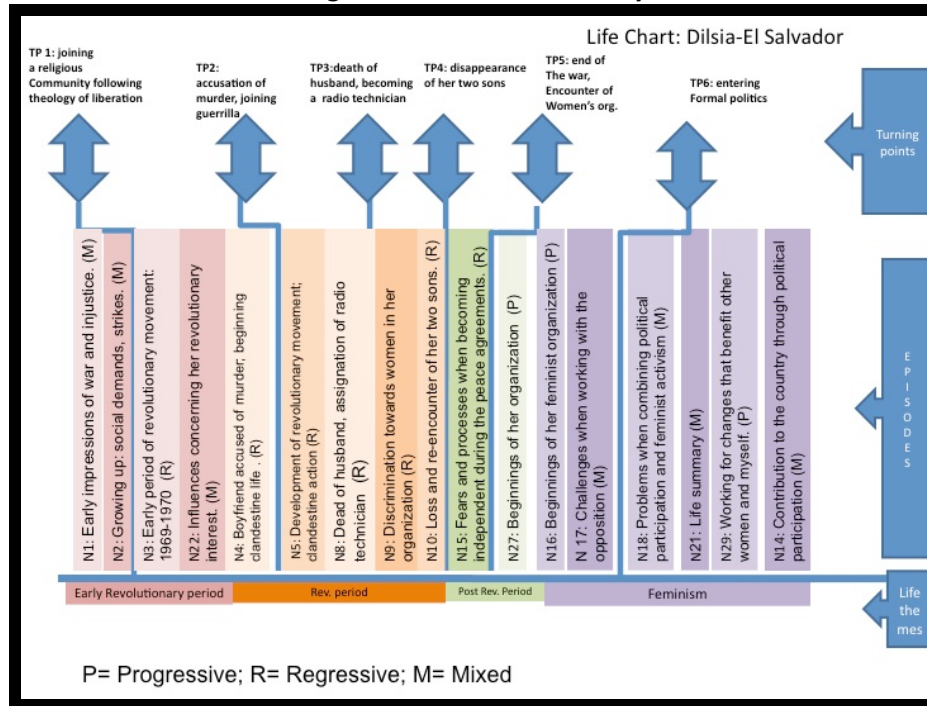
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Narrative Tracing         | Narrative Threads                                                                                                                                  | Progression/Regression                                                                                                                                                      | Opposition/Engagement                                                                                          |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I was confronted with an environment where repression and injustice were evident for all of us, that pressured me to get involved, even though I knew that the level of risk was extremely high. My involvement with the Church sensitized me to the injustices that were taking place at the time.                                                            | N1, N2, N3, N4, N22,      | An environment charged with political repression and religious consciousness had the potential to induce individuals to revolutionary involvement. | Mixed:<br>A politically charged environment – along with the development of religious consciousness-pressured me to get involved and run extremely high risks.              | Opposition to an unjust system that reproduces authoritarianism and repression.                                |
| I was born in a traditional environment where gender roles were stressed and pressed upon me. Because I was different from my sisters, I was a ‘freak’. I broke stereotypical ideas, and was not as ‘good a mother’ as I could have been. Despite the fact that my father supported my political interests, I was still expected to fulfil a traditional role. | N2, N21, N22,             | Traditional family environments may put pressure on women who do not fit the social expectations of such systems.                                  | Regression:<br>In a traditional family environment, women who have feelings or experiences out of the ordinary may feel strange or out of place even within their families. | Opposition to a family system that does not accept one’s own personality style.                                |
| I made my contribution to this country through my revolutionary involvement and at the personal level, even sacrificing my family life, following a revolutionary path since I was very young, in order to                                                                                                                                                     | N4, N5, N8, N9, N14, N27, | Contributing to revolution may involve the sacrifice of those who take part of it, but the outcome produces higher                                 | Mixed:<br>Contributing to the revolutionary movement and higher levels of social consciousness involves personal                                                            | Opposition to a system that has promoted social injustice despite the costs, in order to achieve higher levels |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                |                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                                                   |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| raise the consciousness and information levels through my work in revolution.                                                                                                                                                                                      |                | levels of consciousness                                                                                                                            | and family sacrifices                                                                                                                                                          | of consciousness.                                                                                 |
| I lost my husband, and I lost my children as a result of war, as well as many other significant people. My story may be very painful for many, but I can share it, and I have dealt with it because of my therapy and the support of the feminists.                | N10, N21,      | Dramatic narratives of loss and coping during and after the war are part of the shared experience of feminists.                                    | Mixed: Involvement in revolution has produced pain and loss in my life, that I have been able to bear due to the support of fellow feminists                                   | Engagement to a revolutionary ideal of transformation at the expense of personal and family life. |
| Working as a feminist has allowed me to grow as a woman, as an agent and promoter of my own life. It created a consciousness as a woman that I didn't have before. With the FMLN, I worked for others, but with feminism I work for others and for myself as well. | N16, N21, N29  | Feminist work can promote the development of agency and commitment to a cause for social transformation that does not exclude the agenda of women. | Progressive: Through feminism I have developed a stronger sense of self direction and consciousness that I didn't have before, by joining a movement that also cares about me. | Engagement to a feminist movement that supports women's agenda.                                   |
| The space opened as a politician and the space opened as a feminist have their own value and reason to exist. What one needs to be aware is of how to support each other.                                                                                          | N17, N18, N21, | Political systems can accommodate collaboration between feminists and politicians.                                                                 | Progressive: Both the work of a feminist and a politician have a place and can be complementary.                                                                               | Engagement to activism as a politician and a feminist.                                            |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Dilsia's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.5: Dilsia's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Dilsia highlights the experience of a woman who devoted a large part of her life to revolutionary activism. Having been influenced by the revolutionary discourse of the early seventies as well as her community involvement, Dilsia embraced revolution as her own personal project, facing the risks and pain of those who experienced the violence of war and faced the loss of family and close ones. The end of the war allowed Dilsia to join a project that facilitated her to focus on her own recovery and take on personal goals. Eventually, her desire to overcome stagnation allowed her to deal with loss and take on new challenges like electoral politics.

Being one in the middle of a large family of fifteen siblings, Dilsia grew up in the early seventies in an environment charged with political and social tensions: the workers' movement was organizing itself to react to harsh labor conditions when the Salvadoran government at the time reacted by repressing community organizing. Dilsia, coming from a family of modest income, had a first hand look into the extremely harsh conditions that coffee workers had to endure during the harvesting season.

Possibly the two most significant influences that shaped her 'social consciousness' were her early affiliation with a religious community group that followed the theology of liberation, and her father's interest in social issues. Dilsia was only thirteen years old when these two influences came together: her father accompanied her to some of the meetings of this group, and supported her involvement in their actions. On her mother's side, Dilsia perceived herself as unable to fulfil her wish for a daughter that would comply more with traditional gender roles. Dilsia internalized her mother's disappointment and felt always like 'a phenomenon'. Later, dealing with motherhood, these feelings of inadequacy shaped her views about her own capacity to be a good mother.

After Dilsia's father died, her life was not the same anymore. Her political involvement increased with her mother's reluctant approval. Her work at the religious organization became the core of her adolescent life, to a point where Dilsia later resented that she never had a proper childhood or adolescence.

When she was thirteen, she –along with other members of her group- witnessed a murder for which they were later wrongfully accused.

Later, her boyfriend –who was also involved in revolutionary action- would be also accused of a crime that he didn't commit.

Another significant turning point took place when Dilsia's boyfriend came out of jail, and decided to marry her and begin a clandestine life together. Dilsia joined him and accepted the fate that her revolutionary organization had for them. Dilsia became an effective urban guerrilla, acquiring also experience with military platoons. As she experienced the radicalization of the war, she also began her family life and became pregnant twice of her husband. She gave birth to two boys between 1976 and 1981, while still involved in revolutionary clandestine action. Because of the levels of danger involved, and having at that time no contact with her family –as this was extremely risky- Dilsia decided to leave her children in one of those guerrilla 'safety houses', where other 'fellow comrades' were watching over her children.

In another dramatic turning point, Dilsia's husband was murdered in 1981, leaving her alone with the responsibility of the children. Devastated and unable to manage, Dilsia's revolutionary affiliation organized for her a 'career change' within the revolutionary group, and trained her to be a 'radio technician', which Dilsia did for the next ten years of her life.

In 1987, the house where Dilsia's children were staying was attacked by the army, and the man who was taking care of them escaped to the United States taking the children along. This experience again created a situation where Dilsia, alone and devastated, had to manage her feelings of loss and desperation and continue 'functioning' within her revolutionary life.

In 1991, with the war coming to an end, Dilsia decided to leave her job as a radio technician, which was a regressive moment in her life biography, as the end of her revolutionary involvement and the termination of the FMLN and the revolutionary structures that as she knew, produced intense feelings of uncertainty, fear and isolation, possibly connected with Dilsia's strong losses. At that time, the only project that provided her with a sense of direction was a women's group that was connected to her revolutionary affiliation. In this group, Dilsia found a supportive number of former-combatant women who were struggling with the same issues that she was struggling with, which allowed her to find commonality and support. Dilsia and the group finally found their way to autonomy from the FMLN, as feminism opened a new discursive space where they could address their own needs and create an agenda for women. Her organization opened new spaces. As Dilsia put it: "these [mechanisms] opened the [mind] but didn't enter the heart. With time, we started our own processes and [seized] the opportunities. In 1994, we had already four houses at the national level" (N27).

The organization not only provided a full time position to Dilsia and an opportunity to put her capacities to work, but also allowed her to develop an introspective look and piece together those parts of her life which were marked by traumatic experiences. It was her feminist organization which provided her with the space of a psychodrama group and later even paid for a trip to meet her adult sons in the United States. "if I had not had a psychodrama process at my women's organization, I would have jumped [from a bridge], gone crazy, I don't know..."

It was the supportive character of her feminist organization –along with Dilsia’s resilient nature- which has contributed to Dilsia’s healing and realization that the goals and benefits of activism should also include the activist. 2003 Dilsia became involved in electoral politics without abandoning her feminist membership. Despite her sorrows and losses, Dilsia seems to derive satisfaction from her sense of contribution to El Salvador’s current history: “I think that I have done something for this country, maybe many people have not seen it or lived it, but I have proof and the happiness of having done something, [but] at a high cost... I did it convinced that I was doing something... what happened at the personal and family level, I thought I would write, but I have grown a bit lazy about doing it...”(N14).

#### 4.1.6– “Sara” from El Salvador

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Sara’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: “Early political involvement and beginning of romantic relationship”:** narrative selected because it describes the turning point where Sara started her revolutionary student activism in conjunction with a romantic relationship.

**N4: “Birth of second daughter and finding out about partner’s infidelity”:** narrative that presents a turning point in Sara’s life where she found out about her partner’s infidelity and describes how the situation prompted changes in the dynamics of the relationship.

**N11: “New relationship, party commitment and third pregnancy”:** a narrative from Sara’s revolutionary period which refers to a turning point in her life when Sara dared to challenge the ‘party’. The narrative describes how she avoided -through a third pregnancy- being sent to the military front in El Salvador.

**N15: “Return to El Salvador, entering group therapy in feminist organization”:** a narrative from Sara’s post revolutionary period referring to her return to El Salvador and her new work with a feminist organization in the country.

**N19: “life thread”:** a narrative from Sara’s feminist period where she evaluates her revolutionary involvement with the FMLN. She also offers perceptions of her life as a militant, be it revolutionary or feminist. Note: though this narrative is not literally speaking a narrative of change with a turning point, it is relevant for this study, and it has been included in the analysis, because it presents Sara’s reflections and insights concerning identity transition.

##### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Sara’s life story interview transcription:

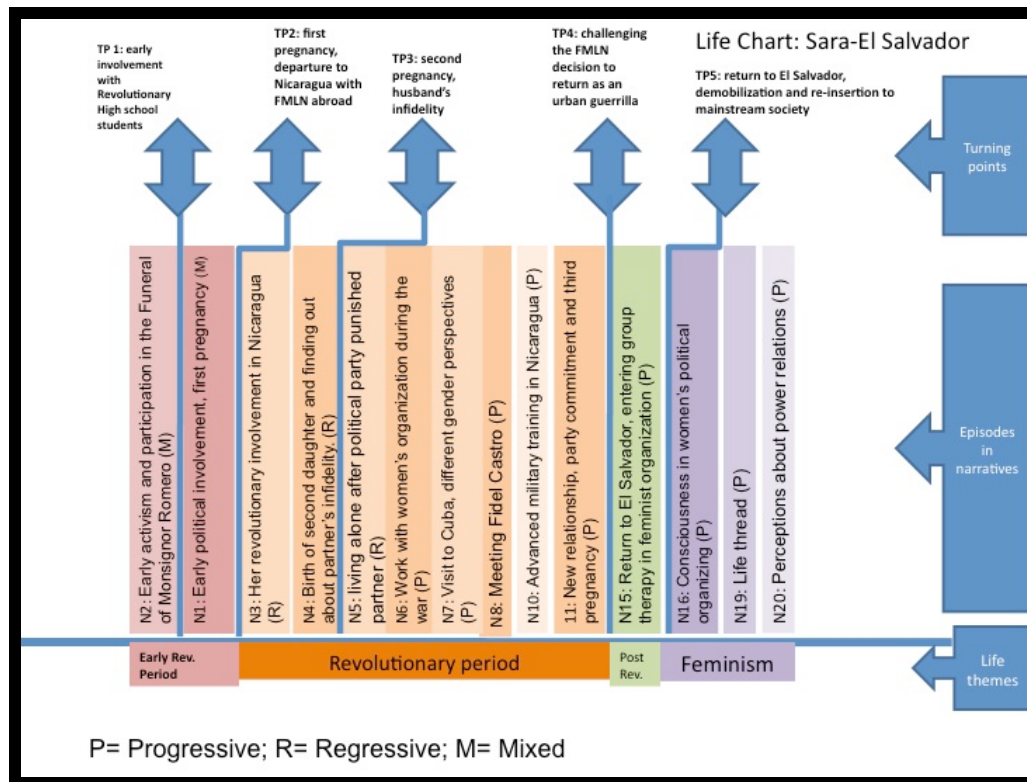
**Table 4.12: Sara's Storied Themes**

| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                            | Narrative Tracing             | Narrative Threads                                                                                                 | Progression/Regression                                                                                            | Opposition/Engagement                                                                  |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I wanted to demonstrate against injustice like other students of my age did before the war.                                                                                                               | N1, N2                        | Fighting injustice was an early motivation in my life.                                                            | Progression: young people can be moved to change injustice                                                        | Opposition to an unjust system                                                         |
| My partner was a revolutionary activist, and as such, he influenced how I lived my political affiliation, and this political commitment also influenced how we lived our life as a couple and as a family | N1, N2, N4, N5, N8, N11       | In my life, romantic and political commitments were intertwined and influenced each other                         | Progression: my partner and I shared an interest in revolution                                                    | Engagement to the revolutionary commitment that shaped our relationship                |
| A common thread in my life has been to fully devote myself to a political affiliation, sacrificing my personal life                                                                                       | N3, N4, N5, N8, N10           | The revolutionary cause demanded full commitment and sacrifices at the personal level                             | Mixed: In being fully devoted to the revolutionary cause, I had to sacrifice aspects of my personal life          | Engagement to the revolutionary cause that demanded personal sacrifice                 |
| I was submitted to a discipline that I had to follow. It was a matter of life and death to follow this party discipline.                                                                                  | N3, N4, N5, N8, N10, N11, N20 | A strict party discipline had to be followed during revolution as the lives of others and yours depended on this. | Regression: the strong discipline inside party lines was justified as a mechanism to remain safe in times of war. | Engagement to a revolutionary cause that demanded obedience and placed extreme demands |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Sara's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.6: Sara's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Sara highlights the experience of a woman who found herself committed to both a meaningful romantic relationship and revolutionary involvement without being able to disentangle one from the other for a long time, until the relationship ended –and a new one started– which prompted in her the capacity to separate her own priorities from the ones of revolution. In the end, Sara found in feminism the opportunity to gain a sense of agency and to find her own relationship with political and social activism.

Sara did not disclose too much information concerning her family of origin. Her mother lived outside El Salvador, in Costa Rica, and as an adolescent, she lived with two siblings. As it was the case with many high school students, Sara started joining demonstrations of the “High School Revolutionary Movement” in El Salvador when she was fifteen years old. Like some of her classmates, she distributed handouts and participated in street activities. Though she closely followed the political situation, she didn’t get further involved until she was seventeen and started dating an arts student, who she later found out, was a member of a revolutionary organization. Sara’s strong feelings for this student, along with her previous experiences in political organizing lead her to deepen her participation in some revolutionary activities. For example, she attended the funeral of Monsignor Romero, a landmark moment during the Salvadoran war, which possibly fuelled both her commitment to the revolutionary cause as well as gave her a higher sense of awareness of the dangers involved.

As the situation in El Salvador became more critical, Sara’s mother asked her to move to Costa Rica in order to continue her high school studies there. Reluctantly,

Sara left, feeling still committed both to her boyfriend and the revolutionary cause. In Costa Rica, she remained connected with some members of the organized left, and in contact with her –then clandestine- boyfriend, who on one occasion visited her. Out of that visit, Sara became pregnant. She was eighteen years old at the time and her mother, endorsing traditional values, pressured the couple to get married. Sara and her boyfriend passively complied, but managed to challenge her at another level: the marriage was never formally registered in order to protect her boyfriend's identity. By then, Sara had internalized her boyfriend's idea that revolution –and protecting the revolutionary interest- came first in their lives.

After giving birth, she moved to Nicaragua hoping to be together with her partner and baby daughter, and willing to work for the revolution. What she encountered was a completely different reality: his life was fully committed to the cause and his actions had to remain secretive even to his own family. He and Sara had to live apart, only able to meet every other week. She felt alone, overwhelmed with her baby and yet had to work long hours for the documentation center of the "Farabundo Marti" radio. Sara did not openly challenge the situation and coped with it in the best possible way. In her narratives, she didn't seem to question the role that the 'the party' had in her personal life. In fact, the sense of 'personal life' was lost, as 'the party' was part of every aspect of everyday functioning.

When Sara became pregnant for the second time, she decided to have her baby in Costa Rica. Upon her partner's visit, she learned that he had been unfaithful to her with another 'companera' from the organization, and that he had been asked by the party to reveal his infidelity to her. Sara seemed understanding of the party's role in this context and, though hurt and angry, decided to give her partner an opportunity. Nevertheless, when she returned to Nicaragua, she found out that her partner had been punished by the party, precisely for his infidelity and the way he had handled the entire situation. As a consequence, he was sent to the warfront in El Salvador. For the second time, Sara was left alone in Nicaragua with her –now- two daughters. She was only twenty-one years old. Around that time, she started working with a group of women who were organized around revolution in El Salvador. This was the first time that she worked with women, even though the group didn't have a gender agenda.

Being a young single mother of two, Sara drew the attention of many of her male revolutionary fellows, but one of them particularly, her partner's substitute in the organization, pursued her insistently until she gave in. Sara felt thankful to this man because he showed interest not only in her, but also in her daughters and found it difficult to refuse him. Possibly, Sara also benefited from the fact that this man protected and supported her within the organization. One of highlights of Sara's revolutionary years occurred in 1984, when she attended an encounter promoted by the "Cuban Women's Federation" as a representative of the Salvadoran revolutionaries. Though Sara felt overwhelmed by the different agendas that women from different countries had, the highlight of her visit was the opportunity to meet Fidel Castro, who had a profound impact on her: "I never imagined that I would meet Fidel Castro. I was a 21 year old 'gal' ... we took photos, we talked with him... is something I never forget.... it was an incredible thing... I felt so good, maybe because we came from the same struggle, of a similar ideology, or identity. It my life story, it left a mark" (N8).

She also attended a military training in Nicaragua where she won the third place. After these experiences, Sara was promoted and asked to return to the warfront in El Salvador. As part of her preparation for her work as a combatant, she was asked to go for a seven-month training in Cuba. Though hesitant, she decided to go and

left her two daughters with her new partner hoping that he would send them back to Costa Rica with her mother. When she returned seven months later, she found out that the girls had stayed with him, and that he had taken good care of them. Moved by his commitment, Sara started questioning her own priorities. She decided then, along with him, to become pregnant in order to avoid her departure for the warfront in El Salvador. Aware that they would be penalized by the party, this was the first time that Sara challenged the interests of revolution, and prioritized her own personal needs. Indeed, she was supported by her new partner, but giving up her commitment to the cause was rather difficult for her to do.

Sara and her partner were penalized but remained committed to the revolutionary cause. Eventually, realizing that the war was close to its end, they returned to El Salvador and when the peace agreements were signed, Sara was demobilized and granted a study scholarship. While working towards her bachelor's degree, she struggled also to find her professional place in post-war El Salvador. She had no academic background, no connections –other than the revolutionary ones- and felt 'on her own' and abandoned by the party.

In the end, Sara started working for a non-profit organization and volunteered for a feminist group that was somewhat affiliated to her own revolutionary organization. Five years later, Sara was finally hired by the feminist association and for the first time after all those revolutionary and post-revolutionary years, she started making sense of what had happened during the war years. She eagerly participated in a psycho-drama group which allowed her to look back –and come to terms with- the pain and sense of abandonment caused by her first relationship.

Sara has worked ever since with the feminist organization, where she –at the time of the interview- held the position of director. For her, the thread that unites her revolutionary and feminist activism is what she calls her "militant spirit", which she wants to put at the service of a social objective, and continues to provide her with a sense of individual and collective identities.

#### **4.1.7- Summary of findings for the Women of El Salvador**

The following summary brings together significant characteristics of women from El Salvador drawing upon two sources: the criteria informing case selection for in-depth narrative analysis and second, the insights gained after applying methods such as storied themes and life story charts.

##### **a) Characterization of women from El Salvador based on Case Selection Criteria.**

Based on the criteria listed at the beginning of this Chapter (p. 175) a series of characteristics have been identified for this group of Salvadoran women concerning the factors listed below:

- Socio Economic Factors: half of the women of the sample come from poor and rural families that had ties with leftist movements. The other half come from

low-middle class families from the urban areas of El Salvador. Concerning family composition, half of the Salvadoran women come from families supported by a single mother. All women of the sample attended school, but only very few (Sonia and Mireya) made it to the University. All of them re-entered university and obtained their academic degrees again after their war involvement.

- **Political Affiliation:** only two women from the sample (Sonia and Mireya) attended the university after finishing their high-school, and it was there where they initially joined revolutionary student movements, eventually leaving their studies aside favoring their activism. The other women joined revolutionary movements at the end of their adolescence, influenced by one or more of the following factors: having a sense of connection with the history of dissidence of their families; the influence of networks of religious and/or high-school student revolutionary groups; a sense of commitment to a romantic partner who was part of the revolutionary movement at the time, and in addition, having lost a significant person (a family member or a close friend) in the hands of the armed forces. Given all these contexts, it is nevertheless important to stress that all the women in this group joined one of the five revolutionary organizations that conformed the FMLN during the Salvadoran war voluntarily and experienced a strong sense of commitment to one of these organizations.
- **Military Involvement:** all the women were affiliated to a guerrilla organization for at least ten years, beginning in the mid to late seventies, during a period of harsh political repression when military regimes were governing El Salvador and many of their friends and family members had been politically targeted. They joined various revolutionary groups that later constituted the FMLN. All the Salvadoran women were sent to military fronts, either in the urban or rural (mountainous) parts of the country. The case of Sara stands out as she was an international representative of the FMLN in Nicaragua, where she supported both FMLN and FSLN warfare practices. When the war officially ended in 1992, women like Carolina, Dilsia and Mireya continued somehow affiliated to the FMLN which became a political party. Later, these women went on to run for electoral positions with this party or others.

- **Feminist Activisms:** All the women in the Salvadoran group joined feminist organizations after the war, with three of them eventually becoming founding members and directors of these organizations (Mireya, Sara and Raquel) and the others, holding stable positions as administrators or researchers of these organizations. At the very beginning of their foundation, these feminist organizations represented the cleavages and a sense of interconnectedness with some of the revolutionary organizations in which the women had fought during the war. These connections ebbed with time. A distinctive aspect of Salvadoran's feminist activism is that half of the women joined the FMLN or other leftist parties to run for electoral politics, constructing their political involvements as platforms for their feminist agenda, most possibly at the expense of autonomy.

b) Characterization of women's life trajectories based on Narrative Analysis Methods, such as Storied Themes and Life Story Charts

Based on the narrative analysis of storied themes and life story charts, a series of characteristics have been identified for this group of Salvadoran women concerning their life trajectories:

- **Gender and Political Socialization:**

Half of the Salvadoran women interviewed for this study spoke about coming from families with a history of dissidence, where a desire for social change had been part of the psycho-social makeup of the family for a long time. In these families, there had been a trans-generational tradition of affiliation with leftist organizations. Therefore, these women framed their stories as being socialized into political action since their childhoods, and this is how many of them joined in their adolescence either religious or student networks or groups that ushered their entrance into political movements. Paradoxically, many of these families were conservative when it came to gender roles and social expectations: men were supposed to lead the family and women were expected to become wives and mothers.

For women whose families were not directly connected to leftist political organizing, other family values that supported political affiliation processes were: Christian solidarity; the importance of education and achievement, and women's strength to carry on with difficulties. The last aspect appeared in relation to the fact that half of the women interviewed came from families led by a single and "strong" mother.

Some Salvadoran women talked about joining religious groups during their youth (Carolina and Dilsia). These groups were called "Christian Community Bases" and were for the most part permeated with ideas originated in Theology of Liberation. In some cases, the role of priests, nuns and other significant community members was critical in supporting group activities. When some of these women were very young, a strong sense of 'class difference' also influenced their perceptions about the world; be it through their work in factories (as in the case of Mireya) or in coffee farms during the harvesting season (as it was experienced by Dilsia and Carolina), where they were confronted with situations that highlighted the extreme social inequalities of El Salvador. As it was discussed in the literature review (see section 2.1.1- "Roots of inequality in Central America"), extreme conditions of inequality that supported a coffee export economy in both El Salvador and Nicaragua created deep divisions between the elites and the impoverished rural masses that fostered the emergence of revolutionary movements in both countries. In the case of El Salvador, a close circle of families reinforced the power of these coffee elites.

- Summary of Crucial Turning Points

Turning Point 1: joining a revolutionary organization:

Concerning significant turning points in these women's lives that led them to join revolutionary movements, the ones that seemed more prevalent were, first, a romantic involvement with a revolutionary boyfriend who convinced them to also join a guerrilla organization. In the case of the women who entered the University (Sonia, Mireya), some of these relationships started when they joined revolutionary student organizations; in other cases, during their affiliation to religious groups. For the most part, growing political oppression by the military was the environment that surrounded these relations. Some of the women interviewed (Carolina, Raquel,

Dilsia) reflected upon how the oppression took the lives of many people that they knew: friends of the family, neighbors and young classmates. In other cases, a turning point would occur when a family member became a direct victim of this oppression, by being killed or disappeared (as in Carolina's case).

#### Turning point 2: Life as a guerrilla member:

When these young women joined revolutionary organizations, they were confronted with dilemmas related to dealing with motherhood and political involvement at the same time (Sonia, Sara, Mireya, Dilsia). In their stories, the revolutionary cause was constructed as the sacrifice of their personal lives, in the form of family separations (as in Carolina, Dilsia, Mireya and Sonia's case) and in some extreme situations, the loss of their children (as experienced by Dilsia). During the war in some instances, prioritizing motherhood became a turning point (as in the cases of Sonia and Sara) since it changed their life direction.

#### Turning Point 3: Post Revolutionary Period/Feminism

Between 1990-1992, all the women dropped out of their revolutionary organizations and mostly experienced depression, a sense of failure and uncertainty about their futures (Carolina, Dilsia, Mireya and Sonia). After the war, many of them were referred to women's organizations by the FMLN, whereas others found them on their own (Mireya and Raquel). Reaching out to these organizations became another significant turning point in their lives, as they constructed their encounter with feminism as giving them a new sense of direction and a way of reframing their activism. This is also reflected on the fact that all Salvadoran women framed feminism as a progressive period in their lives. What is significant is that these women came together initially, as revolutionaries interested in women's rights, but found later, through their affiliation with women's groups, that they began to see themselves as 'feminists', which later implied having to seek autonomy from the left, as feminists were perceived critically by their former guerrilla organizations. As it was discussed in the literature review (see 2.2.2- sub-section on "Salvadoran feminist positionings"). Kampwirth (2002) has argued that in El Salvador the quest for autonomy was particularly hard because the vast majority of women's organizations that existed in the years following the end of the war were founded by one of the five guerrilla organizations that became part of the FMLN. Despite the

fact that Salvadoran feminists were seeking autonomy, once the FMLN became a legal political party, half of the women interviewed retained their political affiliations and, as feminists, were later called to participate in electoral politics, even running for positions in city councils or in the National Legislative Assembly (as in the cases of Carolina, Dilsia and Mireya). They framed their political work as focused on supporting women's rights and responding to both interests of their political party and of their feminist organizations.

## 4.2- Narrative Analysis of Women from Nicaragua

This section presents the summarized results obtained from in-depth narrative analysis of the life stories from selected revolutionary/feminists of Nicaragua. The results are presented for the following participants in the study: Tamara, Elina, Selma, Maribel, Leda and Edith. At the end of this section, a synthesis of what characterizes this group of women from Nicaragua is presented.

### 4.2.1- “Tamara” from Nicaragua

#### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Tamara’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: “Family influences and connection with revolutionary involvement”:** a narrative from the pre-revolutionary period, where Tamara discusses the two crucial influences that shaped her revolutionary involvement: her mother’s solidarity and Christianity and that the Nicaraguan revolution took place when she was an adolescent.

**N2: “Transition from high school to revolution and feminism”:** in this narrative that covers different life periods, Tamara reflects on the path her life took following the Sandinista triumph in 1979. During many years, she was involved in peasant organizing, fighting against the ‘Contra’ and being an active member within the National Union of Peasants. In the end, she describes how through feminism she developed a new way of questioning reality.

**N3: “Encounter with feminism – experiences in AMNLAE and the Erotic Left”:** A narrative from the post-revolutionary period where Tamara describes in detail how her encounter with foreign feminists opened her understandings of the pervasive gender discrimination that existed in the Sandinista structures. Her affiliation with the “Erotic Left” fuelled her desire for democratic spaces for women’s political participation.

**N5: “Disappointment with Sandinismo after political defeat”:** in this narrative, Tamara describes the difficult period of the Sandinista electoral defeat that in her case was marked by the extreme disappointment and anger that she experienced after finding out about the high levels of corruption in her own union. After she left the Sandinista structure, she began working for the development of an autonomous feminist movement.

**N9: “Self evaluation during revolutionary years” and N10: “Role of feminism after the fall of Sandinismo”:** in these two narratives, Tamara describes her self perception as a young revolutionary and also, how her feminist activism became an existential priority after she distanced herself from Sandinismo. These two narratives are presented and analyzed as one, because they are deeply intertwined, though address different topics.

b) Storyed Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storyed themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Tamara’s life story interview transcription:

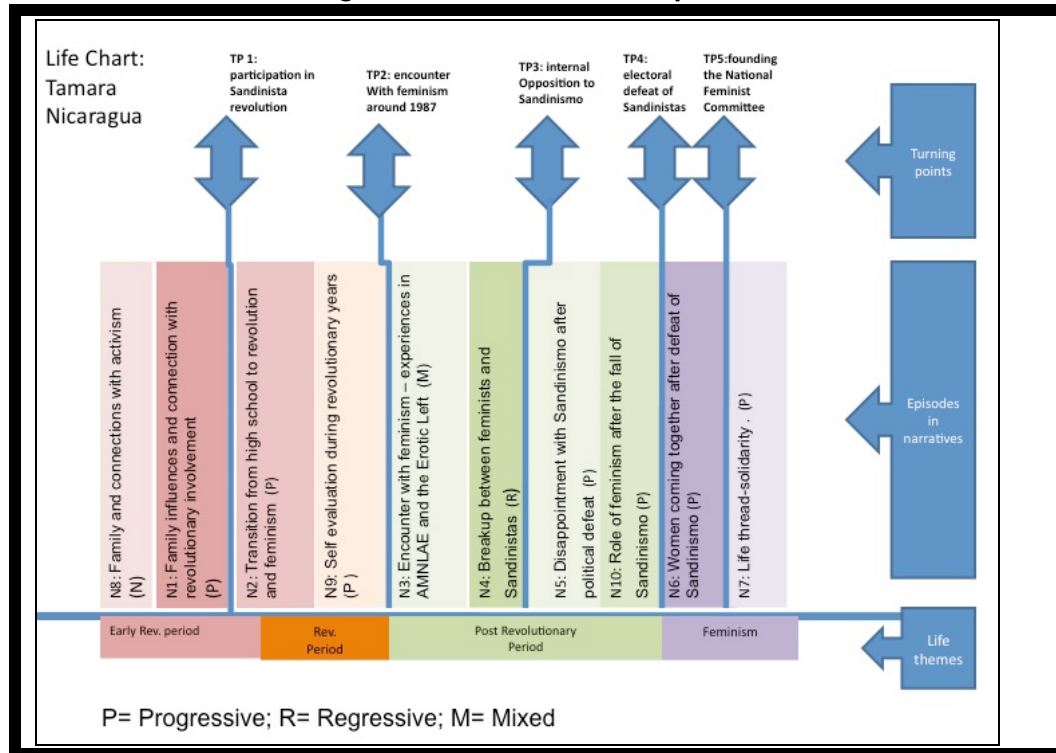
**Table 4.14: Tamara’s Storyed Themes**

| Storyed Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Narrative Tracing       | Narrative Threads                                                                                                  | Progression/Regression                                                                                                                       | Opposition/Engagement                                                                                                                                         |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| My personal/family experiences sensitized me to engage in solidarity or community involvement. This sensitivity was informed by a strong need to change unfair structures in order to benefit the poor and needy.                                                                                                             | N1, N7                  | Solidarity and community involvement are at the basis of the need to transform unjust structures                   | Progression: solidarity and community involvement are elements that support the transformation of an unjust society.                         | Engagement with the poor and needy through solidarity and community involvement                                                                               |
| I was influenced by a strong project of social change, for which I ran risks that supported transformation of these unfair structures.                                                                                                                                                                                        | N1, N2, N7, N8, N9, N10 | The promotion of a social change project can involve great risk taking                                             | Progression: Fighting for social change, even if it involves great risk taking is worth it                                                   | Opposition to unjust structures may involve serious risk taking                                                                                               |
| Feminism came as a form of resistance to cultural patterns that relegate women to subordination. My rebelliousness was influenced by my need to challenge this status quo.                                                                                                                                                    | N2, N3                  | Feminism is a form of resistance and challenges a status quo characterized by subordination                        | Progression: Through feminism women can challenge subordination                                                                              | Opposition to the subordination of women can be achieved through feminism                                                                                     |
| Rigidities and authoritarianism within the Sandinista leadership produced relations characterized by conflict and double games: we negotiated with Sandinismo, worked for Sandinismo but at the same time challenged their structures and questioned their authority.                                                         | N2, N3, N4,             | Supporters of Sandinismo gradually challenged the authoritarianism and rigid structures of the regime from within. | Mixed: Supporters of Sandinismo were entangled in conflicting relationships, where at time supported and at time questioned party structures | Opposition to the authoritarianism within Sandinista structures opened new political spaces for those who were ‘insiders’                                     |
| A new autonomous feminism -free from Sandinismo- was only possible when the Sandinistas had lost their political power. This model was challenging for feminists as women had to fight other opposing actors and different tendencies within feminism. Nevertheless, feminism gave us collective power to seek transformation | N5, N6, N7, N10         | Feminist autonomous organizing opened spaces for transformation and new challenges that women had to overcome      | Progression: Autonomous organizing can bring both opportunities for transformation, which naturally involved new risks and challenges        | Opposition to the rigid structures of patriarchy may take autonomous feminists to open spaces to transformation, but at the same time, to face new challenges |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Tamara's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.7: Tamara's Life Story Chart



### d) Life Summary

The case of Tamara highlights the story of a revolutionary feminist who was drawn to revolution feeling passionate about the idea of joining a social transformation project with a direct impact on the poor or the ignored in the Nicaraguan society. Tamara's need to commit to solidarity was adopted from her mother's Christian values and personality: "I think that my mother was super rebellious... she did things for her time that were not to be taken for granted; meaning, my mother studied, worked outside of the house, decided that her daughters and sons had to study without discrimination... never repeated to me... that my life, my manifest destiny was motherhood and being a wife... I had the influence of older sisters whose rebelliousness influenced me..."

In her case, it was not that she was socialized into Theology of Liberation –as many other revolutionary women- but what was striking for Tamara was her mother's genuine human interest in others. In addition, her mother 'modeled' other qualities, such as independence, fairness and open views concerning gender roles. At home, she felt her mother's support and security who assured equal opportunities for her sons and daughters regardless of gender. In the end, she was drawn to revolution –at age seventeen- mostly by idealism and an inner desire to become a 'heroine', but highly influenced by the figure of her mother. Despite her closeness with her mother, as she briefly mentioned, she ended up leaving her family's house and breaking up family ties in the pursuit of revolutionary involvement. The revolutionary discourse proved extremely attractive for her and

she gave up every other personal project to be part of it. As the revolution –and Tamara’s- radicalism deepened, the military needs took priority over the personal and social, and she found herself involved in the Sandinista-Contra war for a long period of time. She was only able to enter the university five years after the revolution succeeded. She studied social sciences, and eventually earned a masters degree. Tamara’s description of how she experienced herself as a young activist, or the risks that she had to undertake during her war years, only amount to explain her later ambivalence regarding her relationship with the Sandinista regime. On one side, Sandinismo was the project that shaped her youth, gave her meaning and allowed her to develop an identity as a heroine, as she described in this narrative. Her desire and quest for heroism is framed as part of what ‘youth naïveté’ is all about. As she grew older, she became aware of the severe contradictions in the Sandinista structure, which created eventually a moral dissonance. She also introduced the idea that her idealism could have been manipulated by older and savvier Sandinista militants. Tamara spoke of a pre-intuition of feminism; an early experience of anger and a need to rebel towards the rigid military structures of the “Frente” that demanded submission and tolerance for the women-but not for men. It was in 1987 when Tamara –who did not feel ‘called’ to work for the cause of women by AMNLAE – learned about feminism through foreign feminists who introduced her to feminist theory and perspectives. This opportunity made her ‘see’ what she called a “systemic understanding” of what was behind gender based oppression. This was another significant turning point in her life, as she found a venue to express her dissatisfaction with the rigidities of the Sandinista regime-without having to give up her identity as a ‘Sandinista’. She encountered other women –who were as dissatisfied with the regime as she was- but who were still connected with the ideals of Sandinismo, who had invested so much of their lives in this project, and were more eager to promote change from within, than to abandon it. This was the “Erotic Left Party”. Tamara joined the group where she found other Nicaraguan women who were by then willing to embrace the –somewhat clandestine- label of feminists. She was already ignoring some of the directives from of the rigid hierarchies of AMNLAE to whom she had to report, as she was working in the “Women’s Office” of the Worker’s Union.

As the Sandinista front had to face the threat of democratic elections, it became more authoritarian and rigid and the agreement negotiated with the “Erotic Left” party was dropped in the end. When the Sandinistas faced the election, many women like Tamara were already disappointed and angry with the status quo. When the Sandinista Party was defeated, Tamara had mixed feelings of sadness and fear, on one side, but understanding, on the other. Thus, it can be argued that the defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections provided exit options for women like Tamara, who were questioning the Sandinista regime, but couldn’t position themselves outside from it, as Sandinismo was the discursive thread in which they grew up in. She had been fighting gender subordination for a long time; and as new perspectives were opened with the Sandinista defeat, she -like many other women who now were able to openly declare their feminism- became involved in the process of developing an “autonomous movement” free of the need to ‘comply’ with Sandinista guidelines. Tamara went on and founded one ‘colectiva’ and a ‘National Feminist Committee’.

After the autonomous feminist movement in Nicaragua grew and developed, she has remained as a very committed activist, who makes a living by offering lectures and consulting services. Autonomous feminism in Nicaragua has certainly not been conflict free, and Tamara has taken a stand on some occasions, but the experience

has been overall a progressive turn in her life. She has continued to reject the Sandinista authoritarianism, and work for expand feminism in the region. Her life has been marked by a strong need to reject this authoritarianism and to 'save' others, following values related to the "ethics of caring", which eventually found a more balanced expression in her adult life when she was able not only to care for the poor or for women, but for herself as well.

#### 4.2.2- "Elina" from Nicaragua

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Carolina's interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: Early family influences- Early political consciousness:** narrative of Elina's pre-revolutionary years where she describes the financial and emotional struggles of her childhood and adolescence, but how her social consciousness started to develop despite her limitations.

**N2: Early political involvement:** this narrative of Elina's revolutionary years describes the nature of her early political activism, emphasizing her 'escapades', her participation in demonstrations and her interest for political news, and the risks that she eventually faced.

**N9: Personal relationship with Sandinista Front:** In this narrative, Elina describes the complex nature of her relationship with the Sandinista front, and how she understands her own political positioning regarding 'Sandinismo' being a worker for women's rights.

**N10: Experiences after Sandinistas were defeated in elections:** In this post-revolutionary narrative Elina describes her feelings and the reactions of other women from AMNLAE after the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections. Elina discusses also how she gradually distanced herself from the Sandinistas after these elections and how her feminist activism became a priority for her.

**N13: Life thread:** In this narrative from Elina's feminist period, she reflects upon what are her personal characteristics and how these shaped her political involvement and the way she experienced feminism. Both elements are at the center of her life. Note: though this narrative is not literally speaking a narrative of change with a turning point, it is relevant for this study, and it has been included in the analysis, because it presents Elina's reflections and insights concerning identity transition.

##### b) Storied Themes in the "Narratives of Change"

The following "storied themes" were identified from the "narratives of change" identified from Carolina's life story interview transcription:

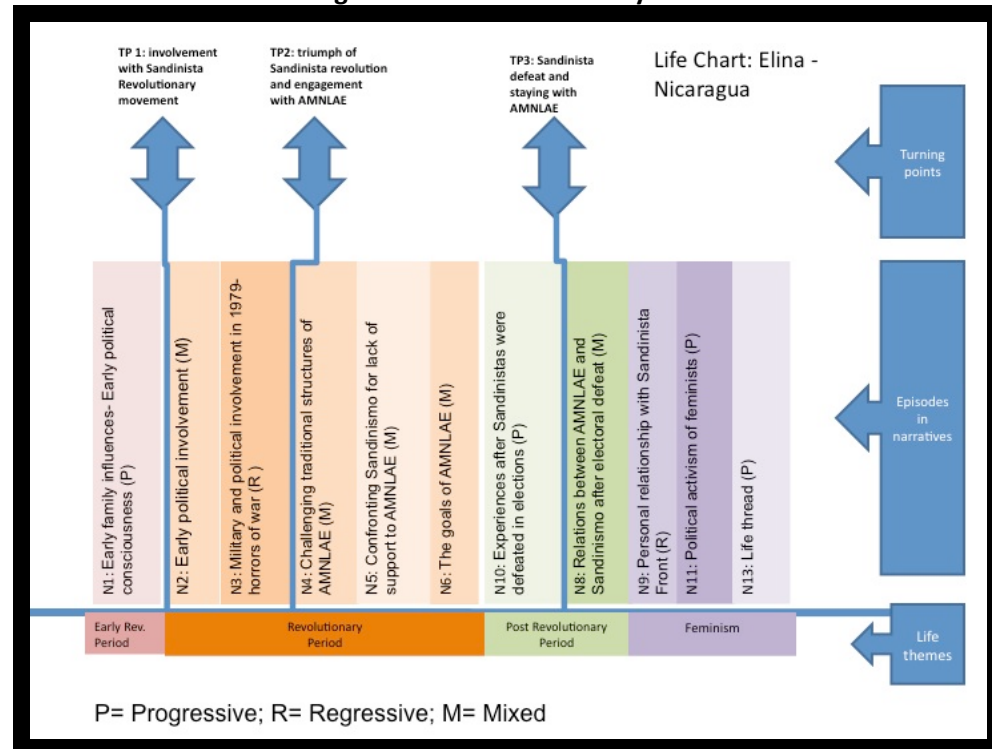
**Table 4.16: Elina's Storied Themes**

| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Narrative Tracing                 | Narrative Threads                                                                                                                                        | Progression/Regression                                                                                  | Opposition/Engagement                                                                         |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I had an early calling, an early commitment to care for others. I couldn't remain indifferent, as I understood the difficulties of not knowing how to get out of poverty and injustice. As I experienced these difficulties, I wanted to fight to help others overcome them.                                                             | N1, N2, N13                       | Facing injustice at the personal level can contribute to an early political calling.                                                                     | Progression: there is the idea that individuals can care for others and help them find their way        | Engagement with others who face oppression and injustice.                                     |
| As my personal quest, I fought, opposed and rebelled against structures that oppressed others and that kept people away from things that they should have access to.                                                                                                                                                                     | N1, N2, N3, N4, N5, N13           | Opposition to and rebellion against rigid structures are ways of opening access                                                                          | Progression: individuals can change their position by fighting and opposing oppression and exploitation | Opposition to rigid and unjust structures who deprive individuals of their fundamental rights |
| I was firmly committed to Sandinista values; those values that took the people of Nicaragua to rebel against oppression; those values that motivated people to organize themselves around the Sandinista cause. Nevertheless, this is the old version of Sandinismo. The new version seems not to care or make women's rights their own. | N2, N3, N5, N6, N8, N9, N10       | Sandinismo has evolved from being concerned with the needs of the majority to being concerned with the needs of a few, and even less with women's rights | Regression: The 'old' Sandinismo was committed to social change for all. The 'new' Sandinismo is not.   | Opposition to new versions of Sandinismo that don't respond to what Nicaraguan women need.    |
| Fighting, defending and supporting women's rights is my life commitment. I am willing to go to great lengths, to ask what I need from the government, to enter in opposition to any structure, as long as I support the rights and demands of women                                                                                      | N4, N5, N6, N8, N9, N10, N11, N13 | Defending women's rights may involve opposing and confronting structures                                                                                 | Progression: women's rights are worth demanding and even fighting for.                                  | Opposition to forms of patriarchy that coerce women.                                          |

### c) “Life Story Chart”

Elina’s life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction

**Figure 4.8: Elina’s Life Story Chart**



### d) Life Summary

The case of Elina highlights the experience of a “mujer del pueblo” (a people’s woman) who found in political and feminist opposition the possibility to transform not only her life, but the life of others around her.

Elina’s childhood was marked by the experience of economic oppression as the daughter of a poor peasant family of the Western coastal area of Nicaragua. As a young girl, she was asked by her mother to give up school and her free time in order to take care of younger siblings; but despite her own limitations, she grew interested in politics and political opposition that could lead to a personal and social change. She does not trace back her interest in politics to any family influence, but it is important to highlight that in the early 1960s there was in Nicaragua a predominant oppositional discourse against the Somoza regime. Elina learned how to read, and then read the Editorials of the iconic figure of Pedro Joaquin Chamorro against the Somoza movement, and these readings taught her about opposition and human rights. As she grew up, she became both more interested in the experience of others who had suffered economic and social forms of oppression (she mentioned her interest in defending and supporting poor children) and also became more radical in her political activism. In the analysis of plot development of N1 (See appendix II, 2.2.a.i) it was argued that Elina’s adolescent mechanism for dealing with hardships such as poverty, imposed child labor, lack of opportunity and gender exploitation- was to re-position herself as someone who was on the lowest level of the social ladder to someone who –through solidarity- could rise above her limiting circumstances. In addition, Sandinista discourse gave her the possibility to find a sense of commonality with those who wanted to change something about the

unjust structures that she knew quite well. As Elina gained autonomy –by getting married, separating from her family of origin- she strengthened her connection with the Sandinista political and military activism, undergoing great levels of risk. It appeared as if social transformation was the ultimate goal in her life, and she invested all that she had in order to get it. When Sandinismo succeeded in 1979, Elina had already achieved a social status connected with her military and political activism in the region. As the Sandinista patriarchal leadership demanded women to work with other women, Elina joined AMNLAE (she had previous experience with a Sandinista women's organization- ANPRONAC during the war) and has stayed in AMNLAE ever since. During those years, Elina worked tirelessly for the cause of women and at the same time, tried to promote AMNLAE's democratization from the Sandinista structures in order to strengthen its work for women's rights. This was not possible in the 1980s and eventually led to her increased dissatisfaction with the party structures. As for many Sandinista women, the 1990 defeat of the Sandinistas was very difficult to process: "[when the Sandinistas lost the elections] the experience was very sad for me, in that time I was very connected or more connected to the Sandinista Front, and well, it was a hit for many feminists that are today in the revolutionary movements, in women movements, and it was a hit.... we thought that all was coming down, that we needed to re-direct our quest from another perspective, perhaps now with less possibilities... but the truth is that if you analyze now, really you didn't miss anything at that time.... but at that time, not only me, all the women that were there –and are now- in the movement thought that having lost the elections was a fatal hit for the people of Nicaragua" (N10).

Elina faithfully remained connected with AMNLAE, which still exists and retains its Sandinista affiliation, but with a more problematized feminist identity, as this organization tries to strike a balance between supporting women's rights and keeping its ties with Sandinismo which has grown significantly anti-feminist in recent years. Elina has tried to navigate the conflicting relationship between feminism and Sandinismo –both which are significant group identities for her- by emphasizing her feminist activism and de-emphasizing her party activism. She has metaphorically spoken about this relationship by saying that she is "not divorced of the Sandinista Front" suggesting that despite her disappointment, she is not ready to give up her strong connection with the core ideas and values of Sandinismo. She may solve this discrepancy by arguing that she identifies herself with the Sandinismo that existed 'in the past' but not the one that exists in the present. It can be said that Elina's conflicting positionings as a Feminista-Sandinista may explain her deep connection with an organization such as AMNLAE that still struggles with such a conflicting –and maybe even impossible- positioning.

#### 4.2.3- "Selma" from Nicaragua

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Selma's interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N3: "Finding book 'Born Female'; understanding family background":** narrative from Selma's pre-revolutionary period, describes a turning point in her life when she encountered North American feminist discourse in the form of a book that shaped her views about gender relations and allowed her to frame her family dynamics.

**N5, N6: “Return home, leaving the house, joining university politics”:** in these two joint narratives Selma talks about how upon her return from the U.S. she questioned her position within the family and sought independence. This process allowed her to explore her preferences and seek an alternative life path that gradually brought her to revolutionary politics.

**N12: “Erotic Left Party and the rights of women”:** A narrative from Selma’s post-revolutionary period in which she describes a critical moment during the Sandinista years when women started demanding democratization within the party structures. Selma, who was part of these efforts became even more committed in expressing her opposition towards some Sandinista government.

**N23: “Dealing with the conflicting relationship with her mother”:** in this narrative, Selma describes the conflicting relationship that she had with her mother and how through the years and with the support of her feminist knowledge and psychological therapy she was able to ‘reconstruct’ her mother’s life which brought understanding and reconciliation between the two, a turning point in her personal life.

**N36: “Ethical value of feminism/fall of the left”:** this is a self-reflective narrative where Selma ponders the meaning and contribution of feminism in her life. In this context, she argues that feminism is the strongest, driving force of her life; and also a way of looking at the world that has literally saved her. This is a crucial narrative in order to understand the value of feminist involvement for her. Note: though this narrative is not literally speaking a narrative of change with a turning point, it is relevant for this study, and it has been included in the analysis, because it presents Selma’s reflections and insights concerning identity transition.

#### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Selma’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.18: Selma’s Storied Themes**

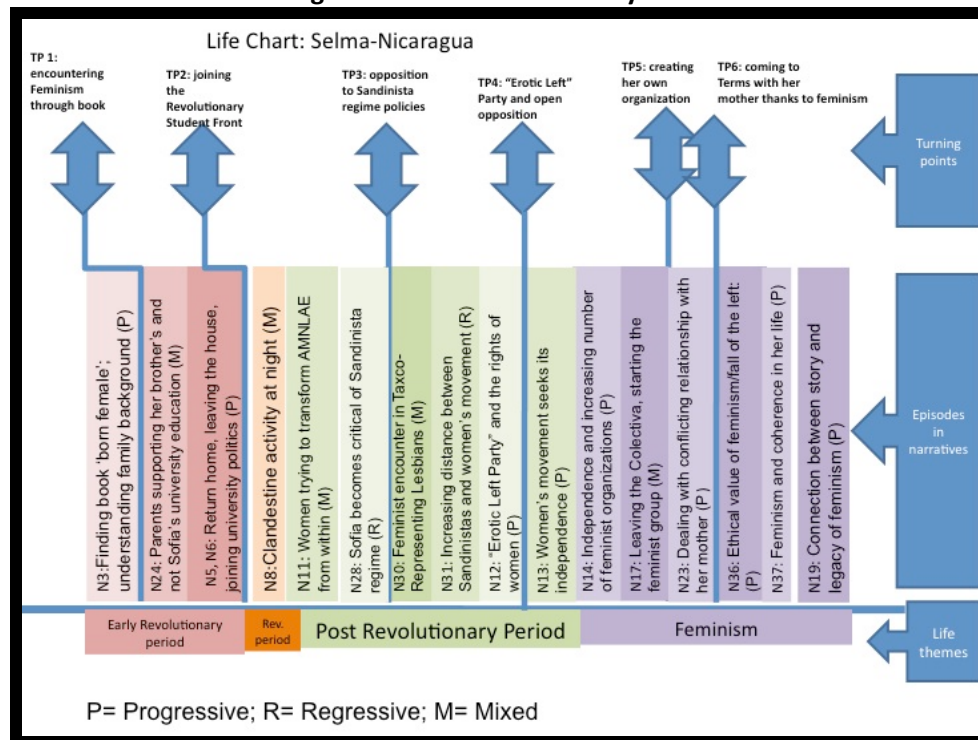
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                        | Narrative Tracing                        | Narrative Threads                                                                                                                  | Progression/Regression                                                                                       | Opposition/Engagement                      |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------|
| I have never accepted a position of submission for women and rebelled against patriarchy in my private and public spheres.                                                                                                                                                            | N3, N5, N6, N11, N12, N24, N28, N30, N31 | Submission to patriarchy must be challenged in public and private spheres                                                          | Progression: Women can and should rebel against patriarchy in the different spheres where they are oppressed | Opposition to the patriarchal system       |
| Feminism provided meaning and understanding of complex relationships in my life; it gave me a personal and ethical frame, which allowed me to remain coherent when others entered in crisis. Feminism allowed me to say: “I am not the one crazy, it’s the world that works this way” | N3, N30, N36, N37, N23                   | Feminism is a frame that allows women to understand how inequality is constructed and remain coherent in the face of contradiction | Progression: through feminist knowledge women can gain coherence, understanding and remain ethical.          | Engagement to feminist theory and practice |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                |                                                                           |                                                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                        |                                                                                                                                        |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The search for autonomy has manifested in all the spheres of my life: at home, fighting dictatorship and working for women.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    | N3, N5, N6, N7, N8, N11, N12, N13, N19, N23, N24, N28, N29, N30, N31, N36 | Autonomy is manifested in different spheres: public, private, political                                                                                | Progression: The search for autonomy allows for personal freedom                                                       | Opposition to those social institutions that prevent personal autonomy                                                                 |
| Social movements loose power the moment in which they loose their political 'tooth'. When organizations develop an NGO scheme, they are dependent on the financial support of other political actors and their priorities are different from those of protest groups. In this sense, "NGOization" and thematic networks within the feminist movement produce weakness and do not respond to the challenges posed by political authoritarianism that prevails in our societies. | N12, N14, N17, N19,                                                       | Strong political movements should have solid structures that organize roles. Fluid roles or functions weaken the political agenda of social movements. | Regression: when feminist women recede to "NGOization" or thematic networks, the movement loses its political strength | Opposition to a way of organizing feminist activism that does not have a structural core which coordinates the different organizations |
| Women fought for the right to be organized and should retain the right to come together and fight for their cause.                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                             | N13, N17                                                                  | Political organizing is a well established right for women                                                                                             | Progression: women can change their reality and should do so through political organizing                              | Opposition to the idea that feminists do not engage in political activism in their organizations                                       |

#### d) "Life Story Chart"

Selma's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.9: Selma's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Selma highlights the experience of a feminist who, can be argued, already started to develop a feminist consciousness in her childhood. Selma was deeply marked by the differentiation that her mother's highly conservative – and possibly unfair- child rearing practices produced in her, as she experienced discrimination and a very controlling environment being the youngest of a family of eight siblings who were males in their majority. Being the youngest and a female, Selma was regarded as a 'little girl' throughout her life, which produced in her the great need to rebel and develop a sense of autonomy. At fourteen, she was sent by her family to live with an older sister in the United States. This experience opened new opportunities for self-growth. Either Selma found feminism or feminism found her in the form of a book called: "Born Female" which she experienced as an "epiphany", both an explanation and revelation that *named* what had happened in her life so far. Selma embraced feminism and it has accompanied her ever since. As it happens in relationships marked by ambivalence, Selma decided to return to Nicaragua after graduating from high school to live with her family of origin, only to experience control and discrimination again –as her brother's career plans were privileged over hers- and in the end, she rebelled, as she had done before, and decided to leave the house and start a life of her own. In this process, Selma not only left the house, but also found in her university setting a new opportunity to express her rebelliousness and her deep need for change through revolution. What is controversial in her life is that she- as opposed to other feminists from the region- came from a family background associated with the military power at the time of revolution. Both her father and her oldest brother were members of the

Nicaraguan armed forces that were fighting against the Sandinista revolutionaries. For Selma, joining the Student Revolutionary Movement meant to enter in opposition with a significant part of her family's identity. Still, Selma, passionate for ideas of change, embraced Marxism and developed the understanding that feminist aims were not possible without political change. It could be argued that for Selma, rebelling against the Somoza regime was also a way of rebelling against patriarchal and political values that had permeated her family of origin, which had felt oppressive for her throughout her childhood. Paradoxically, the figure that impersonated those patriarchal values was her mother, with whom Selma struggled during her developing years and most of her adult life.

The victory of the Nicaraguan revolution by the Sandinistas was a period marked by great pain for Selma's family, as her father died of natural causes and her brother was killed by the Sandinistas, which only deepened the distance between her and her mother, as the latter blamed her for the affiliation with the Sandinistas.

After the revolution, Selma joined the National Sandinista Newspaper, "Barricada", as an editor and journalist, but remained deeply involved with AMNLAE trying to promote internal change within the women's movement and became gradually more and more oppositional to the Sandinista regime. The end of the post-revolutionary phase in Nicaragua was marked by the defeat of the Sandinista regime in the 1990 presidential elections, won by the conservative Violeta Barrios de Chamorro. Selma experienced this political transition with immense feelings of shock and astonishment, which later developed into sorrow and emptiness. In her words: "This was a life project. It was a proposal that you had devoted your life to, a life project. When this shit falls apart, you remain in a state of... emptiness... I said: 'now what? for [the sake of] losing, you lost twice, because one-hundred-and-thousand people died, ah, where is that going to go? It was a muffled pain'".

As Selma's relationships both at the personal/family and professional/political levels remained complicated, ambivalent and conflict loaded, it could be argued that her ideas of feminism provided her with the coherence and sense of meaning that allowed her to find strength and the "courage", as she put it, to move forward. As she put it, being connected to her work and having a feminist perspective saved her from falling into depression and nihilism as many others from her generation did: "the strength comes from feminism. If I would have not been a feminist, I would have killed myself years ago". Despite pain, opposition and difference, Selma presents her life narrative as a path of progression, where she becomes a feminist "lone ranger", a heroine who is always alone (the 'first feminist', the 'only feminist' or 'one of the few feminists' are common expressions in her life story). In her loneliness, feminism 'saves her' and gives her the tools that are needed for her difficult quest.

Through rationalism and theory, Selma also encountered an opportunity to make sense of and cope with the complexities of Nicaraguan society, as she is probably one of the most gifted and prolific feminist writers of the Central American region. She has extensively written and published throughout the years on topics that range from the history of feminism to democracy and media.

In a later point in her life story, Selma was able to find connection both with her mother, and with a new group of women who supported her ideas for a more 'structured' feminism. Her rebelliousness of the latter years has been rechanneled to the authoritarian policies embedded in the anti-feminist discourse of Sandinista leader Daniel Ortega.

#### 4.2.4- “Maribel from Nicaragua”

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Maribel’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N9: “University activism in Nicaragua and life in Costa Rica”:** narrative selected because it describes Maribel’s early revolutionary involvement, but also how, from her point of view, gendered conditionings influenced her withdrawal from political activism in Nicaragua.

**N10: “After the Sandinista success: “building paradise”:** narrative from the post-revolutionary period selected because it presents Maribel’s painful experiences working within the Sandinista structure after the revolution took place. These experiences gradually influenced her views on Sandinismo.

**N14: “Depression- illness after defeat”:** narrative from post-revolutionary years which describes the moment when the Sandinistas were defeated in elections in 1990 and the psychological and physical impact that this event had in Maribel. At this point in time, Maribel found in feminist activism a source of strength which allowed her to better cope with her pain.

**N15: “Feminism in the middle of the crisis”:** a narrative from Maribel’s feminist period where she describes how her feminist activism allowed her to ‘rescue’ herself from the pain of the Sandinista defeat, and allowed her to construct new bonds with other women based on solidarity and mutual support.

**N17: “How dangerous it is to be a feminist now”:** in this narrative from Maribel’s feminist period, she discusses how feminists currently feel threatened by the recently elected Sandinista government. In here, she reflects on her reasons to remain active in the movement, despite her security concerns. Note: though this narrative is not literally speaking a narrative of change with a turning point, it is relevant for this study, and it has been included in the analysis, because it presents Maribel’s reflections and insights concerning identity transition.

##### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Maribel’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.20: Maribel’s Storied Themes**

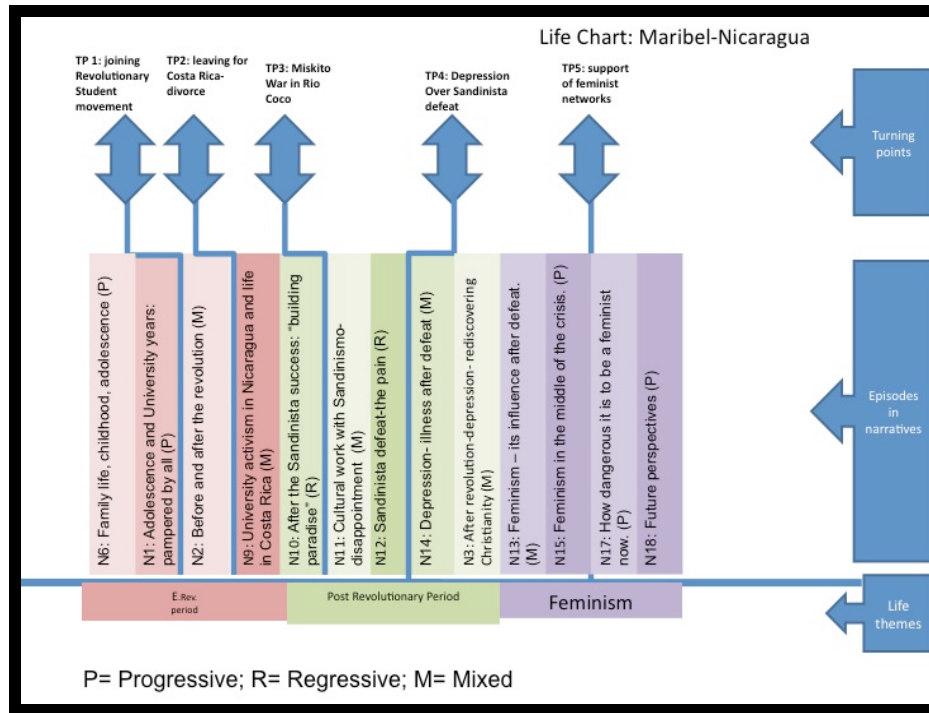
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                           | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                                  | Progression/Regression                                                                                                         | Opposition/Engagement                                   |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------|
| I didn’t experience discrimination or lack of support in my family or amongst my revolutionary peers. In fact, I was appreciated and even pampered. I only experienced oppression in my private sphere after getting married, and later in the rigid Sandinista structures. I didn’t recognize discrimination because it never happened. | N1, N6, N9,       | Gender inequality can be experienced at different stages and in different spheres of women’s lives | Mixed: Even women who were not prompted with earlier significant discriminatory experiences will encounter them in their lives | Opposition to discriminatory practices based on gender. |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                        |                                                                                                               |                                                                                                             |                                                                                                                                 |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| I had –like many women– a historical sense of guilt about things I should have done and I didn't. I was willing to do whatever they –men, Sandinistas– would tell me to do because of this guilt.                            | N9, N10,               | Women are prompted to fulfill the expectations of others, and when they don't, they blame themselves for it.  | Regressive: Women who not fulfill other people's expectations feel guilty and forced to comply with others  | Opposition to the idea that women have to fulfill expectation of others, though experiencing guilt about choosing not to do so. |
| For my generation, Sandinismo was a model of life, not just a historical model. We had organized our life around the revolution. We thought that history favored us and that sooner or later, "the earth would be paradise." | N1, N2, N3, N9         | A whole generation of men and women organized their lives around Sandinismo's project of change in Nicaragua. | Progression: Sandinismo gave a whole generation a sense of personal and historical meaning                  | Engagement to the idea of the value of revolutionary change for Nicaragua                                                       |
| The defeat of Sandinismo was a defeat of a historical project, a dream and for us, a personal project. It was a dramatic personal crisis for many of us.                                                                     | N3, N11, N12, N14      | The defeat of Sandinismo was experienced as the defeat of a personal project by many of those involved.       | Regression: The Sandinista defeat was like a personal failure for many of those involved in the project.    | Opposition to the idea that the Sandinista project was over which created a strong sense of personal failure                    |
| Solidarity among women saved us before and after the Sandinista defeat. In that solidarity, theoretical feminism appeared, we started to read, to exchange ideas, that's how feminism re-surfaced.                           | N2, N13, N15, N17, N18 | Feminism grew in social environments where women were in solidarity with each other                           | Progression: Among women's solidarity, the message of feminism encouraged a sense of a meaningful community | Engagement with a community of women in solidarity who joined in actions inspired by feminist thought.                          |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Maribel's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

**Figure 4.10: Maribel's Life Story Chart**



### d) Life Summary

The case of Maribel highlights the –rather unusual-case of an educated, upper middle class woman writer who engaged in political activism, and later, joined the Sandinista revolutionary government with the intention of being part of something larger than herself, of fulfilling a great destiny and being part of the history of Nicaragua.

Being the daughter of European immigrants with a comfortable economic position, Maribel's childhood was marked by a sense of being 'special', 'pampered' and 'well protected'. Possibly because of her feelings of 'uniqueness' along with other qualities such as attractive appearance and ability to offer a speech, Maribel eventually became the center of her peer's attention. Her life was perhaps in her mind –or the mind of others around her- set for big, 'larger-than-life' experiences.

Maribel entered the university in the mid sixties, when Nicaraguan students were expressing their dissatisfaction with the Somocista regime in more open, bold ways. She was quickly drawn to this national effort, and soon found herself in the spotlight, a place that was well known to her. She engaged in radical actions without looking into the risks. Concerning this historical period, Maribel has said: "it was what had to be done. History favoured us and sooner or later, the earth would be paradise...." (N9). This metaphor pointed to how Maribel –and others- believed that the Sandinista revolution would bring forward a sense of brotherhood among Nicaraguans, and create a place of bliss, delight and peace that would last for eternity.

When she married for the first time, her husband restricted her actions and her political associations, which lead to her first depressive crisis as an adult. As it can be seen in her life story, on more than one occasion, Maribel's sense of agency was compromised by guilt in failing to fulfil the expectations of others.

She was 'liberated' from this marriage in 1972 when a strong earthquake hit the city of Managua, and she decided to leave for Costa Rica and start a new life there with her newborn baby. She stayed in Costa Rica for approximately seven years working as a university lecturer. Eventually she got a divorce and remarried, while at the same time she became politically active by joining the Costa Rican communist party.

In 1979 when the Sandinista revolution succeeded, Maribel decided to join revolutionary history again and returned to Nicaragua leaving her life in Costa Rica behind. She wanted to 'build paradise' in Nicaragua. Because Maribel had left the country and the political struggle before the Sandinista revolution succeeded, she experienced a strong sense of guilt, which on many occasions led her to surrender her agency, particularly in her relationship with the Sandinista leadership. Her experiences in the post-revolutionary Nicaragua gradually meant a regressive turn in her life, as she struggled, yet complied with extremely harsh conditions imposed by the Sandinista government: she worked at different moments for the Ministry of Interior, the Military, a Newspaper and the Ministry of Education, and even though some experiences were by far better than others (Maribel underwent a severe post-traumatic reaction after her involvement in a military action against the Miskito indigenous in the Atlantic coast), she became gradually demoralized around 1985 when she realized that the Sandinista regime as it stood, was far from providing 'paradise' to Nicaraguans. She became more aware of the corruption, authoritarianism and lack of support for women rights that permeated the Sandinista structures, and her last years with the Sandinistas were disappointing, frustrating and demoralizing for her. Still, Maribel was not prepared for the eventual defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections. It seemed that for her it felt better to keep an identity as a 'disappointed Sandinista' than nothing at all. She underwent a long depressive period that lasted around three years, along with an endocrine illness, which left her feeling weak, unable to function and withdrawn for a long period of time, despite having job opportunities in the cultural field.

In the midst of her depression, Maribel found in her contact with feminist women a source of solidarity and support that was essential or "life saving", as she was able to share with other disappointed women a sense of commonality and understanding that comforted her in this difficult transition. As Maribel argued: "the solidarity saved the lives of many. And in this solidarity among women... Marcela Lagarde appeared, we started to read, we started to exchange and... this is how feminism resurged" (TP5 in life chart). Gradually, Maribel regained her strength, and was able to re-build a sense of contribution and meaning through her writing (it is relevant to notice that she continued actively publishing during her Sandinista and post-Sandinista years), her feminist activism and more recently, her interest in Christian theology. Her latest works seem to point to a 'feminist view' of Jesus. She continues to engage in challenging the contemporary Sandinista regime, acknowledging fear, but and at the same time, praising herself for having the courage to denounce, feeling more at ease with her identity of a 'vanguard feminist woman'. Overall, Maribel feels finally at ease and appreciative of different aspects of her identity: the woman; the activist; the feminist; the theologian. In the end, Maribel acknowledged that through feminism, she developed a deep appreciation for womanhood, and for being a 'woman-activist' as opposed to a 'man-activist'.

#### 4.2.5- “Leda” from Nicaragua

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Leda’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: Pre revolutionary beginnings, youth and early adulthood:** a narrative of Leda’s pre-revolutionary years, where she describes the influence of Catholic religion, of student movements and of her stay in Guatemala, where she witnessed racial discrimination for the first time. Through her religious work with prostitutes she developed a sensitivity for the work with women.

**N4: In-depth political involvement and clandestine life:** narrative of Leda’s revolutionary period, when she describes crucial events that marked the rise of the Sandinista revolutionaries into power in Nicaragua and how these events impacted her. She presents them intertwined with stories about her pregnancy.

**N14: Disillusionment with Sandinismo; but connected still:** narrative from post-revolutionary period where Leda discusses her anger at the fact that some members of the Sandinista leadership protected the man who attempted to rape her. Despite the fact that Leda remained employed as a member of the government, she started expressing her disconnection between her personal goals and the Sandinista regime’s objectives.

**N15: After the Sandinista defeat:** narrative of the post-revolutionary period where Leda describes her intense feelings of sadness and anger after the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990. She is particularly concerned about those that she calls “the poor” that were mostly affected by the defeat of the revolutionaries and decided to continue working for the Party despite her internal turmoil.

**N17 “New engagement with feminism and herself”:** this narrative of Leda’s feminist beginnings presents how she experienced feminism and a new camaraderie with other women as an opportunity to achieve “total justice” and to explore her neglected subjectivity.

##### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Leda’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.22: Leda’s Storied Themes**

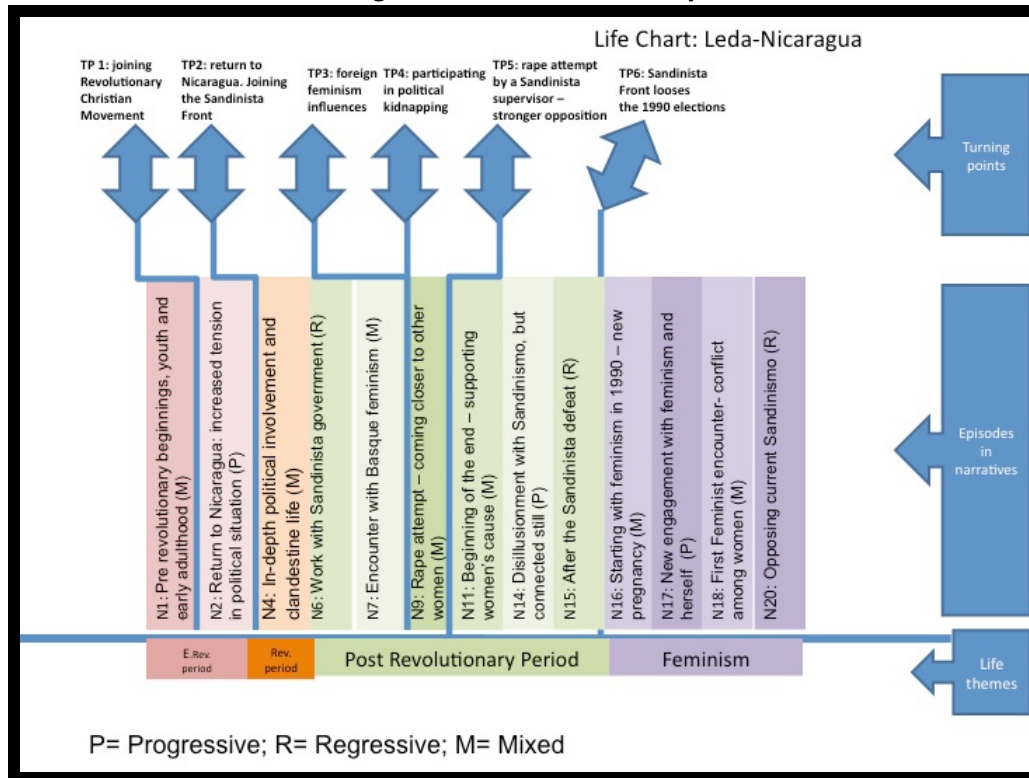
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                  | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                                          | Progression Regression                                                           | Opposition/ Engagement                                        |
|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|
| I started to know about inequality early in my life and decided to do something about it by becoming politically active. The kind of dictatorship that we experienced in Nicaragua “fed” our quest for freedom. | N1, N2, N4,       | The kind of inequality that existed in Nicaragua, produced by the dictatorship, demanded political action. | Progression: individuals can challenge inequality by becoming politically active | Opposition to a system that promoted inequality and injustice |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              |                                |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                                      |                                                                                                       |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| My struggle as a feminist started when I began fighting against social injustice, against the indifference from the bourgeoisie towards women and the injustices against the indigenous and the poor.                                                        | N1, N2, N4,                    | I saw that there are inequality systems based in class, gender, ethnicity, repression, and intellectual divisions.                         | Regression: Differences are unfairly used to construct inequality.                                                   | Opposition to a system that uses difference as means to create inequality                             |
| The Sandinista structures gradually became corrupt and abusive of power, seeking to privilege themselves and becoming all that they criticized before. They systematically sexually abused and betrayed women.                                               | N6, N7, N9, N11, N14, N15, N20 | The power granted by people was misused by the Sandinistas who ended up abusing their position to the extreme of violating women's rights. | Regression: Sandinistas used their position to their benefit only by becoming corrupt and abusive of their power     | Opposition to a Sandinista corrupt and abusive structure that abused women.                           |
| Feminism showed me that things were not over. There was still a need to fight for women's rights. There was a need to continue giving this fight. I developed a stronger cause through feminism                                                              | N7, N9, N11,                   | After Sandinismo, women still needed to fight for their rights, and this was signaled by feminists.                                        | Progression: feminism allowed women to continue fighting for their rights during Sandinismo.                         | Engagement to feminism as a belief system that encouraged women to continue fighting for their rights |
| Sandinismo gave me a sense of social justice, but feminism gave me a sense of total justice. Through feminism my personal and intimate dimensions gained transcendence. It made me a better person                                                           | N14, N15, N16, N17, N18        | Feminism is concerned not only with justice in the social sphere, but also in the personal, intimate one.                                  | Progression: through feminism I was able to work not only on social change, but also personal change for the better. | Engagement to Feminism as a self-improvement philosophy                                               |
| I was angry towards my mother because of how she physically abused me. I was angry towards the man who wanted to rape me, and I am angry towards Sandinismo. Feminism has helped me "cleanse" the anger. One cannot do feminist work without this cleansing. | N9, N15, N16, N17              | Feminism offers the possibility for processing and coming to terms with painful events from the past.                                      | Progression: overcoming anger over abuse is possible through feminist work.                                          | Engagement towards a feminism that allowed me to overcome painful abusive experiences.                |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Leda's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.11: Leda's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Leda highlights the experience of a radical political activist who placed the Sandinista revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua at the center of her life, who later, found in feminism the opportunity to transform not only the lives of other women, but also her own. Leda's childhood was marked by ambivalence towards her mother, a figure who was both 'generous' and 'aggressive' with her. Leda incorporated those features of her mother, and was early drawn to Christian revolutionary movements who supported ideas of generosity and unselfishness by daring to oppose injustice and the harshness of the Somoza dictatorship. As these groups combined both generosity and aggression, they probably echoed Leda's inner world, as she eagerly engaged in radical activism being only fourteen years old.

Like many other young activists in the 1970s, Leda was drawn to revolutionary structures through the hopeful messages of Theology of Liberation, which led her to eventually join the Sandinista clandestine movement in 1975. Another significant influence was a trip that she made to Guatemala in 1974 that fuelled her desire to change systems characterized by inequality and rigid hierarchies.

During the pre-revolutionary years, when the Sandinistas became bolder in their military actions, Leda who was both fascinated and drawn to radical military action, deepened her clandestine activity to the point of running risks while pregnant or using her newborn child as "screen" for clandestine action. It appears as if the idea of a powerful woman-warrior had become central to her identity, which possibly made her more vulnerable of exploitation by military structures.

When the Sandinista revolution succeeded, Leda eagerly joined their government, but gradually became disappointed as she witnessed instances of corruption and abuse of power by the *comandantes* and those close to them. In addition, she became disappointed because of the patriarchal views that prevailed during the Sandinista years, which prevented women to climb higher positions in the political ladder. As she argued: "you began to question not

only the Nicaraguan revolution and not just the caste system. The privileges, the bases of socialism, how is it applied, but also, why do they abuse women, why do they abuse women if they are revolutionaries?...You start questioning that, when you get to know feminist or gender theory. And you see it in the practice with the abuses of the Comandantes, then you say, what is this? Then, disenchantment came not only from the system but also from feminism" (N8). Leda became acquainted with feminist thought in 1982 through foreign feminists; and feminist discourse gradually influenced her perception of reality: it became evident for her that the Sandinista success had not improved women's conditions and rights in Nicaragua. She gradually entered the 'Sandinista dissident women' milieu at the time and joined a group of women who dared to voice her dissatisfaction with the status quo. Despite her position of rebelliousness towards certain Sandinista widespread practices, Leda continued to work with the government as a civil servant, as she felt that she didn't have any other options.

Two events significantly marked Leda's distancing herself from the Frente Sandinista; one was the experience of having a kidnapped woman in her house as a request from the leadership. The second was a rape attempt by one of her colleagues, which went almost unnoticed. These episodes made evident for her that women were inevitably abused and not represented politically by Sandinismo or any other structure like AMNLAE which she regarded as a 'mass organization' at the service of the Frente Sandinista.

As her dissatisfaction grew, so did her need to express openly her disagreement with some practices and her need to 'reconnect' with the idea of trying to transform unjust structures. In the difficult last years of Sandinismo, feminism gave Leda the possibility to develop a sense of agency and independence, as she focused on her work for women. When the Sandinistas were defeated in 1990, she suffered a strong sense of 'loss' and anger over how the Sandinistas had contributed to the defeat, yet identified the defeat as 'her own'. Her sense of loss and uncertainty after the defeat of Sandinismo is captured in the following statement: "you didn't know what to do with your life. If you started at twelve... and you have lived all your life since being twelve until 1990... I had thirty-five years... My life was gone. If half of my life was gone, where would I go? I wanted to leave for El Salvador; to the [revolutionary] struggle in El Salvador. [It] was the first thing I thought". Despite the fact that this moment was lived as a regressive period in her life, the Sandinista defeat opened the door for an encounter with autonomous feminist organizing which Leda quickly embraced. Her new experiences with feminism, allowed her to engage with other women, join support groups and find a community of women who were interested in subjectivity and personal as much as social change. This experience allowed Leda to look at relationships of her past, and develop a stronger self-awareness of present relationships. She finally developed a sense of what she called "total justice" as opposed to "social justice". Leda, who is now a longstanding independent feminist and consultant, still admits that she cannot let go of her anger towards the Sandinista front, as she probably continues to struggle with the idea of a life devoted to the Sandinista project, her own role in the process, and the sacrifices endured for a project that failed in the sense that it didn't render benefit for herself or other women who were involved in revolution. Despite the fact that feminism has been progressive in Leda's life, her conflictive feelings towards Sandinismo keep her connected to this regressive aspect of her life.

#### 4.2.6- “Edith” from Nicaragua

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Edith’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N7 “Christian influences in her activism”:** A narrative from Edith’s pre-revolutionary period, where she describes how Catholic influences played a role into the development of her political involvement.

**N2 “Entrance to university, political and military activism. Gender differences” :** narrative from Edith’s revolutionary period, where she describes the process that she underwent from being a university student that joined the ‘Revolutionary Student Front’ to the involvement that led to her imprisonment and later, to her actions as a clandestine urban guerrillera.

**N4 “Appearance of feminism in her life”:** in this narrative from the post revolutionary period, Edith explains how she learned from feminism while she was still within the Sandinista military structures, and despite the prohibition from the Sandinista leadership, she remained interested in the topic until she left the Army in 1990 and joined a women’s NGO for ten years.

**N11 “Feminism and the political defeat of Sandinismo”:** in this narrative, Edith describes the transition process that she underwent after the defeat of Sandinismo in the 1990 elections. For her, this process came along with a sense of emptiness and a need to reformulate her personal goals.

**N12 “Perceptions of Sandinismo by feminist women”:** in this narrative of her feminist period, Edith discusses how many women experienced differently their departure from Sandinismo to feminism. Note: though this narrative is not literally speaking a narrative of change with a turning point, it is relevant for this study, and it has been included in the analysis, because it presents Edith’s reflections and insights concerning identity transition.

##### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Leda’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.24: Edith’s Storied Themes**

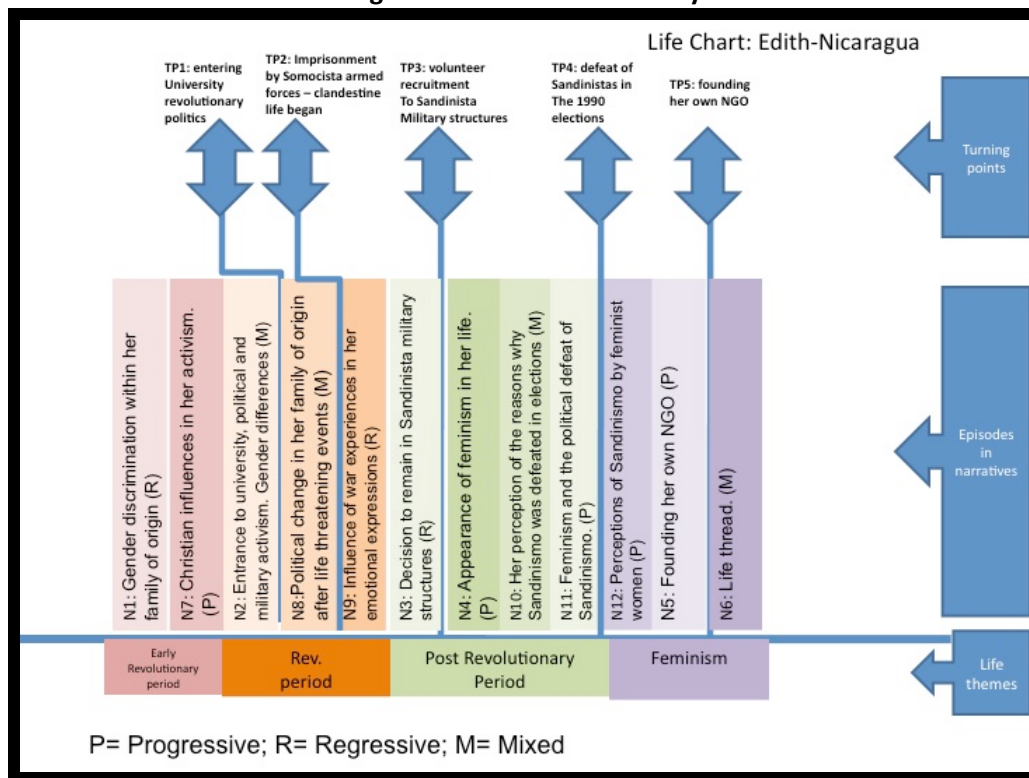
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                       | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                                                       | Progression/Regression                                                                                      | Opposition/Engagement                                                            |
|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The Christian values that influenced me demanded a fight against different kinds of injustice: gender discrimination, political discrimination and authoritarianism. Fighting against injustice has been a common thread in my life. | N1, N6, N7        | Christian values aimed at challenging injustice may demand Christians to get involved in transforming an unjust society | Progression: there is the idea that it is possible to overcome injustice when the oppressed decide to fight | Opposition to an unjust system that produces discrimination and authoritarianism |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                    |                  |                                                                                                                                                                    |                                                                                                                              |                                                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The military experience allowed me to support and defend the revolution, which was very important for me.                                                                                                                                          | N2, N3, N8, N9   | The military experience became a means to support and defend a project of social and political transformation.                                                     | Progression: The military can also serve the cause of maintaining political transformation and change society for the better | Opposition to those who attempted to destroy Sandinismo by using military means to support and defend it.  |
| In my work within feminism, I have found a collective identity that helped me develop a cause with and for other women. This cause includes the promotion of reproductive and sexual rights as well as increasing women's political participation. | N4, N5, N11, N12 | A collective feminist identity helps women come together in order to fight for their rights                                                                        | Progression: Working for women can help women come together and develop a collective identity for their advantage            | Engagement to the feminist movement where a collective identity for a common cause supports women's rights |
| My experience in the military was marked by discrimination because men expected women to have 'masculine' attitudes in order to fit and gain respect, and they had advantages and privileges that women didn't have.                               | N2, N3, N9, N11  | Military and political structures impose patriarchy on women who are forced to assume 'male characteristics' and tolerate being discriminated based on men's needs | Regression: military and political structures discriminate consistently against women.                                       | Opposition to rigid military and political systems that discriminate systematically against women.         |

b) "Life Story Chart"

Edith's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.12: Edith's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Edith highlights the experience of a woman who attempted to transcend socially constructed barriers that limited women's lives at the time when she grew up. Coming from a middle class family of far East migrants to Nicaragua, she was expected to be compliant and follow the traditions of her parents. The syncretism of Eastern and Nicaraguan traditional cultural backgrounds emphasized in her upbringing the importance of education, hard work, respect for the elderly, acceptance of a lower position in society as a woman and compliance with Christian values.

Edith was confronted with a non-conformist discourse only in late adolescence, when a fellow Christian student talked to her about "Theology of Liberation". The possibilities that these ideas of transformation and experiential Christianity described, as well as the strong anti-Somocist political atmosphere of Nicaragua in the early 1970s probably influenced her decision to study journalism at the highly politicized Nicaraguan National University, instead of a more traditional English language teacher program.

This decision was the first significant turning point which deviated Edith's life from a traditional to a non-traditional path. She was 'absorbed' by a revolutionary "university system" which quickly introduced her to political activism. In this context, she engaged in Sandinista activism but continued studying journalism, trying still to keep up with her parent's expectations. Almost at the end of her studies, she underwent a dramatic turning point, when she was imprisoned by the Somocista armed forces. This experience completely changed the quality of her political activism: she went from trying to be 'different' to deciding to fully commit her life to the cause of revolution. Around that time, her brother – who had also joined the Sandinista revolutionary cause- was murdered. In N8 Edith described the kind of impact that imprisonment had in her family: "When my parents saw what they had done to me, how they hit me, you understand, the torture, somehow you have to be against those who did this to your daughter and that made them change their

position, you see? Then I think that you can be a protagonist of change, or produce a change in others, I think that was something unrelinquishable; somehow you have to be clear about your cause, to really motivate this change”.

These events contributed to change her parent's perspectives concerning Somocismo and forged in her the desire to make this her personal life cause. Edith joined a Sandinista combat unit almost until the end of the revolution, only taking a maternity break for a few months.

Decided to defend this successful Sandinista revolution at all costs, Edith returned to the military structures, despite the 'passive resistance' of her fellow soldiers. The kind of atmosphere that she encountered this time around was different from the less sexist camaraderie that she had experienced before the revolution succeeded. She, along with other Sandinista military women, was systematically pressured to leave the army, ignored and not taken into account for promotions. Though Edith gradually grew angry and disappointed towards the Sandinista structures, and despite the early influence of feminist thought, probably the prospect of leaving her 'life cause' may have been too threatening at the time, as she may have wondered, what else was there for her and for Nicaragua.

In 1990, the somewhat unexpected Sandinista defeat was another significant turning point in Edith's life, who felt deeply empty and frustrated, as if her life cause had been taken away from her. The Sandinista defeat also confronted her with her limited understanding of how the 'Sandinista apparatus' was working in reality, as more information concerning the corruption during the Sandinista years came out. It was only then that she was able to leave the military structures and start a life without Sandinismo. A year later, she found a job with a feminist NGO where for the first time in her life, she developed professionally without having to worry about gender discrimination. She worked there for ten years, and decided to retire only to found her own NGO concerned with political, reproductive and labour rights of women. Feminism represented a progressive turn in Edith's life, who found in it a new cause that allowed her not only to fight for the betterment of other women's lives, but also for her own. Reflecting upon the Sandinista defeat from her acquired feminist view, Edith argued in N11: "I think that what I have learned from feminism fundamentally is to really say, [there is] a collective identity that can help you make cause with others, and somehow that was my reflection: how did the Front loose? and I think that it was those women. Somehow I identify with... not because I voted against them, but somehow [I could understand] how they manifested themselves". In this sentence, Edith seemed to acknowledge that the Sandinistas lost the 1990 elections because they also lost all the women who had trusted them with their lives and the lives of their families, something that she could closely relate with, as it came close to her own experience.

#### **4.2.2- Summary of findings for Nicaragua**

The following summary presents insights concerning women from Nicaragua drawing upon two sources: first, the criteria informing case selection for in-depth narrative analysis and second, the insights gained after applying methods such as storied themes and life story charts.

a) Characterization of women from Nicaragua based on Case Selection Criteria:

A series of characteristics have been identified for this group of Nicaraguan women concerning the factors listed below:

- Socio-economic factors:

Most of the women of the sample come from middle class urban families, with the exception of one woman that comes from a poor-rural background. All the families of these women did not have a history or ties with the Sandinista movement. Only one of the women (Edith) joined Sandinismo after her brother was killed by the Somocista Army. In fact, for more than half of the women of this group, joining the Sandinista movement meant some sort of breakup with their families at some point of their lives. Concerning family composition, and differently from the case of El Salvador, only one Nicaraguan woman came from a single-mother household. The majority of the Nicaraguan women interviewed came from households with both parents. Concerning education, all the middle-class women in the sample attended the University, either during or after the war.

- Political Affiliation:

As mentioned before, all middle class women attended the university, and it was there where they initially joined revolutionary student movements and from there, the Sandinista revolutionary front. Only in the case of Alina, joining the Sandinistas was not connected with student or religious groups, but rather through community networks. All these women joined the Sandinista movement voluntarily, although influenced by one or more of the following factors: the influence of networks of religious/student revolutionary groups or having lost a significant person in the hands of the armed forces. Furthermore, all the Nicaraguan women joined the Sandinista Revolutionary Front at various stages of the revolutionary period, mostly during the time preceding their revolutionary victory; and only two women (Tamara and Maribel) did it a short while after the Sandinista victory, when the Sandinistas had already established a revolutionary government.

- Military Involvement:

Most of the Nicaraguan women joined the revolutionary upheaval during 1976-1979, before the fall of the Somoza dictatorship, when they fought against the National Armed Forces commanded by the Somoza dictatorship. After the revolutionary victory,

women either joined the revolutionary structures (ministries, intelligence offices, media) or the Sandinista National Army, in which case, they had to continue fighting against the “Contras” (anti-sandinista army sponsored by the US). In 1990, when the Sandinistas were defeated in historical elections, most women abandoned their political affiliation with the Sandinistas, with the exception of Alina, who continues to support a Sandinista-sponsored women’s organization.

- Feminist Activisms:

During the years after the successful Sandinista revolution, half of the Nicaraguan women in this sample talked about being affiliated and very active in AMNLAE, the national women’s organization established by the Sandinistas, although eventually, these women grew very critical of this organization’s mechanisms. Two women (Tamara and Leda) were influenced by foreign feminists and joined the criticisms that had been voiced by other women, and eventually, a feminist group called the “Erotic Left Party” emerged as an alternative –and subversive- answer to the Sandinista control over AMNLAE. For these women, this was the first step in the process of embracing feminist discourse. Paradoxically, they would still call themselves “Sandinistas” and it was only after the 1990 elections when the Sandinistas were defeated that these feminisms emerged in various forms and in various degrees of closeness and distance to Sandinismo.

b) Characterization of women’s life trajectories based on Narrative Analysis Methods such as Storied Themes and Life Story Charts

Based on the narrative analysis of storied themes and life story charts, a series of characteristics have been identified for this group of Nicaraguan women life trajectories concerning the factors listed below:

- Gender and Political Socialization:

Most of the women from Nicaragua came from families where gender differences were strongly endorsed. These differences were expressed in different ways, sometimes by highlighting how ‘special’ the women in the family were and in others, by emphasizing power distance between men and women; or by endorsing traditional gender roles in the household. In addition, many of these women came from homes where ideas such as solidarity for the poor and a sense of compassion informed by Christian values were highly supported. A few of the women were influenced by ideas from the Nicaraguan progressive

Church (Leda and Elina), which supported religious and political work for unprivileged sectors of society. An additional element encountered in the narratives had to do with their relationships with their mothers. Sometimes these relationships were characterized by admiration, and the mother was seen as caretaking, kind and compassionate figure (cases like Tamara and Elina). In other cases, the mother was rather perceived as a strong woman who led the family with tough hand (Leda and Edith). Yet in other case, the mother was seen more as an obstacle for agency (Selma). In the end, the figure of the mother seemed central in the family environment of most of these women.

#### Summary of Crucial Turning Points:

- **Turning Point 1: Joining a Revolutionary Organization:**

Mostly during their adolescence, a few Nicaraguan women joined Christian groups that were permeated by ideas of Theology of Liberation, in which there was a direct connection between 'consciousness raising' work and the Sandinista ideology (Edith and Leda). In addition, student groups with revolutionary affiliations, both at high school and university levels, facilitated the eventual entrance of these women into the Sandinista ranks (Tamara, Selma, Maribel).

- **Turning Point 2: Revolutionary Victory and life as a Sandinista**

Most women got involved in military action before the revolution succeeded, but also afterwards, when a few women joined the Sandinista Army, and eventually fought during the "Contra War". The experiences of those who later participated in the 'Contra' war were rather traumatic (Maribel and Tamara). Altogether, these women joined Sandinista ranks for more than ten years.

- **Turning Point 3: Post Revolutionary Period and Feminism**

Despite the fact that the male Sandinistas created and supported one national woman's organization, "AMNLAE", many Sandinista women who were very involved in the project, at the beginning, eventually grew disappointed from it. Differently from the women in El Salvador, almost all the Nicaraguan women interviewed were very critical of patriarchal policies that Sandinista structures carried out between 1979 and 1990, which included restraining AMNLAE's autonomy and political agency (See Chapter Two, section 2.2.3-Feminism in Nicaragua). This generalized feeling of dissatisfaction among the women

concerning AMNLAE, along with their early contacts with foreign feminists (in the cases of Tamara, Leda and Selma), prompted the development of early 'feminist' actions aimed at putting pressure onto the Sandinista political structures. This is how the "Erotic Left Party" came to exist (Selma, Maribel, Tamara being very involved in this initiative). This early encounter with feminism when they were questioning patriarchal Sandinista policies, was another turning point for them, which prompted complex relationships with the Sandinistas: on one side, they themselves were part of the 'system' put in place by the Sandinistas but on the other, they questioned and attempted to promote change internally. The 1990 elections, when the Sandinistas were defeated, created the conditions for another turning point in the lives of these women: though they supported and challenged Sandinismo, at the same time, this was the life that they knew, and with the Sandinistas out of power, they talked about the future appearing confusing and scary for most of them. Almost all the women interviewed experienced strong depressive feelings and uncertainty after the Sandinista electoral defeat in 1990. Paradoxically, the Sandinista's political loss created the conditions for the diversification of the women's movement, and soon, dozens of feminist organizations emerged, mostly supported by international donors. Half of the Nicaraguan women interviewed (Tamara, Selma, Edith) created one or more of these feminist organizations, which led to another significant turning point in their lives. Just as in the Salvadoran case, again, all Nicaraguan women framed their feminist period as progressive. A distinctive element concerning the experience of feminist identity development in Nicaraguan women pertains the myth of the 'heroine'. Many of the women interviewed referred to themselves in terms that placed them as 'out of the ordinary', arguing how they were either the 'first feminist that dared to come out during the Sandinista regime'; or the most courageous; or the one that dared to rebel; or the one that challenged the Sandinista leadership and so forth. This 'theme' appeared to be a guiding thread in the lives of many Nicaraguan women who challenged the Somoza regime, the FSLN and different manifestations of patriarchy that followed.

### 4.3- Narrative Analysis of Women from Guatemala

This section presents the summarized results obtained from in-depth narrative analysis of the life stories from selected revolutionary/feminists of Nicaragua. The results are presented for the following participants in the study: Nelly, Leticia, Clarisa, Lilian, Odilia and Paulina. At the end of this section, a synthesis of what characterizes this group of women from Guatemala is presented

#### 4.3.1- “Nelly” from Guatemala

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Nelly’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1 “Early influences and entrance to guerrilla movement”:** in this encompassing narrative that starts with her childhood, Nelly explains how her family was victim of political repression, which produced an indelible mark on her. Still very young, she joined a Catholic movement and later, a revolutionary movement. Nelly reflects on the qualities of the women that she met throughout her revolutionary years and the difficulties that women – like her- had when they had to deal with the violence from some of her male counterparts. Nelly ends the narrative describing the pain that she experienced when her daughter was sexually abused by a former revolutionary-the father of her son.

**N2 “Fighting sexual violence in her adult home”:** in this narrative from Nelly’s post-revolutionary period, she discusses the thread of violence against women that she has witnessed since the war years. Nelly discusses the traumatic experience of the sexual abuse of her daughter and how she was dissuaded by people in her quest to demand justice. In the end, she talks about the connection between her daughter’s experience and the creation of an NGO that fights sexual violence towards women.

**N7: “Departing from family of origin and episodes during life as guerrillera”:** narrative from Nelly’s pre-revolutionary years when she describes the kind of family environment that she experienced before joining the revolutionary movement, characterized by traditional views about women’s roles. In this context, Nelly’s revolutionary involvement was rejected by her family which meant having to break her family relations and enter an ‘adult’ revolutionary world on her own.

**N9 “Impact of the end of the war”:** this narrative from Nelly’s post-revolutionary period illustrates the difficult, depressive period that she experienced after she realized that the Guatemalan guerrilla was not able to seize power. The end of the war confronted her with all the years invested in revolutionary action, that in the end, didn’t prevent her from experiencing unemployment, lack of education and isolation from her family of origin.

**N10 “Support from feminist groups”:** in this narrative, Nelly explains how she entered in contact with other feminist women who were very supportive of the process of denouncing the man who sexually abused her daughter. Nelly felt the solidarity of these groups and that is how she –along with a feminist organization- started discussing the idea of an NGO that would fight specifically against violence towards women.

b) “Storied Themes in the Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Nelly’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.26: Nelly’s Storied Themes**

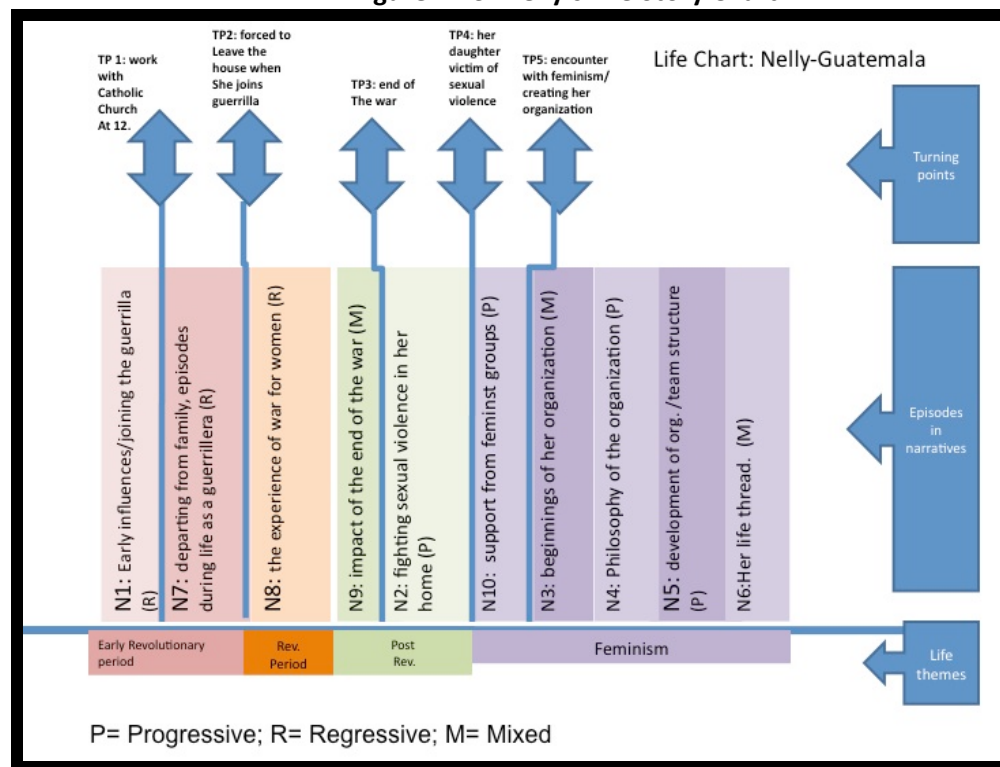
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                              | Narrative Tracing  | Narrative Threads                                                                        | Progression/Regression                                                                                                          | Opposition/Engagement                                                            |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The “system” in Guatemala is based on inequality and exploitation of the poorest, the weakest, the culturally different and women. In a society like this, the powerful can do whatever they want and have the military and cultural means at their disposal to do so. Nobody cares about them, the state and the system don’t respond to their needs, but only to the needs of the wealthy | N1, N2, N3, N7,    | Our system is unfair and based on the needs of the powerful, not the majority of people. | Regression: The system creates conditions for exploitation that seem inescapable for the ones in the lowest level of the ladder | Opposition to the state and to the system as known                               |
| Fighting for change is the only way to achieve it. During the war, we had nothing to loose because they would kill us anyway. After the war, the poor and women have to fight for their rights, because nobody else will do it for them. It is our responsibility to do it for ourselves; we cannot count just on the government.                                                           | N1, N2, N3, N7, N9 | Defiance (in different forms) is the only way to change the system                       | Progression: There is perceived opportunity for change, but at the high cost of defiance.                                       | Opposition to the system                                                         |
| The patriarchal system that wants to keep women giving up their rights shapes thinking not only of the rich but also of the poor and traditional families                                                                                                                                                                                                                                   | N1, N2, N7, N10    | Patriarchy cuts throughout class, ethnicity and gender                                   | Regression: Patriarchy is Nellylized in a society as the “way things are” at all levels.                                        | Opposition to patriarchal thinking which cuts across different levels of society |
| Women have to develop solidarity towards each other and protect themselves from a system that wants to abuse them. Its incredible what women can do if they come together. Women should not loose this vision.                                                                                                                                                                              | N1, N2, N3, N10    | Women have to come and fight together for their rights.                                  | Progression: Women coming together and fighting the system can make a difference for themselves.                                |                                                                                  |

|                                                                                                                               |             |                                                                        |                                                                                                     |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|
| Sexual violence is embedded in the patriarchal system. Women's sexual rights are silenced for the convenience of this system. | N1, N3, N10 | Sexual violence towards women is part of the status quo of this system | Regression:<br>It is very difficult to fight sexual violence when it is part of the broader system. |  |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--|

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Nelly's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.13: Nelly's Life Story Chart



### d) Life Summary

The story of Nelly reflects a "redemption sequence" where the protagonist goes from a regressive period in her life to a progressive one. In the case of Nelly, we learn that she is daughter of an 'era of political repression' in Guatemala (during the mid-sixties) who witnessed and suffered political violence as a child, and grew up with a sense of being endangered. She consistently silences her family's voices throughout her story and therefore her audience gets the feeling that she has been or felt alone during large portions of her life. Having the early influence of the Revolutionary Catholic Church, she is moved by the social injustice that surrounds her –and of course, influenced by the pastoral discourse of the Theology of Liberation- to the point of starting her collaboration with the guerrilla being only twelve years old. With an absent family and the possible pressure that existed in these groups, Nelly leaves (or is asked to leave) her house being only fifteen years old. A pattern is established where Nelly develops a sense of identity connected to the idea of 'giving herself in' and doing 'whatever its necessary' in order to achieve social change. The

political cause is the most important thing in her life. Nelly has a vision, or an idea of how to deal with her deep sense of injustice, because of how her decision to join the guerrilla is framed as an inescapable destiny: She was living under extremely dangerous conditions and felt at risk even with her own family. Since she was at risk of being killed 'anyway', she reached the conclusion that "its worth dying in trying to change things" (N7).

At some point Nelly acknowledged that "You stop living, you jump, learn how to survive and the things that you have to live are too strong, therefore I feel as if I didn't have a childhood."

Her life and her experiences with motherhood come second. Enduring unfair treatment, sexism, sexual abuse and a depleted sense of womanhood, she stayed with the guerrilla movement for approximately nineteen years. Nelly does not disclose in her life narrative whether she was promoted during those years, or whether there were military satisfactions. What she talks about is how leftist women sacrificed themselves for the cause. She talks about how others did what she did as well. There is a strong collective voice when she talks about the sorrows of the guerrilla life.

When the war is over, Nelly has already developed a strong sense of identity and a lifestyle that is connected with her guerrilla life despite the fact that this was most likely not satisfactory. When entering the process of the peace agreements, Nelly experienced a severe depression that came to her when she was 'forced' to dismantle her identity as a 'outsider' and to re-enter society. She has to abandon her position of opposition and engage again.

A significant turning point in her life occurs when her daughter is sexually assaulted by a man close to the family, who in addition, was a former guerrilla member. What Nelly does in this case pulls her out from the pattern of 'giving herself in' for others, and she decides to do something for herself and for her family. Her quest is to bring this man to justice, the justice that she has been looking for so many years. Paradoxically, the daughter's pain "bears fruit" when Nelly, already influenced by supporting feminists, decides to take her personal quest to the society level again, and create an organization that supports women who are victims of violence. Her desire to do something larger for societal change again comes in hand with a painful personal story. She found cohesiveness in this decision: "[I] wanted to create a precedent, and it was a question of principles: if all my life I fought for justice, for the truth, I couldn't remain silent because that was giving up all that I fought for...this originated that we decided to give life to a space that would allow women who are victims of violence...to unite." Ultimately, the healing that the organization provides becomes part of her own healing process. Nelly is able to –partially- re-enter society again. Nevertheless, used to be an outsider, she places herself as a woman who works for other women, even a feminist, but remains at the fringes of the Guatemalan feminist movement. Two significant trends are part of her life: one, a trend where Nelly is 'taken by circumstance': drawn by the church, the guerrilla and the tragedy of her daughter, her actions are more reactions than creations of her own. The other trend is connected with a 'desire' for agency, in reacting to the role of a passive victim, where she stands and fights. Her quests come at a personal high cost, but they are, in fact, what creates meaning for her. In addition, her identity is very closely related to perceiving herself in opposition, coming as an outsider of the system and fighting for others who have also experienced being left behind by the system.

#### 4.3.2- “Leticia” from Guatemala

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Leticia’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: “Radicalization when exposed to inner country injustice”:** in this narrative of her pre-revolutionary period, Leticia describes the impact that the work of priests and nuns of the Chichicastenango region had on her, and how, her work with them became a turning point that led her to radical revolutionary activism.

**N2: “Exposure to a different educational system and life taking a different direction”:** another narrative from Leticia’s pre-revolutionary period. In this case, she describes the different influences that shaped her life direction and the choices she made later in life.

**N4: “Rape attempt and connection with later feminist involvement”:** in this narrative from her revolutionary period, Leticia talks about how she was victim of a traumatic rape attempt, which she kept silent for many years until she was able to disclose to feminist therapists in Mexico. Having this space for intimate sharing and understanding allowed her to develop an emotional connection to feminism and thus, her inspiration to develop a feminist project in Guatemala.

**N5: “Grief over guerrilla’s loss and feminist engagement”:** a narrative from Leticia’s post revolutionary period, where she describes the moment when she realized that it was not possible for her revolutionary organization to win the war. This realization prompted a need to detach herself from other revolutionaries, and find a new space among feminism.

**N19: “Murder, betrayal and disappointment in revolutionary Nicaragua”:** a narrative from Leticia’s revolutionary period, when she describes how the murder of “Comandante Ana Maria” (a revolutionary Salvadoran leader) confronted her with the internal divisions and conflict of interest among revolutionary organizations. For Leticia, revolution stopped being achievable after realizing these problems intrinsic to revolutionary organizations.

**N14: “Return to parental home and reconstruction of relationship with parents”:** this narrative of Leticia’s post-revolutionary period illustrates the conditions in which Leticia returned to her parents household and rebuilt her relationship with them after years of separation. This was a turning point in her post-revolutionary life.

##### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Leticia’s life story interview transcription:

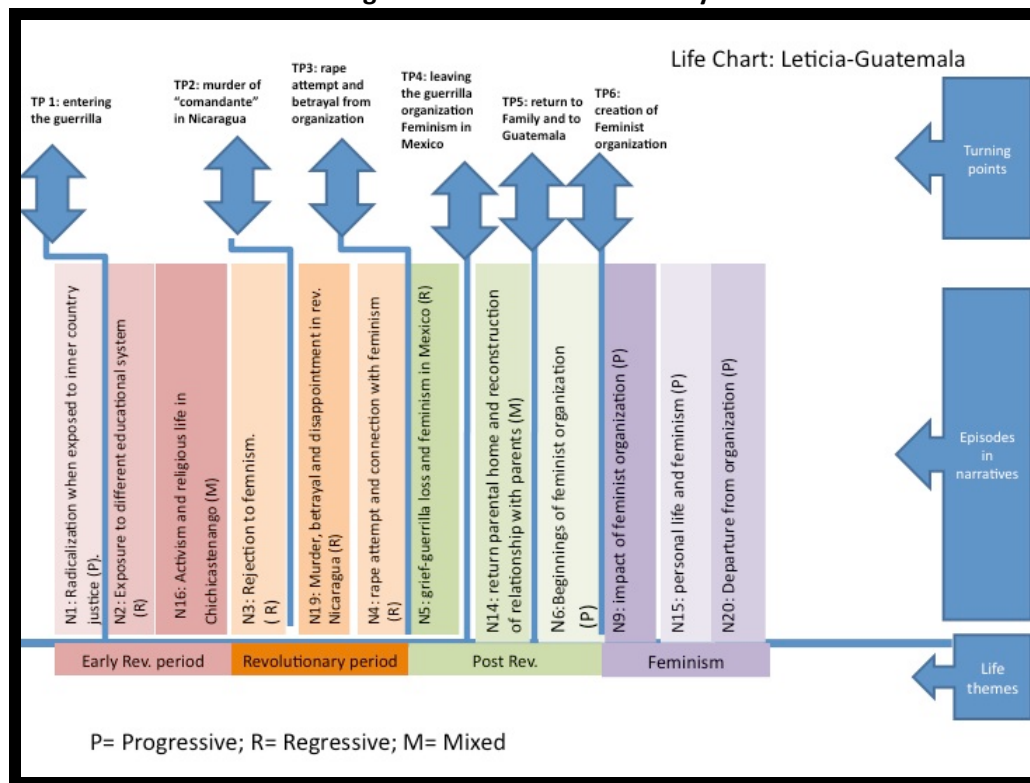
**Table 4.28: Leticia's Storied Themes**

| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                      | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                           | Progression/Regression                                                                                                                      | Opposition/Engagement                               |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 1<br>Others were doing something to change the deep injustice and inequality in my country. Those who were trying to do something were organized and taught me a new understanding of the system. I had to get involved. I did not see the dangers involved in this decision. | (N1, N2, N16)     | The system had to be changed and I had to be part of that change.                           | Progression:<br>There is a perceived opportunity for change, for making the situation better.                                               | Opposition to the state and to the system as known. |
| Theme 2<br>Feminism gave me a new understanding of the things that had happened in my past. It allowed me to heal what was wounded. It gave me a new reason to work for change                                                                                                      | (N4, N5, N14)     | Feminism gave me the opportunity of a "new life", both internal and external after the war. | Progression:<br>Feminism becomes <i>the</i> project personal project that gives a new meaning and dimension to individual and social change | Opposition to the left                              |
| Theme 3<br>Winning the war was not possible anymore. The organizations were not loyal to their own people nor the cause. This was a very painful realization, but I decided to leave the guerrilla and to cut my ties with the organization.                                        | (N5, N19)         | We could not win the war and this became a painful realization for me.                      | Regression:<br>The pain and sacrifice placed in the war did not produce the expected societal change                                        | Opposition to the revolutionary struggle.           |
| Theme 4<br>After the war, I returned to my family and/or to my previous life. There was so much to reconstruct. I reached out to them to start all over again.                                                                                                                      | (N14)             |                                                                                             | Mixed:<br>After all those years of pain and abandonment, the family re-encounter produces an opportunity for healing.                       | Engagement to previous life history                 |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Leticia's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

Figure 4.14: Leticia's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Leticia highlights the experience of a woman who, coming from a protected economic background, is drawn into radical activism and revolutionary engagement influenced by Theology of Revolution and the political activism and pastoral work of nuns and priests of the state of Quiché when she was only sixteen years old. Her experience is highly atypical, as most of the women who became involved in the revolutionary process in Guatemala came from the lower classes. The paradigmatic metaphor that encapsulates Leticia's experience at this time is: "it turned my life a hundred, a hundred-and-eighty degrees" which suggests how the experience of joining this group felt like a radical displacement from one position to the extreme opposite.

Why did Leticia leave her house and follow such a different life path from those of her condition? There isn't a definite answer to this question that emerges from the narratives; only the possibility that a combination of personality style, family values and/or family dynamics lead her to become concerned with Guatemalan macro-social conditions instead of her own social milieu. Those family values could be related to Leticia's mother Christian interest in 'the other'. Another possibility is that she needed to depart from and challenge her father's authoritarianism. What Leticia started at sixteen was an involvement that lasted for almost twenty years that she invested onto the revolutionary cause. Her adult identity was established during the war years, and though it was a highly satisfactory period in her life, it also constrained personal and family choices, as she gave up contact with her family and resigned to the idea of having her own. The revolutionary process became the great epic of her life, which ended with her withdrawal from her revolutionary organization after a perceived feeling of defeat. Leticia presents the murder of Salvadoran revolutionary 'Comandante Ana Maria' in Nicaragua as a sign of decadence within the regional revolutionary movement that signalled her that it was not possible to win the revolutionary war anymore. Perhaps it also signalled that the atmosphere within the movement had

changed and it was not possible for to trust it anymore. What Leticia does not address in her narratives are the internal divisions that existed among the Guatemalan revolutionary leadership and how these constrained the choices of those involved, as guerrilla members had to make choices of which political fraction to support. At that moment in her life, Leticia probably experienced a sense of vacuum, where the revolutionary paradigm was changing and also a life that was known to her for so long. Leticia opted for exile and left for Mexico. It was in this process that she became acquainted with Mexican feminism and entered psychological therapy to make sense of her painful experiences and life decisions. For the first time in her life, the question of 'womanhood' emerged, and she was finally ready to look at it. Mexican Feminism had a great impact on her, and soon took over and became her prevalent source of identity. Feminism allowed her to make her transition into the peace process and gave her a new sense of direction upon her return to Guatemala. What Leticia received from feminism, she wanted to transmit to other women (N4): "my concern was to return to Guatemala and say, if I can devote to build up a group that self-defines as feminist from the very beginning..."

Her encounter with her family was initially characterized by a great power imbalance and distance, but the relationship gradually grew closer as Leticia was able to create a new personal and political space for her through her feminist organization.

When narrating her life story, Leticia repeatedly seemed to leave aside her feelings and emotional reactions regarding her experiences. She is careful to not address conflicting emotions, crisis, doubt and deep pain. In sum, it can be argued that Leticia's life identities have been framed in opposition: she challenged her status quo as an adolescent, entered the revolutionary process and opposed the Guatemalan state and her own social milieu; left the revolutionary cause and engaged in opposing patriarchal views through feminism. In the end, she left her feminist organization and opposed the idea to remain 'a perennial' organized feminist. Her life has had progressive and regressive turns that have given her an opportunity to experience a wide array of positionings that have taken her to risk, excitement, pain, disappointment, engagement and opposition with the different projects in which she has been involved with.

#### 4.3.3- "Clarisa" from Guatemala

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Clarisa's interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1: "Family influence, experience of transition in adolescence, entrance to the university":** a narrative from Clarisa's pre-revolutionary period, where she addresses the influence of being raised only by women and how this aspect of her upbringing ignited a certain sense of 'women's power' that she latter channelled in her student and revolutionary involvement at the University.

**N2: "Entering the guerrilla and coming out as a lesbian":** a narrative from Clarisa's revolutionary period, where she describes the process that she underwent while engaging in revolutionary action. During that time, she came out as a Lesbian with a feminist identity. Soon she realized that this position entered in contradiction with the ideas that revolutionaries had about how guerrilla members should live their sexuality.

**N3: "Feminism as a life saver for women":** in this narrative from Clarisa's post-revolutionary period, she addresses how feminism became a 'life saver' for women who had been involved in revolutionary struggle, as it allowed them to continue their quest to change their

social reality and develop a sense of solidarity beyond the links established in revolutionary work.

**N7: “First Lesbian group organizing”:** a narrative from Clarisa’s feminist period where she describes the early phases of what later would be known as the lesbian movement within Guatemalan feminism. In this context, she describes how Lesbian feminists came ‘out of the closet’ and organized themselves around a political agenda. Clarisa became in this context one of the leading voices.

**N11: “Connections between life experiences”:** In this narrative, Clarisa discusses what has moved her throughout her life, and she emphasizes the importance of creating a ‘community of women’ that support social change. Note: though this narrative is not literally speaking a narrative of change with a turning point, it is relevant for this study, and it has been included in the analysis, because it presents Clarisa’s reflections and insights concerning identity transition.

#### b) Storied Themes in Narratives of Change

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Clarisa’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.30: Clarisa’s Storied Themes**

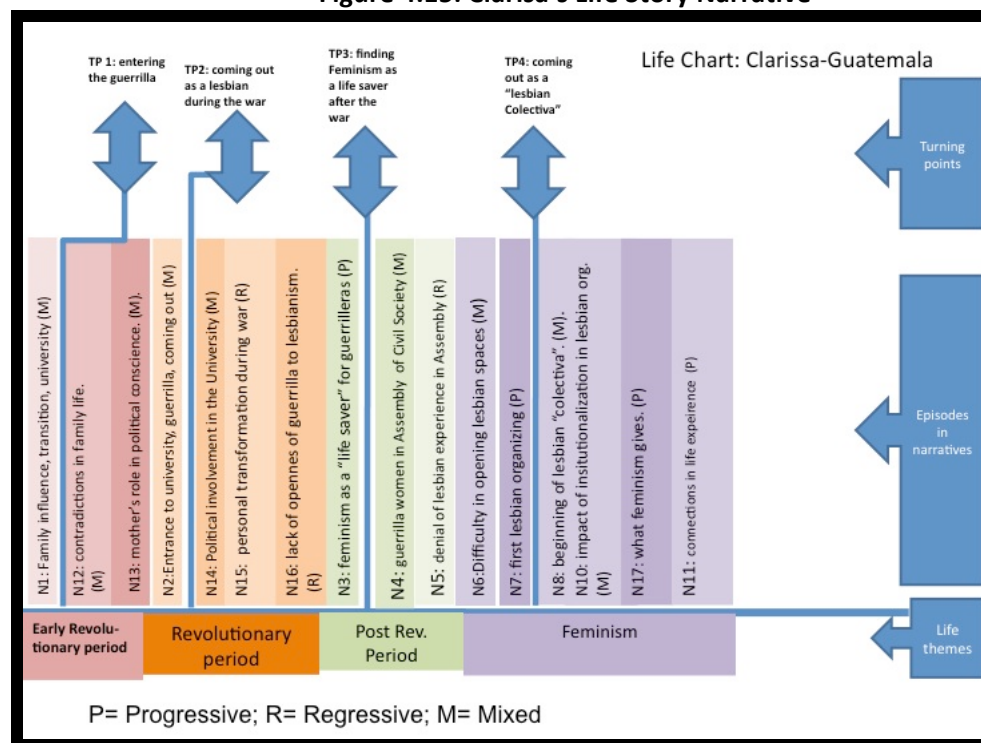
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                 | Narrative Tracing            | Narrative Threads                                                                                                                                                 | Progression/Regression                                                                                                                     | Opposition/Engagement                                                                            |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| The “system”-permeated by relations based on dominance and control-keeps people marginalized and working against their rightful needs. To realize this, is to gain “awareness” which overcomes internal contradiction and frees individuals from this control. | (N1, N2, N15)                | The system alienates individuals by feeding them with ideas about themselves and about society, and to gain awareness means to fight this kind of control.        | Progression: There is a perceived opportunity for internal change, at least, by “freeing” the mind from alienation and gaining conscience. | Opposition to the system as known.                                                               |
| Social change must be pursued at all costs, be it through radical political activism or even military opposition. It is worthwhile to have a radical position. Otherwise, what else is there in life?                                                          | (N2, N3, N11, N14, N15, N17) | Its fair to try to change a society through any means that are available to us: violent, non-violent, radical and oppositional. This is a life quest worth living | Progression: There is a perceived opportunity for external change through activism and social action. This is a meaningful pursuit.        | Opposition to the system, the state in order to change the social and symbolic order             |
| It is possible to create a social collective force among women that can change the way sexuality is constructed in our culture. This is what I attempt to do using the tools of radical feminism                                                               | (N7, N11, N17)               | Body, sexuality and pleasure are personal resources of lesbian women and we have the right to enjoy, not to conceal them. Feminism is a way to achieve this goal. | Progression<br>Feminism becomes the provider of theory and methods that can help to achieve this political quest.                          | Engagement to other women through feminism in order to create a new culture concerning sexuality |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                       |                        |                                                                                                                                  |                                                                                                                                       |                                                                                                          |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Its necessary to recover the history that communities of women construct. This community has been crucial in my personal development. Women need to articulate these processes for collective action. | (N1, N2, N7, N10, N11) | There is a female power that women share and transfer to each other that can unleash their political power and social influence. | Progression: Women are a community of interest that has influence, but needs to develop collective action in order to claim its power | Engagement to communities of women through history and collective action that would claim women's power. |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Clarisa's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction.

**Figure 4.15: Clarisa's Life Story Narrative**



### d) Life Summary

The case of Clarisa highlights the story of a radical political leftist activist who, during her political involvement discovered the need to engage in a personal process of self-discovery as she acknowledged her lesbian identity, which shaped her personal quest, going from macro-social change to personal one, as she –and other Guatemalan lesbians- came 'out of the closet', and found their space in Guatemalan feminist discourse.

Clarisa's childhood was marked by what she called 'the strength and power of women' impersonated in the figures of her mother and other women of her family who worked hard and struggled on their own, without the support of men. Another type of influence is what she called 'all that stuff of alienation' which was never really defined in Clarisa's narratives, but seemed to refer to patriarchal and capitalist views typical of Guatemalan society.

Coming from a rather poor family, political activism came early in her life, being only seventeen years old, when she was drawn to 'organized worlds' that shaped ideas of herself and the world. When Clarisa entered the university, she was already familiarized with feminist and leftist discourses, and felt 'called' by the political agendas of student activists. She gradually moved from student organizations to the guerrilla. The revolutionary experience allowed her to engage in confronting the rigidities of the Guatemalan society which she felt deeply committed to change, but in the process, she became very aware of her lesbian identity, which she didn't conceal from her guerrilla group. Though Clarisa didn't openly talk about the reaction of those around her, she realized that the discursive space of the guerrilla organizations was not open to explore 'personal' as much as 'societal' transformations. Clarisa encountered that the patriarchal and hierarchical nature of these organizations didn't leave enough space for the integration of the two identities: the 'revolutionary' and the 'lesbian' ones. After six years in the revolutionary movement, Clarisa decided to leave it behind and have a different focus for her life.

At this juncture of her life, Clarisa experienced feminism as a 'life saver' because it allowed her to continue involved in social change and also became the new meaningful project in her life. Though feminism had been in her life before her military involvement started it is only *after* the revolutionary process is over that it took a significant prevalence in Clarisa's life. Why is that the case? Clarisa's answer to this question is: "[feminism gave me] the possibility to continue believing in a fight, and still doing... having feminism as a political quest, and continue to believe in the possibility of transformations, from transgression to rebelliousness, from actions that transform reality or social order."

At the end of the war, Clarisa was called to join the negotiations that took place in the "Civil Society Assembly" as a representative of the 'women sector'. In this context, she openly attempted to introduce the idea of the need to protect the human rights of homosexuals in Guatemala. Despite her position, she didn't find enough support for her ideas, and realized that lesbians needed to work together on these issues. She co-founded with other women a small lesbian colectiva which gave her the space and opportunity to explore a collective sense of lesbianism. It became a space of play and support among the lesbian community, but it lacked a political agenda. It soon became evident to Clarisa and others that it was necessary to find connection with other potential allies- the feminists, and they organized the first forum that openly spoke about lesbian feminism right after the peace agreements were signed.

Eventually, Clarisa and the others reached the point where they had to decide whether they would keep the organization relatively informal or if they were ready to 'institutionalize' their efforts. After a painful process, they decided to become an NGO and the group became the first lesbian feminist NGO in Guatemala. It was founded in 1999. Ever since, Clarisa has worked for this organization, currently being the Director, facing prejudices and even death threats. Despite these risks, the group carries a series of programs mostly funded by international donors and agencies.

Clarisa continues to engage in work that supports the political education of women hoping that these efforts will lead to a stronger community of politically involved women who will continue to challenge patriarchy and sexual violence in Guatemala. She, as a 'radical lesbian feminist' continues to engage in opposition to the system.

#### 4.3.4- “Lilian” from Guatemala

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Lilian’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1 “Brief Summary of Life Story”:** an encompassing life narrative from Lisette pre-revolutionary and revolutionary years, where she describes how her upbringing in Cuba contributed to her development of a political consciousness, and how this influenced her involvement in the Guatemalan revolutionary student movement. Nevertheless, it was abroad, in Mexico, when Lilian later encountered foreign feminist women and learned about feminism.

**N2 “Experiences in Mexico, El Salvador and return to Guatemala”:** in this narrative from her revolutionary and post revolutionary periods in Mexico and El Salvador, Lisette reflects upon the impact that feminism and solidarity among women had in her perceptions of social justice. She realized that she had neglected the ‘gender category’ from her analysis of injustice.

**N4 “Early family influences, life in Cuba”:** in this narrative from Lilian’s pre-revolutionary years, she discusses the influence of her particular family upbringing –where gender discrimination was not endorsed- as well as the importance of political participation in Cuba as two key aspects of her personal development that influenced her support and interest for the Guatemalan revolutionary process.

**N5 “Returning to Guatemala, Political activism-war”:** In this narrative of Lisette’s pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods, she describes in detail how she lived the experience of returning from Cuba to Guatemala when she was sixteen years old. At that time, it was her job at the National University which –along her Cuban socialization in political involvement- prompted her to enroll in the revolutionary student movement. From there onwards, Lilian’s desire to fight injustice in Guatemala, along with the death of her brother – also fighting for the guerrilla- determined her deep revolutionary involvement, one that she carried until she was severely injured in combat.

**N7 “Impact of feminism-experiences in Mexico, El Salvador, Guatemala”:** narrative from Lilian’s feminist period, where she describes the impact that Mexican feminist’s discourse had on her way of looking at gender relations within the guerrilla movements. Lilian also discusses her experiences with Salvadoran and Guatemalan feminists

##### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Lilian’s life story interview transcription:

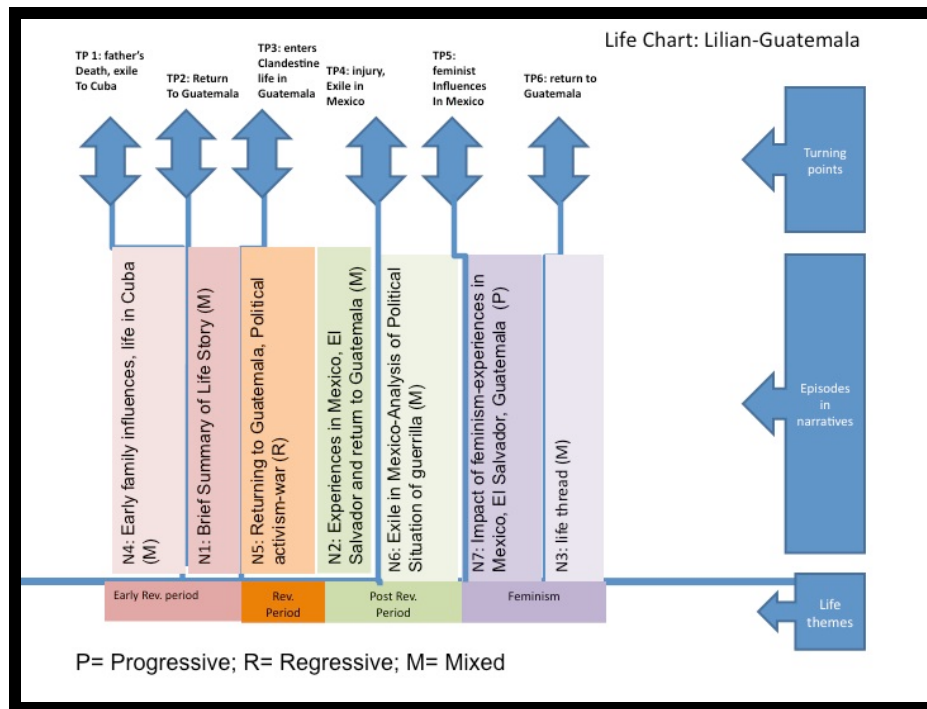
**Table 4.32: Lilian's Storied Themes**

| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                               | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                                                              | Progression/Regression                                                                                                                                                                        | Opposition/Engagement                                                                                       |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Radical political activism is part of my identity; it's a legacy from previous generations and its part of the way in which I grew up and how I was educated, the values in my family and across genders. It's who I am.     | N1, N3, N4, N5    | Radical political activism is part of one's identity and historically constructed              | Progression: Families with political leftist values move forward a country's possibility of change.                                                                                           | Engagement with family values                                                                               |
| I have a basic need for justice. I feel satisfied when I do something to change the unjust structures of this country. I would like to have a more just system like the Cuban in Guatemala.                                  | N3,N5             | Satisfaction comes from knowing that I do something to change the unjust structures of society | Progression: Through Political activism it is possible to change the unjust structures of our society.                                                                                        | Opposition to unjust structures and mechanisms                                                              |
| I have been victim of oppression by the patriarchal guerrilla system without knowing it, and I have also reproduced this exploitative scheme. Thanks to feminism I was able to become aware of this problem.                 | N2,N7             | Radical leftist activists can reproduce patriarchal views that exploit women.                  | Mixed: It is painful to be part of leftist activism aimed at freeing people, only to later realize that one has been victim of leftist patriarchal views. Feminism can create this awareness. | Opposition to patriarchal values from the left                                                              |
| Women can have better types of relationships among them, where they can transit from rivalry to solidarity. This is what I experienced among feminist women in the different countries where I joined the feminist movement. | N2,N7             | Feminism calls for solidarity among women.                                                     | Progressive: Through feminism women can learn to develop solidarity and unite for their rights                                                                                                | Engagement to women's organizing and to developing more collaborative and supportive relations among women. |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Lilian's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction:

Figure 4.16: Lilian's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The story of Lilian reflects an aspect that is related to women's radical political activism that has been addressed by Karen Kampwirth, which is the importance of a 'tradition of political involvement' in their families of origin.

In the case of Lilian, we learn that she is the daughter of two Guatemalan public school teachers, which in the early sixties would 'set the stage' for a particular type of political positioning in her family. She discovers early the price of political involvement and the brutality of political oppression through the murder of her father and her family's exile in Cuba.

Her Cuban experience is incorporated as a 'utopia' that is worth fighting for. Having early access in her life to the prevailing Cuban discourses on the value of revolution, the importance of early political involvement and of contribution to a socialist state, she returns to Guatemala moved with the desire of 'getting involved', 'belonging' and 'contributing to change unjust structures'. Is she following here a pre-determined life path or is her activism rather moved by agency? It may not be possible to disentangle one from the other, as activism and seeking social change has been an identity thread since her adolescence.

The experience of political involvement turns out to be both satisfactory and painful –a mixed sequence of progression and regression- which seems to be a typical turn of events in Lilian's life story, where this pattern is played and replayed throughout her life phases. In her family of origin, the idea of 'sacrifice' for the sake of social change is accepted as an existential goal. She seems to 'take in' this destiny and refuses to express the pain of her choice, but this nevertheless emerges in her metaphors that address violence and suffering, like for example, being "turned into firewood".

Having to leave the revolutionary process in Guatemala due to an injury, Lilian's exile in Mexico recreates the early pain of having to move and readjust to a new place. In Mexico, she has to let go of her previous commitment as a guerrillera fighting for change in Guatemala, and gradually engages with other types of causes that resonate in her and 'fill the identity void as well as open new perspectives for her. What can remain of Lilian's

identity in times of peace, when she has constructed a sense of herself that is deeply embedded in the idea of remaining in 'opposition'?

The 'answer' comes through feminism. It is through her discovery of feminism that she is able to look critically at the revolutionary structures and deconstruct gender relations as another category where inequality is created. Feminist encounters gave her new frames of understanding, as she described in N7: "the first impact of this process is to assume awareness that I am also a woman, and that I am living those things too. The first impact was of... my first reaction was of anger. To know the condition of oppression that I lived myself, of what I didn't have consciousness of. That I was reproducing it throughout my participation, even political,. That I started to analyze those experiences inside the same organization. Of oppression from our 'companeros' to our 'companeras' without us having awareness of it. It produced a great deal of anger in me. [They] collapsed... it had an impact in me... oppression makes you angry, and it was the first thing that had an impact on me".

The anger that she refers to in this point of her life, may not be only addressing her 'lack of awareness' but also the level of investment that she placed on a revolutionary cause that, in the end, demanded so much and delivered so little for women. A new cause that is worth pursuing in times of peace is then incorporated in Lilian's sense of identity. Interestingly, Lilian tends to present dichotomized views of Guatemalans, as she is highly critical of the feminists of this country –as opposed to Salvadoran and Mexicans–; she is also critical of the Guatemalan revolutionary structures and at some point, even of the Guatemalan idiosyncrasy. Guatemala is for her both a dreaded and loved place. A place that is worth fighting for; is worth returning to and is worth 'bearing' despite idiosyncrasies and lack of deep friendships. In this context, it could also be argued that Lilian's life was highly influenced by her early experience of exile, which may have contributed to her ambivalence and sense of 'not belonging' and yet 'wanting to find a place' in Guatemala.

A significant silence in Lilian's life narrative pertains to her personal family life. She mentions that she came to El Salvador with her partner and had a daughter while living there. Still, she does not refer to the gender dynamics between she and her partner, but as it is suggested through her narration, she eventually separates from him. She does not disclose the reasons. The way Lilian frames her life story seems to detach the personal details of her life, favouring the political self. The question then emerges: Is the private really just political for her? Or is she consciously leaving out this information for a reason, and if so, what purpose does this serve? In any case, Lilian seems to derive her sense of identity from her political and feminist affiliations, and in doing so, she speaks of herself almost exclusively in political terms.

#### 4.3.5- "Odilia" from Guatemala

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Odilia's interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N7 "Family roles-early revolutionary church-gender constructions":** narrative from Odilia's pre-revolutionary and revolutionary years where she discusses how the influence of a Youth Christian group fuelled her rebelliousness, and the influence of a leftist nun and her university peers was crucial in the process of engaging in revolutionary activism. In this narrative, Odilia contrasts her revolutionary activism with the dismantling of the traditional gender orientations that she was socialized into.

**N1 “Early family life-guerrilla- loss of her husband:** this is an encompassing narrative from Odilia’s adolescence until her revolutionary period. The thread of this narrative is her relationship with her romantic partner that started when she was around eighteen years old. This relationship was influential in her revolutionary involvement, and Odilia talks about it evolved over time, and how she experienced her revolutionary group after the death of her husband.

**N11 “Leaving her guerrilla organization”:** narrative from Odilia’s post revolutionary period in which she explains how she decided to leave her revolutionary organization supporting a revolutionary leader who argued for the need to supplement revolutionary work with political activism. For Odilia, leaving her organization and returning to Guatemala after her exile of two years was a process that ended with strong disillusionment regarding the role of women in the Guatemalan guerrilla

**N4 “From feminist NGO to feminist journal”:** narrative from Odilia’s feminist period where she describes two difficult experiences that she underwent in dealing with group’s identities and objectives when she found herself at odds with some of her fellow feminists.

**N12: “The function of feminism”:** a narrative from Odilia’s feminist period where she explains how feminism has allowed her to understand other women as well as herself better, allowing her to detach from rigid views about subjectivity. Note: though this narrative is not literally speaking a narrative of change with a turning point, it is relevant for this study, and it has been included in the analysis, because it presents Odilia’s reflections and insights concerning identity transition.

#### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Odilia’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.34: Odilia’s Storied Themes**

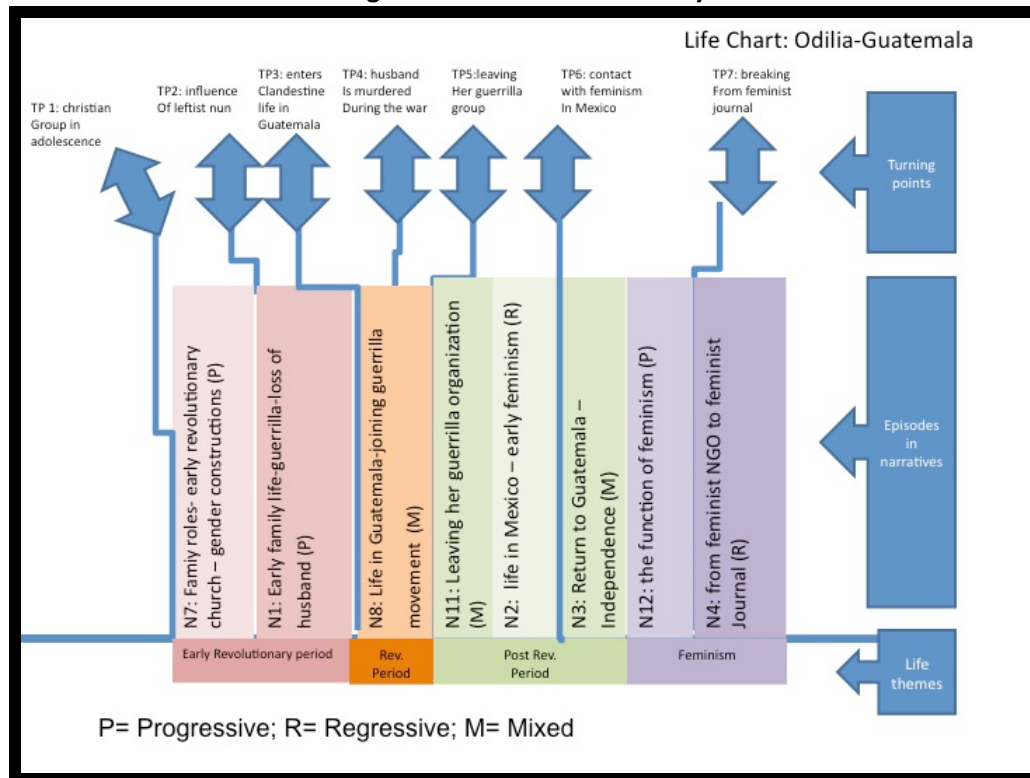
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                | Narrative Tracing        | Narrative Threads                             | Progression/Regression                                                                      | Opposition/Engagement                                            |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 1<br>I have always considered myself a rebel, since I was young, and I have retained that aspect of my identity through all my life. This allowed me to keep my autonomy. I have positioned myself as a critic of the groups of which I have been part of; for example, I am a feminist who retains her sense of individuality and is not “married” to an organization. | N1, N3, N7, N8, N11, N12 | I need to retain my capacity to disagree      | Progression:<br>There is a personal capacity to retain agency.                              | Opposition to those organizations that attempt to cut my freedom |
| Theme 2<br>Leftist men were no less influenced by patriarchal values than others. Women always played a lesser role in guerrilla, and they were sometimes not even aware.                                                                                                                                                                                                     | N1, N11, N12             | The left did not work for women, only for men | Regression:<br>Women in the left have been victims of “machismo” within their organizations | Opposition to patriarchal positions within the left              |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                  |                 |                                                                                     |                                                                                                                                            |                                                                                                |
|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|--------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Theme 3<br>A political agenda is crucial for feminism, because it aims at having impact and creating spaces of representation. A feminism depleted of political agenda is useless                                                                                                                                | N2, N4, N12     | Meaningful feminism involves political planning                                     | Progression:<br>It is possible for women to transform societies if they have politically involved feminists                                | Opposition to the patriarchal political system is possible through a feminist political agenda |
| Theme 4<br>Social organizations can cut the independence and expressiveness of their members, as well as remove their freedoms, specially, if their members rebel. If feminist organizations become "business", members loose their freedom and right to disagree, because they are "employees" not "activists". | N2, N3, N4, N12 | Social organizations have interest agendas that can prevent the autonomy of members | Regression:<br>If organizations develop into 'fundraisers' and/or employers, they may tend to have rigid structures and convenience groups | Opposition to rigid organizational views, which cannot deal with dissenting voices.            |
| Theme 5<br>Feminism gave me and other women a framework to better know ourselves; our rebelliousness, our histories and to understand and to be saved from ignorance.                                                                                                                                            | N2, N7, N12     | Feminism can be a tool to better know yourself.                                     | Progression:<br>It is possible to bring further understanding to one's life through feminism                                               | Engagement to a feminist experience that helps women figure out who they are.                  |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Odilia's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction:

Figure 4.17: Odilia's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Odilia highlights the experience of a woman who places at the forefront of her identity construction the idea of being 'a rebel' or willing to engage in rebellion as a way of dealing with life situations. Even when Odilia does not rebel, she manages to retain this aspect of her identity by reframing the situation and presenting her 'active rebel side' on a different light.

Where did this pattern start? Her audience learns that she comes from a household of a small town, like any other, from a typically conservative family where she is the youngest daughter. Having pressures and influences in her socialization process along the direction of conforming with the norm, Odilia instead develops a critical perspective of family relationships, for example, of marriage, and decides very early that her life will not be the same as her sisters and mother.

Having family conditions and a certain set of interests and perspectives that make her "fertile land" for activism, Odilia also –like many other young women in the region at the time- becomes interested in theology of liberation and in having a societal impact in their environment. She became involved in a Christian Network group, and started getting influence through books and discussions with a Priest with who she develops a close relationship. Some time later, it was the influence of a rebellious Argentinean nun who appeals to Odilia in many levels, who provides her with a 'model' that she can identify and refer to. It could be argued that Odilia constructs a personality style around her internalized ideas of this woman, who she comes to consider a second mother. This woman's attitude created a great deal of dissonance in Odilia, because she didn't act like a traditional nun: she would tell jokes, talk loud, behave in bold manner. It opened the door for Odilia to reframe her sense of what was right and appropriate. In Odilia's words, this nun once told her: "One has to be a thinking cane, not a cane moved by the wind", and with this metaphor, Odilia

incorporated ideas of agency by suggesting the importance to stand on your own as opposed to follow the masses without thinking. After meeting this nun, Odilia's only moves forward in her desire to engage in radical political action, and though not all the decisions of her life belonged to her – as she perhaps would like to affirm- nevertheless, they were mostly intended as channels to express her need to criticize and if possible, transform her reality.

Interestingly, Odilia's most radical political decision does not fully belong to her: she engages in war partially under the influence of circumstances and of her romantic partner at the time. She manages to continue engaging in criticism and wanting to transform reality, but mostly complies with the organization for those years. Loosing her husband doesn't seem to "break her" as she attempts to retain a sense of 'self' after his death. When her partner died, though she suffered a great deal, was able to overcome the pain and gradually entered in relationships again: "Who knows about my nights? Who knows about my body?" she asked others who criticized her for overcoming "too quickly" her pain as widow. (N1).

In the end, Odilia's departure from the Guatemalan guerrilla movement was marked by her need to take a stand for a political solution, as opposed to a revolutionary one for Guatemala. This situation opened the opportunity for her to review a neglected side of her subjectivity: what she calls her 'womanly side' which maybe is a euphemism that helps her refer to 'her sensitivities, sorrows, fears, desire for protection' and other feelings potentially problematic for someone like her.

Odilia's acceptance of her subjectivity is marked by her encounter with feminism while in Mexico, which provided her with analytical tools to look at her position as a woman, perhaps for the first time in her life. In the end, she is able to regain her sense of agency and a sense of a 'new life' when she start engaging in feminist projects.

For Odilia, the idea of independence is a crucial part of what being strong means, and though she engages in feminist organizing, she is highly critical of those who 'work' for the movement instead of those who are 'politically active'. She has probably learned after many years of dependency from her guerrilla organization, what a 'straitjacket' organization can mean in someone's life. Despite her need to protect herself from being controlled, Odilia cannot avoid investing herself meaningfully in the feminist projects that she develops upon her return to Guatemala. Remaining both fully invested and highly critical sets the stage for disappointment when her partners reject her views and ideas. In the end, Odilia has to find new ways to negotiate remaining a feminist -or engaged with the movement- despite her disappointment and desire to 'not care' about what others do. In the end, her identity as a "rebel" and as a "autonomous feminist" seem to act like 'defense mechanisms' that allow her to face her social network –and her inner self- and continue functioning as if 'not much' has happened.

Odilia perceives herself as someone in opposition, but in the last part of her interview, in fact, she admits favouring a feminist position that engages with the state. She seems to reject a feminism that is only concerned with itself and hopes for a politically invested and promotes transformation. In the end, her life narrative can be considered of the mixed, as it can be understood as a process where progression and regression seem to appear hand in hand, almost setting the stage for each other

#### 4.3.6- “Paulina” from Guatemala

##### a) Analysis of Selected Narratives of Change

The following is a series of narratives from Paulina’s interview transcription that have been selected for in-depth analysis:

**N1 “Beginning of her political engagement”:** in this encompassing narrative that deals with pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods, Paulina discusses how her family history influenced her professional choices, and how these in turn, influenced her political involvement.

**N2 “Work with leftist party, beginnings with feminist NGO”:** In this narrative from the post-revolutionary and feminist periods, Paulina describes how she became engaged in a revolutionary organization –by the end of the war in Guatemala- and was able from there, to enter in contact with international agencies and eventually, feminist organizations. What started for her as volunteer work for women became a personal and career path that allowed her to put together the different pieces of her family life and to construct new personal meanings for her life.

**N3 “Connections between life thread and family history”:** in this narrative from her feminist period, Paulina reflects on the ‘lessons learned’ from her family history and her own, based also on concepts such as women’s right to fight for equality and justice in the private sphere.

**N6 “Involvement with student movement”:** in this narrative of her revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, Paulina reflects on her experiences as a student activist with the revolutionary student association and what were her aspirations during this period and the one that followed after the peace agreements were signed.

**N7 “Feminist/revolutionary identities and connections”:** narrative from Paulina’s feminist period, where she discusses her ‘two identities’: the revolutionary and the feminist. She argues that both are intertwined and that she does not need to resign to neither of them in order to fight for social justice. Note: though this narrative is not literally speaking a narrative of change with a turning point, it is relevant for this study, and it has been included in the analysis, because it presents Paulina’s reflections and insights concerning identity transition.

##### b) Storied Themes in the “Narratives of Change”

The following “storied themes” were identified from the “narratives of change” identified from Paulina’s life story interview transcription:

**Table 4.36: Paulina’s Storied Themes**

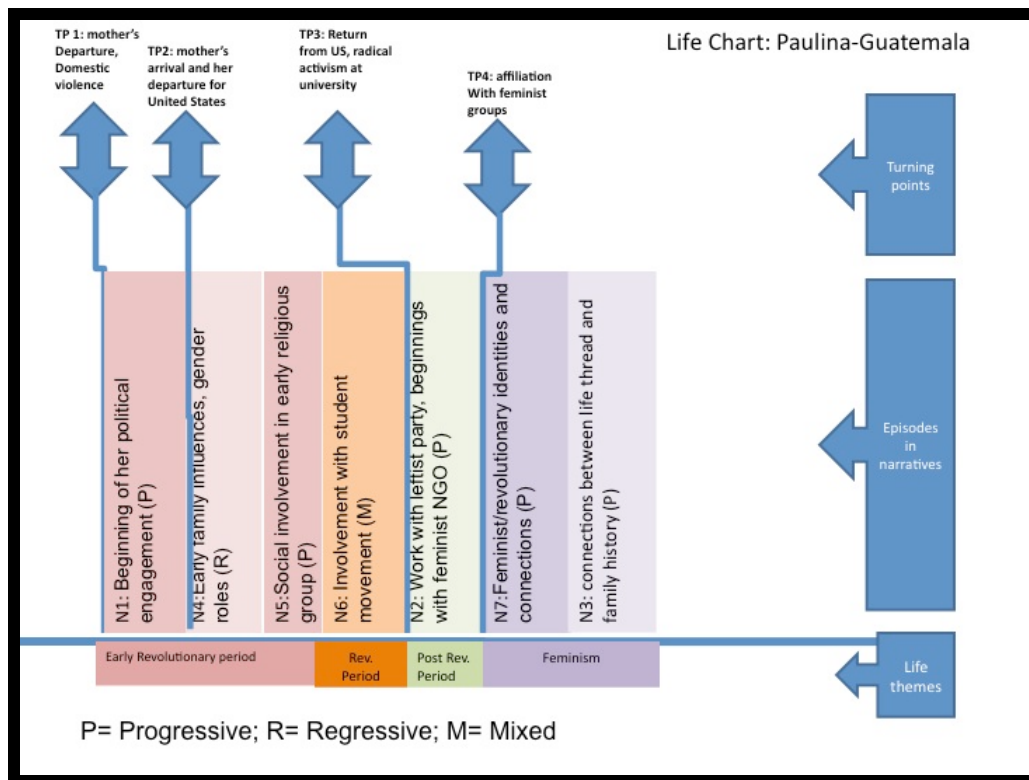
| Storied Themes                                                                                                                                                                                           | Narrative Tracing | Narrative Threads                                             | Progression/Regression                                                                            | Opposition/Engagement  |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|------------------------|
| The legacy and stories of my women ancestors, my mother and grandmother shaped ideas about my quest of change in the lives of women. I work not only for me, but also for the women before and after me. | N1, N3            | Women ancestors shape our identity and our quest as feminists | Progression: Women from the same family can develop a supportive community throughout generations | Engagement among women |

|                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                                     |                 |                                                                                                      |                                                                                                                                                     |                                                             |
|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------|
| Big influences in my life have been to develop group and collective work, particularly for those who are the poorest and weakest in society. Also, witnessing oppression has had a significant impact on me.                                                                                                                        | N1, N4, N5,     | Group and collective work with the poor and oppressed shapes ideas of change                         | Progression: Work done for others is meaningful and impacts positively on both sides: the giver and the taker                                       | Engagement with the poorest and weakest                     |
| There are women who are overworked and oppressed both in their private and public spheres. Witnessing domestic violence in my family of origin marked my views about my work for women's rights. Women need to strengthen their boundaries in order to stop working so hard. Its necessary to improve the quality of life of women. | N1, N2, N3, N6, | The private sphere can be a place of oppression for women through exploitation and domestic violence | Regressive: Women in their private spheres suffer so much because they are oppressed in their relations and in the amount of work that they conduct | Opposition to patriarchal oppression in the domestic sphere |
| My revolutionary and feminist identities are independently conformed one from the other, but share common concerns: I am a socialist, a revolutionary and a feminist who wanted to transform this society.                                                                                                                          | N1, N2, N3, N6  | Revolutionary and feminist pursuits are connected                                                    | Progressive: There is the possibility to transform women's life through a revolutionary and a feminist agenda                                       | Opposition to an exploitative and racist system             |

### c) "Life Story Chart"

Paulina's life story chart represents episodes of change in her life as well as significant turning points that have shaped her life direction:

Figure 4.18: Paulina's Life Story Chart



#### d) Life Summary

The case of Paulina highlights the experience of a woman who, marked by early childhood experiences of domestic violence from her father towards her mother, gradually develops a sense of agency and self-protection, as well as a need to stand out that marked her engagements in her professional life as a feminist as well as a political activist. Her particular type of feminism, can be argued, is focused on developing a life practice oriented to honor "her ancestors" or women of her family by learning both from their strengths and mistakes –particularly her mother's mistakes- and engaging in correcting those conditions that lead them to becoming victims of circumstance.

Paulina's early childhood experiences were characterized by pain, difficulty, poverty and abuse from some family members, as her mother had to leave the house and she –and her siblings- ended up living with her grandparents. Her father is a rather evasive figure in her life story, as she does not make sense of him in other terms than of labelling him an 'alcoholic', which both "did not excuse him for what he did" but in a way, it did. Perhaps this aspect of her family history remains yet to be dealt with.

What is a positive turn of events in her life is that, despite coming from a broken home, Paulina's grandparents provided her with stability and good enough role models that were able to give her positive identification figures. Paulina was able to integrate positive male role models through her grandfather, who supported her quest for education and personal development. In fact, as opposed to other feminists interviewed for this research project, Paulina is one of the few to address the positive influence of some men of her life, as she talks about her husband's political involvement, her grandfather's openness to education, her father-in-law's political activism and even her father's sensitivity to poverty.

Paulina was drawn to pursue a professional life and entered political student activism at the National University influenced by the *zeitgeist* of the mid 1990s in the Guatemalan conflict.

It is in this context that Paulina starts her revolutionary life. As she remembers: "There was still some level of risk, because we handled everything in a clandestine way. [In] the meetings that we had in classmates houses, we used to say that we were going to work in an university project, but we didn't go to the project, but rather to study Marxism, and discuss Marxist texts... at that time, there were political statements against the government that were very strong, but this is what motivated us to continue fighting... the statements were against the state, but we managed well the clandestine process." (N6)

As she had experiences with poverty, class difference and oppression, the revolutionary discourse resonated in her and was gradually internalized as one of her identities. Interestingly, Paulina was able to capitalize the end of the war to her personal and political objectives, since she was not significantly affected by a major experience of political violence and her lifestyle didn't experience a major change with the end of the war. Instead, she channelled those situations into professional development and soon entered in contact with revolutionary feminists. The feminist discourse also resonated in her as she had experiences of domestic violence, gender abuse, discrimination and personal insecurities in her own family history.

In the end, Paulina was able to engage politically and socially through her identities framed in opposition, such as her 'revolutionary' and her 'feminist' ones. Paulina's 'type of feminism' is in fact concerned as much with macro social transformation than with micro-transformation, and from this view, she is as much of a political activist as she is a feminist. Though she frames her political views as opposing the rigid material conditions of the Guatemalan society, in fact, she is also highly critical of abusive practices within feminism. She does not take for granted that a feminist milieu protects women from abusing each other, as it is a 'home' where 'abuse' can also take place. She learned about this painful reality through her childhood experiences. Despite her distrust, it is also a progressive turn in her life narrative that through her feminist involvement, Paulina found a psychological 'place' in life.

### 5.3.7- Summary of findings for Guatemala

The following summary presents insights concerning women from Guatemala drawing upon two sources: first, the criteria informing case selection for in-depth narrative analysis and second, the insights gained after applying methods such as storied themes and life story charts.

#### a) Characterization of women from Guatemala based on Case Selection Criteria.

A series of characteristics have been identified for this group of Guatemalan women concerning the factors listed below:

- Socio-economic factors: Almost all rural or urban women, with one exception (from an upper class background) come from poor or lower class economic background. Concerning family composition, the majority of the women come from households with both parents, with two exceptions. Almost all women attended school, and half of them made it to the university. All of them re-entered universities and obtained their academic degrees after their war involvement
- Political Affiliation: half of the women who entered the university after high-school joined revolutionary student movements and from there, the various Guatemalan guerrilla organizations; whereas the other half joined revolutionary movements before they entered the university. In one case (Nelly), who joined a revolutionary organization at the age of fifteen, attending school and eventually the university was simply not possible. All the women of the Guatemalan sample joined the one of the revolutionary organizations of the UNRG voluntarily, although influenced by one or more of the following factors: a sense of connection with the history of dissidence of their families; the influence of networks of religious/student revolutionary groups; a sense of commitment to a romantic partner who was part of the revolutionary movement at the time, and in addition, having lost a family member in the hands of the armed forces. In addition, women joined the prolonged Guatemalan war at different points in time.
- Military Involvement: in the early to mid-seventies, most Guatemalan women joined the revolutionary processes in order to fight against the military governments that ruled the country at the time, with the exceptions of Clarisa and Paulina, whose political

involvement started in the 1980s. In the case of two women who became affiliated to revolutionary groups during their university years, their involvement was relatively short termed (approximately five years) compared with the cases of women like Nelly, Leticia, Lillian and Odilia, whose involvement extended for more than ten years, ending with exile in Mexico for all of them except Nelly. The Guatemalan war ended in 1996 with the Peace process, where younger revolutionaries like Clarisa and Paulina seized the opportunity to participate in national efforts for reconciliation. The older Guatemalan revolutionary women opted to distance themselves from their previous political affiliations.

- Feminist Activisms:

As mentioned above, half of the women of this sample left Guatemala during their revolutionary years seeking political asylum in Mexico, and during those years, they entered in contact with Mexican feminist organizations or Guatemalan women's groups that had been supported by local feminist organizations or international solidarity groups. Clearly, these early contacts with feminism contributed to the development of a certain kind of feminist consciousness that they later brought back to Guatemala when they founded their own feminist NGOs (Odilia and Leticia). Other women of this sample, also founded feminist groups but as a response to specific needs. One of these organizations attempted to open a feminist space for lesbian women (Clarisa) and the other, as a response to sexual violence against women (Nelly).

b) Characterization of women's life trajectories based on Narrative Analysis Methods such as Storied Themes and Life Story Charts

Based on the narrative analysis of storied themes and life story charts, a series of characteristics have been identified for the life trajectories of this group of Guatemalan women concerning the factors listed below:

- Gender and Political Socialization: Just as in the case of Salvadorans, a few Guatemalan women also came from families with a history of leftist political affiliation. In some of these cases, this political background took a toll in these families where sometimes the Guatemalan women counted family members among the dead or disappeared (Nelly and Lillian). In some cases, these women were raised in a single-parent household, where the mother was the strong figure who moved the family forward, both financially and

emotionally (Lilian and Clarisa). For most of the Guatemalan women, their families were led by both parents and encouraged traditional gender role models. In the case of single parent families, the financial pressure led the mothers to spend less time at home, finding alternative sources of income to support their families (Lilian and Clarisa).

- Summary of Crucial Turning Points

#### Turning Point 1: Joining a Revolutionary Organization

Concerning significant turning points in Guatemalan women's lives, the ones that seemed most prominent were, first, joining Christian community based movements that worked with impoverished indigenous population areas (particularly for Nelly, Leticia and Odilia). In other cases, particularly concerning the women who grew up in urban parts of the country, it was their involvement in student movements that gradually socialized them into revolutionary affiliation (Clarisa, Lilian and Paulina).

- Turning Point 2: Life as a Revolutionary Guerrilla

A significant turning point took place when they joined revolutionary organizations and were sent to rural warfronts. Given the high levels of political oppression experienced during the war in Guatemala and the harassment towards those involved in political work, half of the women of this sample eventually fled to Mexico during the war (Leticia, Lilian and Odilia). Some of them left as a mechanism to distance themselves from the war and their own guerrilla groups (Leticia and Odilia) whereas others left with the hope of coming back and continue the revolutionary struggle (Lilian).

#### Turning Point 3: Post Revolutionary Period and Feminism:

Leaving for Mexico changed women's perspectives and allowed them to get in touch with feminists and women's groups from both Guatemala and Mexico, which was another turning point in their lives. Upon their return to Guatemala, many of these women had to confront a difficult environment shaped by new political arrangements and uncertainty concerning their roles in this post-conflict society. Another significant turning point in their lives occurred when they created or strengthened feminist organizations with the objective of opening democratic spaces for women. Though most Guatemalan women expressed that they don't see feminism as a cohesive movement in the country, they also acknowledged -as a positive aspect of the movement- the increased diversification of women's organizations,

ranging from indigenous to lesbian feminisms. In this particular sense, Guatemalan feminism faces different challenges from those of El Salvador and Nicaragua, because of the intrinsic connection between multiculturalism and discrimination that broadly permeates in Guatemalan society. Through their stories, feminists in Guatemala, conveyed how they are frequently confronted with the challenge of avoiding the reproduction of discriminatory and racist cleavages, sometimes without becoming aware of these aspects themselves. (For more on this topic, see 2.2.4- sub-section “The Diversification of the movement - 1996 onwards”). In addition, almost all Guatemalan feminists followed the trend of framing their narratives from the feminist period as progressive, just as the Salvadoran and Nicaraguans did.

#### **4.4- Similarities And Differences Across Countries**

Drawing upon previous results, this section focuses on establishing a comparative perspective among the women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, particularly in terms of similarities and differences identified through the narrative analysis. This section conducts these comparisons based on two sources of information: first, from aspects related to the selection criteria, namely, socio-economic factors; political affiliation; military involvement and feminist activism. The second source of information is the integration of various narrative analytical methods, focusing on the following aspects: Psychosocial characteristics of the family of origin; Turning Points; Progression/Regression; Opposition/Engagement and Identity Transition.

##### **4.4.1- Similarities And Differences Pertaining Selection Criteria**

As mentioned in Chapter Three, this study did not attempt to control for the participant’s socio-economic backgrounds, but rather, to establish revolutionary and feminist activism as fundamental criteria for selection, and from there, identify similarities and differences across the women from the different countries, in order to see in which way these may be informing their activism. A summary of these results is presented below.

- **Socio-Economic Factors:**

Overall, concerning socio-economic factors it can be seen that, pertaining social-class, both in El Salvador and Guatemala most of the women come from lower class backgrounds, some from rural and other from urban areas, which is different from the Nicaraguan case, where most of the women come from middle class. Possibly influenced by the class factor, it could also be seen that also in El Salvador and Guatemala, some women come from families with a history of leftist political dissidence, which is not the case at all in Nicaragua. Clearly families with a history of dissidence are those from lower class backgrounds. Another difference between El Salvador and Guatemala in relation to the Nicaraguan case, is that in these countries there are more women who come from families supported by a single-mother, which indeed, has implications, one of them, of economic nature, as families with a single provider have less income. Another distinctive aspect regarding the Nicaraguan sample is that almost all the women had access to university level education while engaged in revolutionary action, which was not the case for the Salvadoran and Guatemalan women. Thus, class difference and a history of dissidence seem to be the most salient differences across countries.

- **Political Affiliation:**

Overall, concerning political affiliation, and more concretely, the factors that influenced these women's decision to join a revolutionary organization, it can be seen that in terms of similarities across countries, the influence of networks of religious and/or high-school student revolutionary groups, appeared as a common and decisive factor. Though women joined different revolutionary student groups across countries, as for example, university students in the case of Nicaragua, as opposed to high school students in the case of El Salvador and Guatemala, nevertheless, it was through these groups that women got immersed in revolutionary ideology and eventually the opportunity to join a revolutionary group appeared in their lives. Other significant social groups that influenced their revolutionary affiliation were their membership to religious groups (mostly Catholic and influenced by theology of Liberation) which were part of their family and community lives.

Another similarity across countries is that a significant factor that influenced affiliation to revolutionary movements was the experience of having lost a significant person, be it a family member or someone from the women's communities. In some cases, it was a brother, in others, a father and in others, romantic partners or close friends, but these

losses occurred in social contexts of extreme political oppression which prompted some of these women to see no alternative but to join a revolutionary group.

In terms of differences across countries, it can be seen again, that in the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala, differently from Nicaragua, coming from a family with a history of political dissidence was another key factor that influenced revolutionary affiliation, and also for El Salvador and Guatemala, commitment to a romantic partner who was already part of the revolutionary movement at the time was another significant factor that prompted revolutionary affiliation.

- **Military Involvement**

Overall, concerning some aspects of these women's military involvement, it can be seen that, as a similarity across countries, the majority of the women joined a revolutionary movement early in their personal lives (being 15-20 years old), and for the most part this occurred in the early to middle seventies, which, notwithstanding the case of Guatemala (where the war began in the 1960s) meant that the majority of the women involved in revolutionary did it at relatively early stages of the armed conflicts in Nicaragua and El Salvador. Thus, most women from the three countries were affiliated to revolutionary groups for ten years or more.

As a difference across countries, when the wars finally ebbed away, some Salvadoran feminist women (not all though), as opposed to those from those of Nicaragua and Guatemala, continued to be affiliated to the revolutionary party and later in their careers, ran for electoral positions with the FMLN and other political parties. In the cases of Nicaragua and Guatemala, feminists distanced themselves from their former revolutionary affiliations and did not get involved in party politics.

- **Feminist Activisms:**

Overall, as a similarity across countries concerning the factors that influenced these women's feminist activisms, it can be seen half of the women who participated in the study are founding members of feminist organizations. As founders, these women experienced the very early stages of the feminist movements in their countries, which involved the search for autonomy from their former revolutionary allies and also, the development of a characteristic feminist identity in each of their countries.

Concerning differences across countries, it could be argued that women from Nicaragua and Guatemala appeared to have been strongly influenced by foreign feminisms

when they were still politically involved as revolutionaries, as opposed to women from El Salvador, who had more contact with foreign feminisms only after the war. These influences were fundamental in the constitution of the kinds of feminisms that eventually emerged in Nicaragua and Guatemala, as opposed to El Salvador.

#### **4.4.2- Similarities And Differences Pertaining Narrative Analysis of Life Trajectories**

In the following sub-section, the purpose is to disentangle and make explicit the similarities and differences across the samples of women from the three countries studied that emerged after conducting narrative analysis of their stories, by summarizing both commonalities and shared inter-subjective meanings, as well as the differences of each of the country samples considered in this study focusing on the following areas: Psychosocial aspects of family of origin; Turning Points; Progression/Regression; Identity Transition and Opposition/Engagement.

- **Psychosocial Aspects of Family of Origin**

One of the similarities encountered in the narratives from all the women from the three countries had to do with how the figure of the mother was constructed as crucial in terms of informing their daughter's revolutionary or feminist activisms. In some cases, as constructed in their stories, mothers were supportive of such activisms; in others, they were influential through the values that they instilled in their families (solidarity, support for the poor, courage, self-reliance) and in other cases, some women expressed a wish to do something different from what their mothers did, which served as an incentive for revolutionary involvement. In this sense, mother-daughter relationships appeared to be very intense, either very close or conflicting in the life story narratives of women from the three countries.

A second similarity across countries had to do with how women spoke of their families traditional values regarding gender roles and how families expected them to fulfill these as daughters, wives and mothers. This was the case even though many of these families were also supporters of revolutionary involvement.

In terms of difference, it can be noticed how women from El Salvador and Guatemala constructed histories of trans-generational family dissidence as a fundamental factor for their activisms which –as they argued- created a particular sensitivity pertaining class difference and social injustice early in their lives, different from Nicaraguan women,

who constructed dissidence not in terms of family affiliation, but based on a larger sense of shared community, namely, a national commitment to political change.

- **Turning Points**

The following turning points emerged after conducting narrative analysis of the stories and are shared by the women of all three countries:

- One significant turning point occurred when these women joined revolutionary student/religious groups that framed social reality from a revolutionary or 'Theology of Liberation' perspective; and, in the case of some of the women interviewed, it was in these groups where they met boyfriends/partners who facilitated their entrance to guerrilla organizations.
- Eventually, a second significant turning point occurred when these women joined revolutionary groups and became 'guerrilleras' going underground and becoming a clandestine revolutionaries.
- A third significant turning point involved experiences of death of close ones or separations that interrupted and altered marriage and motherhood experiences. For the most part, these involved separation from the partner with whom these women had procreated children or sometimes involved separating from the children themselves.
- In most cases, undergoing exile and/or entering in contact with foreign feminisms became another significant turning point during the time of war.
- The end of the wars in each country was a significant turning point, where most women underwent strong sense of mourning and loss; depression and uncertainty concerning the future.
- After the war, another significant turning point involved creating or joining a feminist organization with other women from their revolutionary milieu. In some occasions, the end of the wars overlapped with the women's new feminist involvement.
- Finally, for many women, another turning point involved developing a professional/personal life affiliated with a local feminist organization, which altered

their life orientations and prompted their careers in a direction that they could not foresee before, like working as project administrators or political lobbyists.

In terms of differences across countries pertaining turning points and life directions, it is important to notice how women from Nicaragua, during their revolutionary period openly expressed dissatisfaction concerning patriarchal practices from the FSLN, which led to many of them developing early feminist actions to challenge the Sandinistas, and thus, challenging the Sandinistas as feminists became another turning point in their political activism. The case was different among the guerrilla women from El Salvador and Guatemala, who did not talk about developing strong opposition against gender inequality within their revolutionary organizations during their revolutionary years.

Another difference pertaining the narratives of the revolutionary period, involves Guatemalan women expressing their strongly felt need to seek political asylum in Mexico during the war and joining other Guatemalans who lived there, differently from women of El Salvador and Nicaragua. The situation was constructed differently in the narratives of women from Nicaragua and El Salvador, who did not address the experience of asylum seeking to such extent in their stories.

One significant difference in the narratives of the post-war period pertains how revolutionaries turned feminists from El Salvador, differently from the women of Nicaragua and Guatemala, did not completely break free from political involvement as feminists, and later joined their former guerrilla organizations (such as the FMLN, turned a political party after the war) in electoral campaigns and even running for elected positions.

- **Progression/ Regression**

Concerning similarities across countries regarding plot development and how stories were constructed by the women from these three countries, the following results are relevant:

- The revolutionary period was constructed as 'mixed' by half of the women of the three countries.
- The post-revolutionary period was also constructed as 'mixed' by half of the women of the three countries.
- The overwhelming majority of the women constructed feminism as a 'progressive' phase in their lives. Some of the aspects connected to feminism as progressive refer to how these women developed a concern for themselves, their own needs and subjectivity through their feminist practices. Feminism also seemed to allow them to connect and develop a stronger

sense of 'we-women', that helped them overcome the natural sense of loss and separation from others from which they emerged after the war

Concerning differences across countries, it is important to notice the following:

-The pre-revolutionary period was constructed as 'progressive' by most Guatemalan and Nicaraguan women, differently from the women of El Salvador, who constructed it as mixed, as some of them talked about 'giving up' their personal goals in the service of collective goals.

- The revolutionary period was constructed as 'regressive' by some women from El Salvador and Guatemala, as opposed to most Nicaraguan women, who in stark contrast, constructed it as progressive, as they saw the opportunity to challenge the Somoza regime as a time of development or progress in their lives.

Another significant difference pertains how the post-revolutionary period was constructed by half of the women from Nicaragua, who regarded this phase of their lives as regressive, as opposed to women from El Salvador and Guatemala, for whom this period was rather 'mixed' as both positive and negative connotations coexisted.

- **Opposition/ Engagement**

Drawing upon women's inter-subjective meanings across the different life periods, it was possible establish similarities and differences across countries concerning opposition and engagement. In terms of similarities, for the most part, the women from the three countries positioned themselves against the authoritarian military party systems (in the case of El Salvador and Guatemala) and the Somoza dictatorship (in the case of Nicaragua) during the 1970s-1980s, which led them to construct a revolutionary identity.

Another similarity across countries concerning opposition/engagement pertains conflict among feminists themselves, as the movements have not been free of conflict, in some cases, reproducing cleavages from the times of war. In each country, these cleavages took on different forms; for example, in the case of El Salvador, they had to do with women's previous revolutionary affiliations to the five guerrilla groups that existed during the war; in the case of Nicaragua, these cleavages had to do with degrees of closeness or distance from the Sandinistas; and in the case of Guatemala, cleavages had to do with ideas of what could be regarded "feminist".

In terms of differences, it can be seen how women from El Salvador and Guatemala talked about engaging in alliance building practices with different parts and agencies of the

state throughout the years that followed the end of the war, Some of these women were even able to establish alliances across party lines, reaching out to more far-right conservative parties, which represented a significant departure from radical leftist positionings that they supported during the wars, as opposed to the Nicaraguan women, who distanced themselves completely from the Sandinista party in power regarding themselves in opposition to its structures and policies.

- **Identity Transition**

By analyzing women's stories from a narrative angle and drawing upon their inter-subjective meanings across the different life periods, it was possible to reconstruct the process of identity transition, and thus, establish similarities and differences across countries.

In terms of similarities, and concerning the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary periods, for the most part, the women from the three countries framed their sense of self as a 'political activist' wanting to contribute to the revolutionary cause of social change in their countries, in order to stop political oppression and economic injustice. A bi-product of this construction implied that many women framed their lives as self-sacrificial, talking in their stories about how they gave up their personal goals and aspirations for the revolutionary cause.

Another similarity pertains how, at the end of the wars, all the women from the three countries talked about having adopted a feminist identity that, in the case of the women from Nicaragua and Guatemala was not associated with any political party (differently from El Salvador, as it has been said).

Looking at differences regarding identity construction, during the post-revolutionary period, the Nicaraguan case stands out, as Nicaraguan women adopted a feminist identity while they were still involved in the Sandinista revolutionary structures. This juncture demanded 'identity negotiation' while these women still regarded themselves as both Sandinistas and feminists and expected to influence changes within Sandinista structures that would bring these two perspectives (Sandinismo/Feminismo) together. Women from El Salvador and Guatemala experienced this process differently since they identified themselves as feminists only after they resigned their revolutionary identities.

Another difference across countries pertains how some feminists from El Salvador, differently from Guatemalan and Nicaraguan ones, continued their affiliation with the FMLN

as feminists, which suggests that their construction of a feminist identity did not rule out political involvement with the left.

#### **4.5- What is learned about the Experiences of Revolutionary and Feminist Women of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala after Narrative Analysis**

Drawing upon the insights gained through the analysis of socio-cultural factors along with the results that emerged from the application of the different analytical methods, this sub-section offers a characterization of what can be considered distinctive for each of the country groups of revolutionary and feminist women interviewed. These accounts portray results that can be only regarded as interpretations of personal and collective experiences as narrated by the women interviewed and as interpreted by the researcher through narrative analysis, but in no way they can be regarded as actual accounts of history. These country summaries are presented in narrative format and seek to portray results in a holistic manner.

##### **4.5.1- The Case of El Salvador**

The Former Revolutionary and feminist women from El Salvador that participated in this study were perhaps the women in the region mostly influenced by the dissidence background of their families of origin. Almost all of them came from poor backgrounds, and half of the women of this sample grew up in families where significant ones (a brother, a parent, a close relative, a neighbor) was either involved in a mass political movement, a guerrilla group or had been a victim of repression, as it was typically the case in low income neighborhoods of El Salvador in the late 1970s and 1980s. Their early childhood environments were highly influenced by dissident political discourses, be it through their family's political affiliations or from the social networks to which they belonged, namely, dissident and revolutionary high school students or religious groups to which they were affiliated, such as their community Christian Base Communities. As in the other Central American countries, the so-called progressive Christian discourses promoted by priests influenced by Theology of Liberation had a significant impact and shaped the contents of dissident discourses to which young Christians had access during those years. As explained by these women, paradoxically, their families only conceived liberation and revolution in social class terms, leaving out the question of gender oppression. Thus, many Salvadoran women felt still very compelled to both engage in revolutionary action while at the same

time, comply with traditional gender roles. In the case of some women, there was also a sense of being constrained to join revolutionary movements due to personal or family constellations that promoted commitment towards certain revolutionary organizations or mass movements; all of which enabled a revolutionary identity at the expense of their own personal goals. While growing up, and under these influences, these women gradually developed a strong oppositional consciousness grounded in the recognition of political oppression by the state and a sense of urgency to react against it. Most women were significantly influenced by extreme demonstrations of political oppression against dissident priests such as Rutilio Grande or Monsignor Romero. In addition, and perhaps more than in Nicaragua and Guatemala, many Salvadoran women were 'ushered' to revolutionary action through their romantic relations, which is an indication of the influence of traditional roles as partner or wife

Differently from Nicaraguan women, and more like the Guatemalans, Salvadoran women did not see their revolutionary commitment yield the expected results, and after approximately ten years of revolutionary action, either they left their revolutionary organizations or underwent the demobilization period. Most of them had endured significant family losses or separations and underwent painful experiences such as incarceration. Differently from the Nicaraguans, many Salvadoran women experienced gender oppression during their years as revolutionaries, and even though it has been discussed in the literature chapter concerning revolutionary history (see section 2.1.1 in the literature review) how some feminist ideas were already present in some Salvadoran revolutionary publications of the late 1980s, for the most part, the Salvadoran women interviewed have acknowledged that they did not have a strong gender based consciousness while engaged in revolutionary action. Similar to the Guatemalan case, the end of the war and the demobilization of the revolutionary forces through a Peace Agreement brokered by the U.N. created conditions for the emergence of a particular type of feminism in El Salvador, as it was mostly at this point where international influences became more significant and supportive in the construction of feminism. Many international women's groups were involved in both supporting Salvadoran women in their recovery efforts as well as promoting a feminist consciousness among them. As the FMLN attempted to secure the participation of women in their female secretariats, many former revolutionary women soon became aware of the difference of treatment that they received in the demobilization process as opposed to combatant men. These factors prompted a strong need for autonomy from the FMLN and the various guerrilla groups under the umbrella. Like in the case of Nicaragua and Guatemala, many of the women interviewed

were involved in founding women's groups promoting former combatant women's interests. The women from El Salvador constructed this post-revolutionary period as mixed and regressive, as they were confronted with the challenges of reconstructing a life in a new society, from which they had been alienated during their revolutionary years. These feminist organizations gave them a sense of direction and connectedness to their oppositional identities from the past, but more importantly, contributed to create a sense of 'we-ness' necessary for their sense of survival that still persists among them. As these women deepened their feminist commitments, they also went back to school, obtained degrees and professionalized their work as feminists. Many Salvadoran feminists claimed that through feminism, which they framed as a progressive phase like Guatemalans and Nicaraguans, they finally found a balance between personal and collective goals. In spite of the distance established between the FMLN and feminist organizations, some Salvadoran feminists later ran as political candidates for elected positions with the FMLN, both representing the political left and their feminist affiliations. These women apparently saw this positioning as a compromise that allowed them to engage politics at the service of feminist goals. This is a very distinct aspect of Salvadoran feminism and a 'solution' that allowed Salvadoran feminists to retain their political and gendered identities, regardless of the intrinsic conflicts between these.

#### **4.5.2- The Case of Nicaragua**

Very differently from the women from El Salvador and Guatemala, with one notable exception, the Nicaraguan women that participated in this study distinctly come from middle to upper middle class backgrounds and these families were in no way related to the political opposition against the Somoza dictatorship. Most of the women came from traditional family backgrounds composed by both parents, and mostly it was not until their university years when they encountered oppositional discourses. Influenced by very strong oppositional and revolutionary discourses, many women joined these revolutionary student movements also moved by a sense of solidarity that came from early affiliations to Catholic religious groups. Like the Salvadoran and Guatemalan women, Nicaraguan women were also deeply socialized into traditional gender roles in their households. Joining revolutionary student groups and later, the Sandinista guerrilla, was a clear challenge to these traditional roles, as some women took on very unconventional military roles, although their political consciousness was mostly driven by the quest for a Nicaragua freed of "Somocismo". Once

the Sandinistas defeated the Somoza dictatorship, these women immediately joined the political structures within the Sandinista government and in some cases, even the Sandinista military. Differently from El Salvador and Guatemala, the Sandinista government seized the opportunity to politically organize women around the collective identity of “Sandinista Women” through their one organization, AMNLAE. Although some of the women in this study joined AMNLAE, their relationship with the organization proved to be problematic, as the organization was highly constrained by the Sandinista –mostly male- leadership interests. Differently also from El Salvador and Guatemala, Nicaraguan feminists were also influenced by the discourses of sympathetic international feminists who had come to Nicaragua attracted by the revolutionary Sandinista project. Gradually but forcefully, these women became increasingly discontent with patriarchal Sandinista policies that coerced the AMNLAE project and limited its representational role. As these women were not ready to give up their Sandinista identity for a feminist one, they opted for the strategy of ‘activism from within’ and founded a dissident women’s group called “The Erotic Left Party” which sought to put pressure on the Sandinista structures. These initiatives were strongly supported by international feminists and contributed to shape a gendered oppositional consciousness among many Nicaraguan women. In 1990, the Sandinistas lost a historical election and with the end of an era, these former Sandinista women found themselves both experiencing a deep sense of loss, and at the same time, freed from a collective identity filled with ambivalence. In this context, international donors poured resources to strengthen the women movement in Nicaragua, and in the face of the conservatism and anti-feminism of president Violeta Chamorro, feminist women paradoxically experienced the opportunity to associate freely as feminists. The Nicaragua feminist movement seemed almost from day one deeply fragmented on the grounds of affiliations to Sandinismo, but it also represented the diversity existing within the movement. Like the women from El Salvador and Nicaragua, a deep sense of loss and depression after the war was followed by a deep connection with feminist goals, and this latter stage was also framed as progressive by Nicaraguan women. As feminist women have continued to represent an alternative oppositional discourse in Nicaragua, they encountered even more resistance by the Sandinistas when they returned to power in 2006. The tense relations between the Sandinistas and the feminists continue to shape the oppositional consciousness of feminist women in Nicaragua to this day.

#### 4.5.3- The Case of Guatemala

The Guatemalan women that participated in this study appeared to have more in common concerning their personal and family backgrounds with Salvadoran than with Nicaraguan women. With one notable exception, almost all of them came from poor families and some of them, like the Salvadorans, were also deeply influenced by the history of political dissidence of their families. In addition, some of them experienced early losses in their lives and grew up under the extreme political oppression existing during the 1970s in Guatemala, which shaped their environments as they grew up. Similarly to Nicaraguan and Salvadorans, Guatemalan women were also socialized in very traditional gender roles and found it difficult to separate their revolutionary activisms from what was expected of them by their families. In addition, there were a few cases of women who came from households of a single mother, and internalized the idea of the “strong mother” that sacrifices herself for her family.

In addition to the previous influences, and along with dissident discourses and political oppression, just like in the rest of Central America, the influence of Theology of Liberation was strongly felt in Guatemala, particularly in the indigenous regions of the country. Be it in high school or university, almost all Guatemalan women joined a revolutionary student movement, and very similarly to the Salvadoran case, it was in some of these groups where they met romantic partners who supported their affiliations to revolutionary movements. Some of these women were moved by the idea that they had no option but to join the guerrilla if they wanted to survive, as they grew in fear of being murdered.

As it has been widely reported (see sub-section 2.1.3 in literature review) war in Guatemala was particularly gory and took a heavy toll in the lives of some of the interviewed women, who joined revolutionary movements very early in their lives –who were constrained by the factors listed above- and nevertheless managed to live as combatants for more than ten years. In two distinct cases concerning the younger women in this group, as their revolutionary commitments were shorter, they did not experience the deep strain that other women who joined the guerrillas for a longer period of time did.

Another distinctive aspect of Guatemalan revolutionary activisms revolves around the fact that, as a consequence of war, thousands of Guatemalans sought refuge by crossing the Mexican border. Half of the Guatemalan women interviewed for this study eventually sought exile in Mexico. There, they established contact with Mexican feminists who were

actively supporting refugee of war organizations from Guatemala. These early contacts with Mexican feminists marked deeply the Guatemalan women who migrated, and it was there when they experienced gender consciousness possibly for the first time in their lives. In 1996, when the Guatemalan peace agreements were finally signed, and these women gradually returned to their home country, like the Salvadorans and Nicaraguans, found ways of coming together and organizing feminist organizations through their social networks. Differently from Nicaragua and El Salvador, in Guatemala there were civil society instances that supported the development of feminist organizations, in addition to international organizations. Many women who joined feminist organizations had been revolutionary activists in the past, but not all of them, and also, distinctly from El Salvador and Nicaragua, some of these feminist groups had very specific aims, one to deal with sexual violence, and the other, to open political spaces for lesbian feminists.

As it was the case for Salvadorans and Nicaraguans, for Guatemalan women it was rather traumatic the return to Guatemala and even for those who never left the country, there was a deep sense of loss, which they had to work through their feminist affiliations. As it was argued by Guatemalan feminists, the movement seems rather fragmented and some of them refuse to even talk of a 'Guatemalan movement' but these women do derive a sense of collective identity through their feminist affiliations and like Salvadorans and Nicaraguans, the majority constructed the feminist period as progressive. Differently from Salvadorans and Nicaraguans, Guatemalan feminists keep their distance from political parties, and through they experience harassment in patriarchal Guatemalan society, they seem to strongly believe in a feminism independent from party and political affiliations, and in some specific instances, even collaborate with certain government instances. Guatemalan feminist cleavages seem to evolve around the question of definitions of feminism, particularly concerning the debate of whether women's organizations are better off by regarding themselves as feminist or whether they should embrace 'gender theory' as the latter is seen as a more moderate approach.

## 5. Discussion and Conclusions

In the following section, I present a discussion of results concerning the categories “identity transition”; “opposition/engagement” and “identity negotiation” in the narratives of revolutionary Central American feminist women, which address the core topics explored through the research questions that have guided this study. The objective of this discussion is to offer an in-depth review of the results obtained in the light of the literature of the field of women’s activism and revolution in Central America as well as the narrative psychology paradigm. Following this discussion, a summary of findings by country is offered, which highlights similarities and differences concerning these topics across countries.

In the sub-section dealing with conclusions, I proceed to answer the research questions, by drawing from insights gained from the results as well as the following discussion.

### 5.1- Experiences of Identity Transition and Negotiation

The questions that guided this study deal with issues of identity transition and negotiation. In this sub-section, I offer a detailed discussion concerning the results obtained, though not in terms of each participant, but rather in regards to two overarching dimensions: ‘Country of origin’ and ‘Life period’. The objective of framing the analysis from this perspective is to go beyond what can be learned from individual cases and explore crucial factors that contribute to the understanding of how narrative identity transition was constructed by a particular social group. More specifically, I focus the discussion on the specific factors that facilitate transition; the direction of this transition; the conflicting aspects of this change and life threads.

In order to unveil how women constructed identity transition and identity negotiation throughout their lives, I considered information derived from narrative methods such as ‘plot development’, ‘life story charts’, ‘narrative tracing’, ‘actantial analysis’ and ‘deconstruction’ for this discussion, with the idea of exploring underlying factors of identity change. More specifically, I incorporate the following results from the analysis into the discussion:

1. ‘Life periods’ identified in the ‘life story charts’, such as the ‘pre-revolutionary’; ‘revolutionary’; ‘post-revolutionary’ and ‘feminist’ ones. (See 3.4.2.b- “Life Story Chart”).

2. 'Turning points' that were mapped in the 'life story charts' for each one of the life periods;
3. The information coming from the 'storied themes' from each one of narratives of change, that were also mapped in the 'life story charts';
4. The information coming from the 'opposition/engagement' category from the 'storied themes';
5. The information derived from 'actantial analysis' of the narratives of change considered for each life period;
6. The information derived from 'metaphor analysis' of some of the metaphors that appeared in each life period.
7. The information derived from deconstructive methods for the narratives of each life period; and,
8. The 'narrative plot development' per country for each life period (see 5.1- Summary of Findings Per Country).

The following discussion makes sense of the wide array of results listed above, presenting them in the form of a summary for each life period pertaining to the country of origin of the narrators.

#### **5.1.1- Identity Transition in the case of Salvadoran Women**

After reviewing the data that emerged from the sources listed above, I present a discussion concerning identity transition, as well as the themes that shaped this transition; the direction of change and identity negotiation for the women from El Salvador, considering each of their life periods in the following section.

##### **5.1.1.a- Transition to war**

As I have argued before, some social and psychological factors concerning these women's public and private spheres significantly influenced their early revolutionary involvement. Concerning the Salvadoran women early revolutionary period, key themes that influenced their involvement, and their transition to the revolutionary period are the following:

- a) Influence of the women from their families of origin/Other significant women: the impact of the participants relationships with their mothers, grandmothers, sisters

and other relevant women from their communities was a theme associated with ideas of independence and autonomy from men, even before their revolutionary involvement. In others cases, this theme emerged when women explained how the mother supported their revolutionary involvement. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Women in my life taught me how to be strong, not depend on any men' (Carolina); 'My mother supported my revolutionary involvement, she promoted consciousness, and this was supposed to happen, I had to participate in the war' (Raquel).

- b) Student activism: The relevance of the participants' involvement with high school or university revolutionary groups emerged consistently in the various narrative analyses. An example can be seen in the following storied theme: 'I demonstrated against injustice like other students of my age did' (Sara).
- c) Death of significant others: for some women, a crucial theme that prompted them to political activism was the experience of loss, be it of a family member, a community member or others who were known to them. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Entering revolution... was a consequence for the killing of my brother' (Cleotilde); 'I felt commitment towards those who died' (Raquel)
- d) Romantic Partner revolutionary involvement: in some instances, the role that a romantic partner played in the revolutionary involvement of some of the Salvadoran women was crucial. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'my partner was a revolutionary activist, he influenced me' (Sara) and 'I got involved because of love, I could not distinguish clearly between my desires and the desires of my partner' (Sonia).
- e) Religious involvement calling for justice: For some women, their connections with Catholic groups that demanded social justice significantly influenced their later political affiliation. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'A repressive environment pressured me to get involved, knowing that the risk was too high. My church work sensitized me about injustice' (Dilsia); 'I grew up with strong religiousness and a demand of justice' (Carolina).

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned about this period is that many of the Salvadoran young women who later participated in a revolutionary movement –at the

time- were constrained by the above mentioned social and inter-personal factors that prompted them into a revolutionary affiliation. In some families with history of political affiliation, possibly expectations concerning their political involvement were made at times explicit or they remained implicit, but what some of these women acknowledged in their narratives, was the influence of older women in their families who supported a sense of 'autonomy'. These influences were based on how the women perceived that their mothers or grandmothers taught them to be independent and autonomous from men, and how this independence was reflected in their capacity to function despite hardships. It was probably more this latter aspect –as opposed to agency- that influenced these young women. In many cases, strong influences came also from Catholic Church and student groups that offered alternative ways of engaging in community work. The Catholic Church that these women experienced was very different from their mothers' and these religious influences were mostly felt in groups that supported Theology of liberation precepts, such as the need to pursue social justice for Christians. Another significant factor that influenced revolutionary involvement had to do with the death of loved ones, most likely siblings who were already involved in revolutionary movements. These deaths seemed to 'beg' a commitment from the women who experienced them. In other cases, it was the influence of a romantic partner what prompted an eventual revolutionary affiliation. As it came up in the analysis of 'storied themes', these constraints limited the participant's sense of choice, and on many occasions, the women had to give up personal goals for collective and revolutionary ones. For some of the women, this felt like a personal sacrifice (Carolina, Sonia, Raquel). For others, their revolutionary involvement was experienced more like something that they had to do for others and was expected from them –either by boyfriends, family members or political groups- and was not questioned, but rather lived as a 'personal' commitment (Mireya, Sara, Dilsia). In some cases, these two were not contradictory, but rather complementary, as Dilsia, for example, possibly experienced both a sense of commitment to the revolutionary cause through her boyfriend and her father, while being very aware of the risks and sacrifices that her revolutionary involvement could entail (a storied theme from Dilsia's narratives concerning potential risks in terms of revolutionary affiliation reflects her concerns about this matter: "I was confronted with an environment where repression and injustice were evident for all of us, that pressured me to get involved, even though I knew that the level of risk was extremely high"). Thus, these women's identities as daughters, girlfriends, Catholics and students moved them closer to a newer identity as a 'revolutionary' as the constraints of the previously mentioned factors limited the option of

opposing this 'unjust system' or political 'oppression' through other means than the revolutionary ones. This data is consistent with research concerning revolutionary movements in El Salvador and Nicaragua, which points out to how issues of family sustenance and the political repression of the government seemed particularly threatening to women as family nurturers and protectors, suggesting that women's roles in both domestic and non-domestic aspects of family survival serve as a basis for revolutionary participation. (Lobao, 1998, p. 281)

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, half of the Salvadoran women experienced this period as 'mixed', followed by some seeing it as progressive and only one woman experiencing it as regressive. I argue that this experience was mostly lived as a 'mixed' one, because it demanded, on one side, a strong sense of commitment to the fundamental cause of fighting for justice; but on the other, it involved sacrifices and constraints that prioritized revolutionary objectives over individual ones. The outcome for these women, ultimately, meant to engage in opposition against an 'unjust system' in general terms, but in practical ones, it implied fighting against the national armed forces; politicians and the economic elites. It proceeded in similar terms with their sense of engagement: the women felt committed towards achieving 'justice for others'; but in more specific terms this meant fighting as a response for the death of a loved one; or supporting a revolutionary boyfriend; or following in the family's traditions of dissidence; or feeling strongly committed –and constrained- by a religious or revolutionary group.

**Describing identity negotiation:** One of the metaphors that emerged from the narratives of this period came from Sonia: "It was part of the game of the time", where she referred to how revolutionary ideas were part of the socio-cultural atmosphere within her university milieu. What is implied in this metaphor is that her student revolutionary activism had a playful, amusing, fun quality to it that was particular of this historical period. This game –the revolutionary one-, had serious impact on the 'players' lives, but its seriousness is downplayed in this metaphor; which suggests that what was happening in their lives was taken as 'part of the time', which was to certain extent uncontrollable and had unforeseeable consequences.

Through actantial analysis, it is possible to unveil how the participants constructed the conflicts lived during their early revolutionary years and what were the internal key oppositions from the perspectives of the narrators. After reviewing the results from the

actantial analysis of the narratives from this period, three general categories were identified<sup>52</sup>:

1. Key oppositions concerning 'romantic relationship constrains'. In this case, what emerged was a conflict between the relationship with a boyfriend/significant other and perceived personal goals and identity needs. In three cases (Carolina, Sandra, Dilsia) the opposing actants identified were: "supporting revolutionary commitment of boyfriend//personal goals, identity needs".
2. Key oppositions concerning 'family constrains'. In this case, the constrains concerned the need to honor a family commitment; be it due to the death of a close family member in the hands of the armed forces, or because the family supported a revolutionary affiliation. The conflict was between these constraints and internal states that would inhibit revolutionary participation. In two cases, (Carolina, Raquel) the opposing actant forces identified were: "death of brother, revolutionary involvement of family//fear, helplessness, not showing sensitivity to family's needs".
3. Key oppositions concerning 'internal constrains'. In this case, the constraints concerned more an internal conflict between two opposing forces, namely, the desire to engage in revolutionary action, and the fear of change, or fear of consequences, risks involved, family separation. In the case of Mireya, the opposing actant forces identified were: "self sufficiency, capacity to question injustice// facing the world on 'her' own"

It is through deconstruction of these key oppositions that the 'negotiation of the acquisition of the 'revolutionary identity' can be understood. For these Salvadoran women, joining a revolutionary organization and becoming a 'guerrillera or revolucionaria' implied having to leave behind a certain lifestyle and role (as a student, as a family member), a particular or a way of relating to others (as the rebellious daughter, or the one that wanted to follow on the family footsteps), regardless of whether they grew up in families with a history of dissidence. The 'turning point' of transition from pre-revolutionary involvement to revolutionary participation was a point of departure, a point of no return for these women, and the way in which they left their 'pre-involved self' for a 'revolutionary' one, was mostly based in the impact of the constraining factors described above. Through deconstruction, the ambivalences and inconsistencies concerning this life juncture can be further

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<sup>52</sup> The key opposing actants will be represented in opposition by using the sign '//' between them.

understood. For example, when the revolutionary involvement was constrained by family factors, ambivalences towards family members remained undisclosed in the narratives. An example can be seen in how Carolina did not discuss her mother's lack of 'availability' or her levels of closeness to her murdered brother in her narratives. Other examples appear in Raquel's narrative, when she presented a narrative of loss, and offered an end to the story by saying: "That was it... I joined the guerrilla"; here, I argue that her political involvement was framed as a resolution to the story of family loss. Another example can be seen in Mireya's case, who, despite acknowledging her parents' promotion of positive qualities, avoided discussing how her difficult relationship with her father influenced or facilitated her decision to join the guerrilla. In cases where romantic involvement constrained and supported revolutionary affiliations (Sonia and Sara) both narrators avoided framing their political involvement as an absolute function of their romantic one, and particularly in Sara's case, her stories demonstrated how she surrendered aspects of her personal life for the pursuit of the revolutionary identity at high personal costs, yet a critical view of the role that "the party" (FMLN) had in her private life is absent from her life narrative.

In sum, I argue that identity negotiation for Salvadoran women takes place when individuals affiliate themselves to collective identities at the 'expense' of previous ones engaging in a dynamic transformation of their storied lives. As mentioned in the literature review, (See 2.3.1) from a constructivist perspective (Stryker, 2000), commitments are dynamic, based on life developments; thus, one important source of commitment dynamics refers to life course changes (in the cases previously discussed, loss of significant others and romantic involvement) which can interrupt current relationships or create new ones. Thus, if social commitments change, movement or group affiliations may be affected by these changes. Furthermore, when these commitments are modified, identity formation can also be influenced. In these processes, individuals can be aware or unaware of when they are engaged in identity formation or the processes of change through which their identity story is formed (Polkinghorne, 1996, p. 365).

#### **5.1.1.b- Transition to a Post Revolutionary Period**

Concerning the Salvadoran women revolutionary period, key themes that influenced their revolutionary involvement, and their eventual transition to the post-revolutionary period are the following:

- a) Personal risks faced: a frequent theme in revolutionary narratives concerned how the women faced significant personal risks and threats during the war years. This

theme appeared when the participants discussed concrete experiences such as imprisonment; student massacres and warfare during the so-called “ofensivas” (periods where the guerrilla fighting intensified with a military objective in mind). Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: ‘you had to live with danger and survive constant risk’ (Carolina) and ‘a repressive environment pressured me to get involved, knowing that the risk was too high’ (Dilsia).

- b) Personal sacrifices: the relevance of this overarching feeling of making a personal sacrifice for the sake of others and for the betterment of society was another crucial theme that reappeared at different levels. During the war, it was a theme for Silvia: ‘you had to make sacrifices and risk for you family and your life’; for Dilsia, ‘I sacrificed my personal life, since I was very young, in order to raise consciousness’ and for Sara, ‘I devoted myself to my political affiliation, sacrificing my personal life’.
- c) Importance of collective goals/contribution to others: many of the revolutionary women were moved by the idea that revolutionary collective goals had to be prioritized over their individual ones. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: ‘I wanted to change the world, the structures’ (Silvia); ‘I could not ignore that others were living difficult lives, facing injustice’ (Raquel); ‘I contributed to the country through my revolutionary involvement’ (Dilsia); ‘my growth came from working on the objective of shaping a system and producing a result’ (Sara).
- d) Surrender to rigid party discipline/Gender discrimination: Some of the Salvadoran women recognized in their narratives how they had to resign agency and submit to a party discipline while being members of the revolutionary organizations where gender inequality prevailed. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: ‘I rebelled against gender inequality in my leftist organization’ (Raquel); ‘I was submitted to a discipline I had to follow; it was a matter of life and death to follow this discipline (Sandra).
- e) Significant losses: Half of the women experienced significant family losses (Carolina lost a brother; Mireya, two partners; Dilsia, her husband and two of her sons) and others eventually had to leave the country and settle in a new place (Sandra and Silvia), away from their families. Two of the women underwent dangerous

imprisonments and some of them lived in the mountains, far away from their children, for long periods of time (Mireya and Dilsia).

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned is that many of the Salvadoran young women who got involved in revolutionary action experienced this period as a process that demanded some kind of personal sacrifice that was necessary in order to fulfill the collective revolutionary goal. These perceived sacrifices affected the quality of their personal lives, and involved facing separation; family loss; the impossibility of having a stable family life and the risks and threats faced during the war. Faced with constraining factors that defined their early revolutionary involvement, possibly for many of these women, having both their families and themselves undergoing the hardships of clandestine revolutionary life, could only be internally justified for the sake of a larger objective, namely social transformation and contribution to the country, or at least, to the social group that they represented. As it came up in their narratives, some participants felt that their political involvement did contribute significantly to the necessary revolutionary process in El Salvador. As part of this personal sacrifice, these women followed the strict control mechanisms established by their revolutionary organizations. In few cases, the women were able to recognize the negative impact of gender inequality within their revolutionary organizations, but as they had already surrendered their sense of agency, this gender aspect didn't seem to prompt any further desire to change their current situation. Concomitantly, for some women, the fact that their political organizations were perceived as very strict and disciplined provided them with a sense of security and affiliation.

**Concerning the direction of this transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, half of the Salvadoran women experienced this period as 'mixed' and half as 'regressive'. It can be argued that the experience was both lived as 'mixed' and 'regressive' because, despite the fact that revolution allowed the women to pursue the higher goal of social and revolutionary change congruent with social expectations, this was an extremely difficult and painful period for most of them, as they had to deal with significant risks, sacrifices and losses.

During the revolutionary years, the women opposed what they called 'an unjust system' that oppressed and acted with injustice against people in general; and felt engaged –and committed– to the idea of revolutionary involvement, by following family traditions of dissidence with the idea of sacrificing themselves for others, and fulfilling their roles as revolutionaries of their different organizations. This is consistent with Karen Kampwirth's (2002, p. 11) concept of "traditions of resistance" referring to how some women are set on

the path toward revolutionary activism through childhood experiences of resistance to authority, which –in her words- planted seeds that germinated years later when the structural, ideological and political conditions were right.

In addition to the family influences, the importance of party affiliation is relevant considering the sense of belonging that the women experienced regarding the five revolutionary organizations that existed in El Salvador during the war.

**Describing identity negotiation:** Through actantial analysis, it is possible to unveil internal key oppositions during the revolutionary years from the perspective of the narrators. After reviewing the results from the actantial analysis of the narratives of Salvadoran women from this period, two conflicting positions emerged:

1. Negotiation of 'sacrifice': in some cases, the narrators expressed a conflict between the option of sacrificing their personal life at the expense of revolution, opposing what sacrifice meant in regards to personal gains. Thus, the opposing actants were: choosing Sacrifice//Control over one's life, outliving those who died during the war. (Carolina and Sonia). In negotiating 'sacrifice' as a sound choice, women like Dilsia had to justify internally the strain that their revolutionary commitment placed on her family. In this context, Dilsia experienced herself both as 'victim and perpetrator' of war. This is consistent with research conducted by Ibanez with ex-combatant women from El Salvador which demonstrated that while women as actors are perpetrators during the war, ultimately the same women are also victims (Moser and Clark, 2005).
2. Negotiation of 'the right for personal and family goals': Sara's case is the example of a woman who sacrificed her revolutionary engagement for the pursuit of family. The opposing actants here are: prioritizing family needs//not being able to fulfill revolutionary aspirations.

Through deconstruction, the points of conflict concerning the eventual transition from a revolutionary to a post-revolutionary phase in the lives of these women become more explicit. Despite the fact that most of the Salvadoran women saw no easy way out of personal sacrifice during the revolutionary years, paradoxically many of them still held a feeling of guilt (because of not feeling able to carry on with the revolutionary duties, as it was Sonia's case) or having a strong sense of debt (for outliving those who died during the war like in Carolina's case) or questioning the whole revolutionary experience and the

consequences that it yielded (as in Dilsia's case). From this perspective, the turning point of transition from a revolutionary to post-revolutionary identity may have had to do with an alteration in the critical balance of 'sacrifice' for the sake of revolutionary goals and the pursuit of personal/family goals. In Sara's case, for example, the resolution of the dilemma was based on her perception of what was in the best interest her family, and, as it was argued in text deconstruction, the locus of control of her decision to avoid going to a war battlefield was placed outside herself, as she responded to the needs of a new romantic partnership that demanded the prioritization of her family life from her revolutionary involvement. In the case of another combatant, Sonia, she experienced a 'personal crisis' concerning her revolutionary involvement, which –in her words- 'I could not resolve, my body resolved', which demanded again, a prioritization of her family life. In the case of the women who fought until the very end of the war (Dilsia, Mireya, Carolina) the commitment to honor their family losses (the collective over the individual) contributed to support their involvement until the very end.

In sum, it could be argued that the transition from a revolutionary to a post-revolutionary identity possibly had more to do with a process of prioritization, or re-establishment of a commitment, where the women, possibly did not question their revolutionary identity as such, but rather, the impact of their revolutionary involvement in others around them, be it their revolutionary affiliations (or perceived revolutionary commitments) or family members.

#### **5.1.1.c- Transition to feminism**

The following section deals with significant social and psychological factors concerning these women's experiences by the end of the war that significantly influenced their post-revolutionary affiliations. Some themes are carried from the revolutionary to the post-revolutionary period, whereas others emerged during their post-revolutionary involvement:

- a) Importance/Development of consciousness: a theme that appeared in various narratives from this period was the development of 'consciousness' or the recognition of the importance of political consciousness in the lives of these women. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'after the war... we gained consciousness' (Carolina); 'My mother supported my consciousness' (Raquel); 'I sacrificed my personal life in order to raise consciousness' (Dilsia).

- b) Emergence of Feminism/Working with and for women: By the end of the war or when the peace process began, Salvadoran women learned from different sources about feminism and either joined or created feminist spaces with a concrete focus on supporting women. The theme of 'feminism' appeared in their narratives of this period. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Only after the war I learned about feminism' (Carolina); 'Feminism was a position against patriarchy' (Raquel); 'Working for women was my desire' (Sonia); 'Coming from the left, I shared unique experiences with other women that had value. I wanted to share this in our feminist organization' (Mireya).
- c) Autonomy: A key theme that concerned former combatants had to do with gaining a sense of autonomy from their revolutionary organizations. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'to gain autonomy, I had to break ties with the structures' (Mireya); 'I wanted autonomy; nothing to do with the guerrilla, but to rebuild my life on my own' (Sonia). This is consistent with literature on second wave feminist movements in Central America, which emphasize the importance of autonomy for feminist women (Kampwirth, 2001; 2004; 2011; Stephen, 1997; Molyneux, 2001; Jaquette, 1994, 2009).
- d) Sacrifice/commitment to a broader cause: Two themes are carried over from previous life periods, namely 'sacrifice' and 'devoting a life to a broader cause, or supporting others' are presented here as an intertwined theme. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'My life objectives went from individual to collective' ; 'I could not ignore that others were living difficult lives facing injustice', 'I contributed to the country through revolutionary involvement, sacrificing my personal life since I was very young' (Raquel); 'I contributed to the country, sacrificing my personal life' (Dilsia); 'My growth comes from working on the objective of shaping a system and producing a result' (Sandra)

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned about this period is that by the end of the war, the theme concerning personal sacrifice and revolutionary involvement with the objective of supporting others was strongly felt among the Salvadoran women. Nevertheless, in these post-revolutionary narratives, this theme appeared as a reflection, involving evaluations that ranged from the 'positive' (as it is the case of Sandra) to the ambivalent, where the losses –in terms of sacrifice of youth- were considered (in cases like Dilsia and Raquel) to the negative, where a limited sense of choice in the decision to join the

guerrilla was recognized (Sonia). A resolution to this conflict was on one side, independence and a search for an autonomy or agency that was neglected during the revolutionary years, and on the other, a need and an interest in affiliation and support from other women. I argue that this time, the affiliation took on a new form, as feminists not only focused on collective goals (such as revolutionary ones) but also started to pay attention to the needs of themselves, and those of other women who were part of the movement. One of Dilsia's storied themes makes this point very clear: "Working as a feminist has allowed me to grow as a woman, as an agent and promoter of my own life. It created a consciousness as a woman that I didn't have before. With the FMLN, I worked for others, but with feminism I work for others and for myself as well". Another storied theme along these lines comes from Sonia: "After the war, I wanted to have autonomy. I didn't want to have anything to do with my revolutionary organization. I wanted to rebuild everything in my life on my own".

Through the emergence of feminism these women became aware of the experiences that they shared –from their position of revolutionary women- and what their own special needs were; and through feminist action they decided to join forces against 'patriarchy' (or a broader system focused on the needs of men) and support other women in similar situations. Some crucial turning points during this period had to do with facing fears concerning departing their revolutionary organizations or the FMLN structure (as it can be seen in the life story charts of Raquel, Mireya and Dilsia). Others had to deal with sadness and sorrow concerning their war losses (Raquel, Dilsia) and for others, the question of how to move their feminist organizations forward was a core concern (Mireya, Dilsia). Thus, these women's identities as former revolutionaries moved them closer to newer identities as 'feminists' as they shared similar conflicting feelings towards their previous revolutionary involvement and a stronger interest concerning self-understanding and affiliation in order to support their own needs.

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, half of the Salvadoran women experienced this period as 'mixed', followed by some seeing it as progressive and only one woman experiencing it as regressive. It can be argued that this experience was mostly lived as a 'mixed' one, as on one side, during the post revolutionary period, the women who had fought during the war faced the challenges of rebuilding their lives without the support of their revolutionary affiliations; having to re-establish themselves in mainstream society, and deal with the losses of war, while at the same facing the reactions from families or community members, all of which produced significant amounts of 'sanctuarial traumatic stress' stress (See discussion in 2.3.5- Trauma

in life narratives of former combatants). On the other side, these women also encountered an alternative affiliation with feminism, which opened the possibility for autonomy and self-care, which was perceived by many as a positive turn in their lives. Their experiences of opposition and engagement, also shifted significantly from the war years. During the post-revolutionary period, Salvadoran former combatant women felt strongly oppositional against 'discriminatory systems' in general, that diminished women's sense of autonomy; or systems that promoted gender discrimination; or systems that were put in place during the post-conflict period (such as how 'demobilization' of the guerrilla forces took place) or more concretely, rigid structures from the left that did not support women's autonomy. It could be argued that in this life period, the focus shifted from the national armed forces or the society status quo, to specific systems that directly affected the lives of these women, such as, for example, the issue of discrimination of guerrilla women vis a vis their male counterparts regarding land distribution in the context of the 1992 Peace Agreements. This change is in line with the women's newer focus on their own interests and not just an exclusive general, social interest. Furthermore, their engagement also shifted towards feminist organizing, prioritizing a commitment towards a work with and for other women; women's rights or a commitment towards autonomy.

**Describing identity negotiation:** two metaphors presented in the narratives of this period reflect the dilemmas that the Salvadoran women confronted during the post-revolutionary period. One metaphor from Dilsia: "We were holding the hand of daddy party" refers to the 'parental' and dependent relationship that some of these women experienced towards the FMLN by the end of the war. Another metaphor concerning one of the feminist organizations that existed at the time, refers to how the emergence of feminist ideas were perceived by these women. In the metaphor, Dilsia argues: "The nest of knowledge about women's theories was there...". This metaphor obviously refers to motherhood, but of a different kind, the kind where women were 'nesting' and eventually 'giving birth' to a new world of theories and analysis. As both processes coexisted, that of finding it difficult and painful to let go of previous affiliations, while at the same time, being part of this new feminist thinking, ex-combatant women had to find mechanisms to cope with ambivalence and inner conflict concerning their sense of affiliation and belonging. After reviewing the results from the actantial analysis of the narratives of the Salvadoran women from this period, a core conflict emerged, where the opposing actants are: the negotiation of 'autonomy' or 'pursuing personal priorities'//Fears concerning moving on, a sense of dependency'. Most of the results of the actantial analysis of the narratives of this period

reflected this core dilemma. For example, in the case of Raquel, the dilemma was framed as: ‘following her personal priorities (autonomy)//entering the National Civilian Police, as demanded by the FMLN (dependency)’. In the case of Dilsia, the opposing actants were: ‘feeling overwhelmed by uncertainty over leaving revolutionary structure (dependency)//achieving autonomy from her organization (autonomy)’; and in the case of Sandra, the dilemma was framed as: ‘starting a new life phase (‘starting anew’)//remain with unsolved grief, anger and disappointment (‘fears concerning moving on’).

Through deconstruction, the points of conflict concerning the transition from a post-revolutionary to a feminist identity became more explicit. Certain internal experiences supported autonomy, as it was the case for Carolina, who admitted experiencing anger when she gained feminist knowledge, though she did not talk about the direction of this anger, and it could be argued, was probably addressed to only certain aspects of her revolutionary experience. In the case of Sonia, humor was a mechanism that allowed her to reflect on the losses and possibly, her own mistakes during the post-war period, when she joked about ‘being dumb’ for not getting a piece of land, as opposed to other women combatants who did get compensation because of their involvement in revolutionary action. For Dilsia, who suffered the loss of her husband and two sons during the war, autonomy in terms of leaving the FMLN implied having to undergo yet another loss: the loss of her own revolutionary affiliation.

From this perspective, the turning point of transition from a post-revolutionary to a feminist identity in the case of Salvadoran women had to do with the necessary pursuit of autonomy in a historical moment where the FMLN could not provide the security of a strong political affiliation, after having exhausted its resources. For these women, who had to face a post-conflict society on their own, joining a feminist group became both a resource (because of the access that it provided to a community of women); an opportunity for self expression (by allowing them an introspective look to their lives as revolutionaries) and a real possibility of working for women’s rights .

#### **5.1.1.d- Transition during Feminism**

The following section deals with significant social and psychological factors concerning these women’s experiences with their feminist affiliation. The key themes that influenced these women’s feminist involvement are the following:

- a) The importance of feminist practice: a theme that appeared in various narratives from this period, is what could be labeled as the importance of feminist practice in

everyday life, that has to do with the way in which these women live feminist ideals through their actions. These actions are both directed to themselves and others. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Working for women was my desire' (Sonia); 'Feminism was a position against patriarchy, now is a way of living and thinking' (Raquel); 'As a feminist, I have grown as a woman and [I] also work for myself' (Dilsia); 'My previous militancy continues with feminism' (Sara).

- b) Healing: another theme that is connected to the feminist experience is that of personal recovery after the war. This recovery is mostly framed as an internal psychological process of healing and transformation. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Feminism... has healed me' (Raquel) and 'I can share my painful story, I have dealt with it through therapy and feminism' (Dilsia).
- c) Political involvement as a feminist: Some Salvadoran feminists, differently from the Nicaraguans and Guatemalans, have been actively involved in political participation, even running for elected positions with the 'FMLN' Party. They tend to frame their political involvement as another aspect of feminist work. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'We want to transform the state through non-violent means'; 'We women have a role in institutions, we need to have an impact in different levels of the state' (Mireya) and 'My spaces as a feminist and politician have their own value' (Dilsia). According to Hipscher (2001, 160f) in fact, the feminist relationship with the movement is also a liability, as it spawns and reproduces sectarianism and creates obstacles for alliance building with women from the right and other sectors in Salvadoran society. It is interesting to note here the different perspective that these feminist politicians have about the issue.
- d) Feminist consciousness: a theme that is connected to both revolutionary and feminist affiliations has been the idea of the development of 'consciousness'. As some women explained, feminist consciousness has allowed them to understand the impact of gender subjectivity and gender relations in the social world. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Only after the war I learned about feminism, we gained consciousness' (Carolina) and 'As a feminist, I have gained consciousness as a woman' (Dilsia).

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned about this period is that women who were former combatants and began joining feminist organizations developed a strong sense of identity connected to their feminist affiliation. A feminist identity has been experienced as a way of understanding the world ('feminist consciousness'); as a way of living and functioning (feminist practice) and as a way of having a substantial transformational impact of the gender power balance in their societies (feminist politics). An important aspect concerning feminist practice for many of these women had to do with another –less discussed– impact of Salvadoran feminism, namely, that through certain practices, like therapeutic groups or feminist psychotherapy, it opened spaces that allowed women to have an introspective look at themselves and their histories, as it has been widely reported by the Salvadoran feminist groups "Las Dignas" and by some women the feminist organization "Las Melidas"<sup>53</sup>, which yielded therapeutic results such as a sense of recovery. Thus, the storied themes of the narratives of this period point to a perceived 'healing' aspect of feminist practice. Another important space that feminism opened had to do with a turn to female subjectivity –as opposed to social practice– and the acknowledgement of the value of the experiences of women during the war, which stood in big contrast to revolutionary ideologies that placed all the emphasis on the transformation of society as way of reaching personal improvement. Furthermore, feminism became for many of these women a 'way of living' –as they argued in their narratives– which have allowed them to develop new engagements and oppositions, different from the previous revolutionary ones.

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, all the Salvadoran women have experienced this period as 'progressive'. This is the only life period where all the women shared a similar sense of direction. It can be argued that feminist involvement was perceived as a progressive turn in the lives of these women because of its emphasis on the women's recovery and healing after the war, along with its focus on the women's needs and rights, which was fundamentally different during their pre-revolutionary and revolutionary years, where the focus was on collective goals. Furthermore, feminist groups provided Salvadoran women with spaces and a platform to come together and develop a sense of community and solidarity that –at the time– strengthened their capacity to reach autonomy from revolutionary organizations during the post-revolutionary period. Concerning experiences of opposition and engagement,

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<sup>53</sup> Information both from the publication: "Una Decada Construyendo Feminismo... Las Dignas" (July, 2000), in addition to information from interviews that I conducted at "Las Melidas" in San Salvador, March 2008.

throughout their feminist period, women have opposed general systems that support and reproduce gender discrimination, which in practical terms, refers to powerful sectors of society affiliated to both the political right and the left. In addition, a few women expressed opposition towards the way in which demobilization of guerrilla forces took place, particularly looking at how women combatants did not receive the same kinds of benefits that former combatant men did. On the other side, in terms of engagement, Salvadoran former revolutionaries and feminists expressed both collective and individual engagements. At the collective level, they have supported women's political participation across different levels of the state, with a strong emphasis on women's rights. At the individual level, women have defended and protected the value of autonomy, self-reflection, healing and the development of a feminist identity.

**Describing identity negotiation:** In a metaphor presented in one of her narratives of the feminist period, Mireya talked about how –after the war- a group of ex combatant women came together and discussed the question of ‘what was it like to be a woman during those [revolutionary] years?’ a question that –in her narrative- she answered with a metaphor: ‘It was like ‘taking the lid off a pressure cooker’. What this metaphor suggested is that Salvadoran combatant women functioned as ‘pressure cookers’ that held inside a great deal of psychological and emotional pressure. This metaphor is telling of the experience of feeling ‘pressured’ to keep something inside, as these women did for so many years. From this perspective, feminism created a space for the expression of ‘that’ what remained ‘repressed’, namely the personal, intimate feelings of women who differed agency and personal priorities for the sake of revolution<sup>54</sup>. When feminist activism gave these women the opportunity to bring their own perceived needs and desires to the forefront of their consciousness, key oppositions emerged. These oppositions, which were unveiled and explored through actantial analysis, could be classified in the following terms:

1. A focus on ‘internal dilemmas’: in some cases, the narrators expressed a conflict between internal states that emerged from their gained feminist consciousness. An example is seen in Carolina's key opposition: ‘development of a feminist consciousness that supports a critical view of gender relations//being unaware of the role of gender relations’. Another example can be seen in the following

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<sup>54</sup> Publications from the feminist group “Las Dignas” such as the book “Mujer Montaña” (1996) (Women Mountain) and “Una Decada Construyendo Feminismo”(2000) offer extended accounts on how former combatant and feminist women avoided talking about their personal experiences during the war, including sexuality and motherhood, as well as expressing the pain from their losses and traumatic experiences.

opposition: 'silence, incapacity to deal with war trauma//reframing, reprocessing disappointment through feminist practice'.

2. 'Negotiations': some key oppositions pointed to the need of negotiating and striking a balance while facing dilemmas between personal and social needs and perspectives from their political past. An example of opposing actants is: 'respect for subjectivity and a shared knowledge (a feminist model)//reproduction of hierarchical and authoritarian relations in the work with other women (a revolutionary model)' (Sonia). Another example of negotiation is: 'balancing the needs of others and one's own needs//goals of revolutionary and feminist organizations are prioritized' (Dilsia); and yet another: 'opening a discursive space that prioritizes the needs of women above all//commitment to an agenda that prioritized class over gender concerns' (Mireya).

Through deconstruction, the points of conflict concerning adopting a new feminist identity were unveiled. In the case of Sonia, as she addressed the issue of different 'ways of relating' during the war and as a feminist, her concern was about how feminist women with a revolutionary background had a tendency to reproduce old ways of relating that were rather hierarchical and authoritarian, without being aware of the patriarchal schemes that prevailed in their revolutionary organizations, even when they were trying to do something different in their feminist organizations. Possibly letting go of these ways was difficult as they probably increased a sense of control and order that –at the time of the war- allowed these women to function and survive. Another conflicting aspect concerning the transition to a feminist identity -highlighted by Mireya- had to do with breaking ties with their former revolutionary organizations in order to seek autonomy. This process, as it appeared in the deconstructive analysis of her narrative, was rather difficult in the very beginning, when former combatant women were concerned with the reactions of their male counterparts. Another difficult point of transition was highlighted in the deconstruction of Dilsia's narrative, which pertained the recognition by revolutionary women of the fact that they were not heroines without problems. In order to receive the understanding and support of others, these women had to come out and to accept their own traumas, fears and hatred that could not express before.

From these perspectives, the turning point of transition to a feminist identity in the case of Salvadoran women had to do with the women's capacity to open and create an autonomous feminist space (through their feminist organizations) where they could

separate themselves from a former revolutionary and social agenda, and emphasize their personal and community needs. In this process, they had to let go of previous affiliations and ways of relating that provided security in the past, and had to embrace the risks and possibilities of a new feminist identity that emphasized personal over the social priorities; and women's over class needs.

### **5.1.2- Identity Transition in the case of Nicaraguan Women**

The following section presents a discussion concerning identity transition, the direction of the transition and identity negotiation for each of the life periods experienced by Nicaraguan former revolutionaries and feminists.

#### **5.1.2.a- Transition to war**

Concerning the Nicaraguan women's pre-revolutionary period, key themes that influenced their pre-revolutionary involvement and their transition to the revolutionary period are the following:

- a) Desire to change unfair structures/end of Somoza dictatorship: all the Nicaraguan women expressed one way or the other in their pre-revolutionary narratives their desire or willingness to challenge and transform the oppressive structures of the Somoza dictatorship in Nicaragua. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'I [had a] need to change unfair structures for the benefit of the poor' (Tamara); 'I fought against structures that oppressed and exploited people' (Elina); 'The search of autonomy manifested in me fighting dictatorship' (Selma); 'The dictatorship in Nicaragua fed our quest for freedom' (Leda).
- b) Rebelliousness: Some women described themselves as rebels that wanted to challenge an oppressive system. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'My rebelliousness was influenced by my need to make social changes' (Tamara); 'I never accepted a position of submission... and rebelled against patriarchy in public and private spheres' (Selma); 'I wanted to fight, I rebelled against structures that oppressed and exploited people' (Elina).
- c) Demand of social justice: along with a strong desire to challenge unfair structures, the young pre-revolutionaries of Nicaragua felt also the need to demand social justice. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'I

started to fight against social injustice' (Leda); 'My values demanded a fight against different kinds of injustice' (Edith).

- d) The influence of Sandinismo: some of the women referred to their relationship with the Sandinista cause, and how they eventually joined this movement and developed an identity around it. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'We negotiated with Sandinismo; worked with Sandinismo...' (Tamara); 'Sandinismo was a way of life and we organized our life around revolution' (Maribel).

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned about the key themes that emerged in the narratives of this period is that Nicaraguan young women who later participated in the revolutionary Sandinista movement were fundamentally moved to action by a desire to rebel and overturn the rigid structures of the Somoza dictatorship that had ruled the country for forty years, creating a system of social disparity and impunity that was deeply rejected by a large part of Nicaraguan youth in the 1970s. Though one of the women interviewed in this study came from a family with a history of dissidence, this was not a generalized factor among these pre-revolutionary women. More importantly, the Nicaraguan young women who felt called to revolutionary action were mostly influenced by a sense of solidarity and commitment to others who were not able to stand and fight by themselves, such as the poor. This is consistent with Kampwirth's (2004, p. 8) comments on the reasons women in her research gave for joining the guerrilla struggle in Nicaragua and El Salvador, namely to end exploitation of the poor and/or indigenous or to create more just countries for their children. An additional theme that emerged in the pre-revolutionary narratives concerned these women's self-perception as rebels that expressed their dissatisfaction through political activism. Furthermore, the impact of the Sandinista movement and the support that it gathered from Nicaraguan students at this particular period shaped these women's forms of rebelliousness. The particular way in which Sandinismo positioned itself among the youth of this time –as the leading and legitimate force for revolutionary change- had a significant impact on the commitments that these women developed towards the revolutionary cause during this period, and the years to come.

During this pre-revolutionary period, a significant turning point for most of the Nicaraguan women interviewed was their involvement in revolutionary student activism, which became the natural path for their eventual revolutionary affiliation to the Sandinista

revolutionaries (this was the case for Tamara, Selma, Maribel, Leda and Edith). In some cases, other factors determined revolutionary involvement, as it was the case for Edith, who became a Sandinista guerrilla after the Somoza army murdered her brother, who was also a revolutionary. Thus, the factors that favored the transition to a revolutionary identity had to do with these women's rebelliousness along with their commitment to social change and challenging the dictatorship through revolutionary student organizations, which moved them closer to the identity of 'Sandinista revolutionaries'.

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, almost all the Nicaraguan women experienced this period as 'progressive' with the exception of one woman, who perceived it as mixed. It can be argued that, for most Nicaraguan women, joining a revolutionary student movement at this moment felt like an empowering experience that gave them the opportunity to channel and express their rebelliousness and to experience a supportive community in their quest for social transformation. Though these women were placing themselves in a position of increased risks, the tone of their narratives suggest that they didn't feel intimidated and rather looked forward to the opportunities to openly express their opposition to the Somoza regime. These women's approach to social transformation is consistent with the profile of "radical women", as discussed by Kampwirth (2001, p. 1) who argued that radicalism is defined by both the tactics and goals used by women who settle in political paths that take them beyond electoral politics, and who choose unconventional tactics to transform -rather than merely reform- their societies. This radicalism is also present in the themes that emerged in these women's narratives concerning opposition and engagement, as it can be noticed that they mostly opposed and challenged the inequality and injustice that came from the Somoza dictatorship. Their sense of engagement was directed to the support of those who faced oppression and injustice, be it the poor or other women, which again manifests an interest to transform the status quo in their society.

**Describing identity negotiation:** Two metaphors that emerged from the narratives of the pre-revolutionary period express, on one level, the risks that young revolutionaries were willing to undertake for the revolutionary cause, whereas the other metaphor captures the mindset behind these risks. The first metaphor, concerning the risks and challenges faced, came from one of Tamara's pre-revolutionary narrative: "[I would] go to the world without any security mattress meaning, sleeping anywhere, living anywhere". This sentence reflects how Tamara experienced life as unprotected and tough, after she left her parents house in order to join the Sandinista military forces. Another pre-revolutionary metaphor by

Maribel, captured the rationale behind these actions: “[we thought] that we were favored by history, therefore, sooner or later, the earth would be paradise”. This metaphor expresses the hope for a ‘new era’ (represented by the success of ‘the people’ of Nicaragua in the figure of the Sandinistas) where ‘spiritual’ priorities (brotherhood, justice, peace) would become central.

Through actantial analysis, it is possible to unveil how Nicaraguan women constructed the internal conflicts lived during this pre-revolutionary period and what were the internal key oppositions from their perspective. After reviewing the results from the actantial analysis of the narratives of this period, the following categories emerged:

1. Key oppositions concerning gaining ‘a sense of empowerment’: there were some cases when the Nicaraguan women that participated in revolutionary action challenged internal states of weakness or disempowerment through their revolutionary affiliation, in order to increase their strength. In one case, the opposing actant forces were: ‘a sense of being at the lowest level of the social structure, unable to help others//empowerment achieved through helping others’ (Elina). In another case: ‘engaging in political demonstrations with student movements//fear of coming across as weaker than men, unable to fight as they do’ (Leda).
2. Key oppositions concerning ‘challenging submission and restriction’: engaging in revolutionary action was –for some women- a mechanism that allowed them to challenge submissive or restrictive family practices. The conflict was between accepting submission or rebelling and confronting ‘rigid and established practices’. In the case of Selma, these oppositions pertained to her early discovery of feminism, which can be seen in the opposing actants: ‘accessing feminist knowledge//challenging the notion that there was something intrinsically wrong with her’. In the case of Maribel: ‘engaging in activism that contributed to the Nicaraguan revolution//sense of restriction and inability to engage in personal and political projects’; and in the case of Edith: ‘Transform unjust structures//a position of submission, abiding by traditional family rules concerning women’s roles’.

It is through deconstruction of these key oppositions that the negotiation of revolutionary identity can be further understood. For Nicaraguan women, joining the Sandinista revolutionaries became a ‘turning point’ of transition from pre-revolutionary involvement to revolutionary participation, and the way in which they left their ‘pre-

involved self' for a 'revolutionary' one, was mostly based in the impact of the constraining factors described above. In the case of women that sought a sense of empowerment, where the case of Leda stands out, in her pre-revolutionary narrative, some 'inconsistencies' concerning her identity as a revolutionary came out, when she clarified that she did not study at the National University of Nicaragua, because her parents would not let her study there due to her middle class affiliation. This discourse appears paradoxical and contradictory, as on one side, her 'revolutionary discourse' rejected class discrimination, yet in her comments concerning her own social class, she still needed to position herself as some kind of 'social elite' that would follow her class expectations. Looking at the case of women that attempted to challenge submission through political affiliation, another example stands out in Maribel's case, who was forced by her first husband to quit her revolutionary activism, despite the fact that she was regarded as a key figure in the Nicaraguan revolutionary student movement.

In sum, affiliation to a revolutionary –and Sandinista- identity for Nicaraguan women who were committed to the cause of student revolutionary activism occurred as a mechanism that allowed them to challenge submission and even an internal sense of powerlessness. It also represented an opportunity for these women to test their capacities, and gain a sense of empowerment, in a particular historical moment where the Sandinista movement was able to draw on the internal needs of these young women and recruit them to the cause of overthrowing the Somoza regime.

#### **5.1.2.b- Transition to a Post Revolutionary Period**

Concerning the Nicaraguan women revolutionary period, key themes that influenced their revolutionary involvement, and their eventual transition to the post-revolutionary period are the following:

a) Rebelling against oppressive structures: a theme that was present also during the pre-revolutionary period also appeared during the Nicaraguan revolutionary period and referred to the pursuit of social transformation by challenging the oppressive structure of the Somoza dictatorship. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'I ran risks that supported the transformation of social structures' (Tamara); 'I rebelled against structures that oppressed and exploited people' (Elina); 'the dictatorship in Nicaragua fed our quest for freedom' (Leda).

b) Fighting for the weakest, the poor, indigenous peoples and women: another theme had to do with the desire to seek social justice for the most oppressed sectors in society, namely

the poorest of the poor and women. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'I am willing to enter in opposition as long as I support the demands of women' (Elina); 'I started to fight against social injustice, indifference towards the women and the injustices against the indigenous peoples and the poor' (Leda)

c) Commitment to the Sandinista struggle: this theme reflects the strong commitment that the women involved in revolutionary action experienced towards that Sandinista movement. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'I was committed to Sandinista values' (Elina) and 'My military experience [with Sandinismo] allowed me to support and defend revolution' (Edith).

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned is that many of the Nicaraguan young women who got involved in revolutionary action experienced this period as a moment of complete commitment to the revolutionary cause, and were mainly concerned with overthrowing the Somoza regime and creating a more fair system that would eventually reach out to those who had been discriminated or exploited by the dictatorship, like the indigenous, the poor and the women. In doing so, these women fully committed to the ideals and the methods of the Sandinista revolutionaries by enrolling and fighting in the army facing all kinds of risks and challenges. The fact that many of these young women were recruited from revolutionary student movements (in one case, also because of involvement with a religious group) speaks for the strong presence that revolutionaries had among the Nicaraguan youth. In limited cases, the women were able to recognize the negative impact of gender inequality within the Sandinista organization at this particular revolutionary moment, but as they had already committed to the goals of the Sandinista cause, this gender aspect didn't seem to prompt any further desire for change. This is consistent with Kampwirth's (2002) assertion that sexism was not strongly predominant in Sandinista ranks before the defeat of Somoza, and it was only after the revolution succeeded that the later Sandinista Party endorsed sexist practices within the National Armed Forces, particularly during the Contra war.

A significant turning point in the lives of these women during this period was their involvement in clandestine revolutionary life, which marked the later developments of their lives.

**Concerning the direction of this transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, half of the Nicaraguan women experienced this period as 'mixed', followed by some women who experienced it as progressive and only one as regressive. It can be argued

that this experience was both lived as 'mixed' and 'progressive' because of coexistence of both challenges and risks that women had to face in the midst of war, while at the same time, the opportunity that they had to express their rebelliousness and contribute to the overthrow of the Somoza regime. As opposed to the prolonged revolutionary periods in El Salvador and Guatemala (ten and thirty years respectively) in Nicaragua, the Sandinistas were able to gain widespread support for their revolutionary action after the 1972 earthquake, finally seizing power in 1979 (see section 2.1.3 in historical review). The direct consequence in the lives of the women studied here is that an intensified revolutionary period was experienced for a shorter period of time, as opposed to women from El Salvador and Guatemala. In addition, it most likely involved their experiences as student activists. The implication here is that these narratives of the Nicaraguan revolutionary years do not reflect the traumatic impact of war involvement, as opposed to those of the Salvadoran or Guatemalan women, and rather express positive associations of hope and social transformation. During the revolutionary years, the women opposed mainly structures developed throughout the forty-year long Somoza dictatorship. They also opposed those who attempted to destroy Sandinismo. In terms of engagement, the women were fully committed to the cause of fighting for those who were considered the direct victims of oppression and injustice in Nicaragua, namely the indigenous peoples, the poor and women.

**Describing identity negotiation:** A metaphor from Leda's revolutionary period is symbolic of the levels of devotion that some women had towards the Sandinista cause: "I once returned with the child... because the child was a good, how can I put it? a good screen". In this sentence, Leda is discussing how she used her child when she had to travel from Nicaragua to Costa Rica trafficking money for the Nicaraguan revolution, where she describes how she presented to others the iconic image of a woman with a child as 'innocent' or 'trustworthy'; as a screen that hid clandestine action such as bringing money for the Sandinista revolutionaries.

After reviewing the results from the actantial analysis of the narratives of Nicaraguan women from the revolutionary period, an internal key opposition emerged, which can be phrased in terms of 'sense of choice-agency//compliance with constraining circumstances'. These conflicting positions can be exemplified in the following conflicting actants: 'identity connected with political involvement//fear and compliance to repressive social and political system as she knew it' (Elina); or in the case of Leda: 'Conscious engagement in dangerous clandestine revolutionary life//being dragged into the revolutionary cause by constraining factors'; or in the case of Selma: 'achieving full

independence in order to engage in revolutionary action//incapacity to achieve independence from family's rules'.

Differently from the women of El Salvador and Guatemala, the women from Nicaragua did not choose to leave their Sandinista revolutionary organization after a certain period of military involvement, but rather, they experienced a 'successful revolution' going from a revolutionary to a post-revolutionary period when the Sandinistas defeated the Somocista army in 1979. In this sense, these women did not experience a rupture that led them to a new post-revolutionary identity, but rather, their revolutionary involvement led them to a new stage in their lives: building a new Nicaragua after revolution. Through deconstructive methods, the key opposition that many of these women faced, namely a 'sense of choice-agency/compliance with constraining circumstances' can be further understood. In the case of Selma, for example, there is a clear connection between her political involvement and her need to develop autonomy from her mother's rule, as if supporting the liberation of others would lead to her own liberation. In the case of Leda, who also had a difficult relationship with her mother, her connectedness to revolution and radical activism allowed her to develop the identity of a 'woman-warrior' even at the expense of great personal and family risks.

In sum, it could be argued that the Nicaraguan women who were drawn to revolution by their internal need to rebel against particular personal circumstances, found in their commitment to Sandinismo and their personal quest to help those who were perceived as the weakest, an opportunity to empower themselves by strengthening their own self perceptions as heroines or warriors.

#### **5.1.2.c- Transition to feminism**

The following section deals with significant social and psychological factors concerning these women's experiences after the Sandinista victory that significantly influenced their post-revolutionary affiliations. These themes reflect the contradictions that they encountered in their new positions as 'administrators' and 'bureaucrats' of the Sandinista post-revolutionary machinery:

- a) Conflicting relationship with parts of the Sandinista structure/leadership: a theme that appeared in the narratives from this period was the increased tension and disappointment concerning the actions and roles of Sandinistas in leadership positions as well as parts of the Sandinista system. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'We worked with Sandinismo, but

challenged the structures, the relations were characterized by conflict and double games' (Tamara); 'I never accepted a position of submission towards men and rebelled against patriarchy' (Selma); 'the new version of Sandinismo seemed not to care about women's rights' (Elina).

- b) Corruption and abuse of power by Sandinista leadership: a frequent theme in these post revolutionary narratives had to do with the women's feelings of anger and disappointment concerning corrupt practices, abuse of power and impunity that prevailed in the Sandinista leadership. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'The Sandinistas became corrupt and abusive of power, seeking to privilege themselves and becoming all that they criticized before' and 'The Sandinistas sexually abused and betrayed women' (Leda); 'My experience in the [Sandinista] military was marked by discrimination... they had advantages and benefits that women did not have' (Edith)
- c) Emergence of feminism as a transformational force: in their narratives of the post-revolutionary period, Nicaraguan women referred to the emergence of feminism as a new vehicle for social and personal transformation, even when they were still connected to Sandinismo. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'An autonomous feminism was only possible when the Sandinistas lost power, but feminism gave [us] the power to seek transformation' (Tamara); 'Feminism provided meaning and understanding in my life, giving me an ethical frame and coherence' (Selma); 'Feminism showed me that things were not over, there was still a need to fight for women's rights and continue giving the fight' and 'Feminism helped me cleanse the anger' (Leda).

**Describing identity transition:** As it was described in detail in the theoretical review, after the Sandinistas achieved power in 1979 and established a government dedicated to consolidate the 'revolution', the Sandinista 'Comandantes' developed an authoritarian political system that attempted to centralize all forms of political organizing in the country. As a consequence, AMNLAE, the national woman's organization created by the Sandinistas, promoted a top-down hierarchical model that alienated the voices of the most progressive women in the country. Eventually, the same women who had joined the Sandinista revolution with the objective of challenging the authoritarianism of the Somoza dictatorship and seeking justice, developed a conflicting relationship with the 'Sandinista state' as it can

be seen in the themes that emerged from the narratives from the post-revolutionary period. This relationship became both conflicting and painful, and a great source of disillusionment for many Sandinista women, who began expressing their discomfort more openly during the post-war period. This is consistent with research of Nicaraguan historian Gema Santamaria (2006, p. 109), who shows how increasing groups of women began to reject AMNLAE's transformation as of 1982. These women argued that AMNLAE could not represent the interests of Nicaraguan women, because the organization did not take into account women's needs beyond political involvement and motherhood

Furthermore, these women became openly critical of the corruption and abuse of power by some leaders of the revolution, which created a stronger sense of separation between them and their former revolutionary comrades. It is in this socio-historical context that second wave feminism emerged in Nicaragua, as a transformational force among women, both at the personal and social levels, which is another significant theme in the narratives of this life period.

As it was presented in the life story charts, significant turning points that had a deep impact in these women's lives during this period were: trying to transform AMNLAE from within; encounter with foreign feminisms; the creation of the Erotic Left Party; Distance/breakup between feminists and Sandinistas; electoral defeat of Sandinistas in the year 1990; Experiencing depression, illness after defeat of Sandinistas. Thus, from what can be inferred from the analysis of turning points and storied themes is that the disappointment of Nicaraguan women concerning the perceived betrayal of core Sandinista values by the 'party apparatus' moved them closer to a 'feminist' affiliation, where the women experienced a sense of commonality and shared interests that focused on women's experiences, needs and rights.

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, half of the Nicaraguan women experienced this period as 'mixed' and the other half as 'regressive'. It can be argued that this experience was lived both as mixed and regressive, because, during the post revolutionary years, Sandinista women faced great disappointments regarding the outcomes of revolution. They had fought for justice and access, but the Sandinistas prioritized the reproduction of the Cuban model in Nicaragua, centralizing and limiting the nature of women's political organizing –among other things– which led to increased tensions between progressive women and the Sandinista leadership. Despite the fact that the emergence of feminist trends among women allowed them to

share their concerns and engage in collective action (such as the creation of the Erotic Left Party), for the most part, the women felt overwhelmed by the authoritarianism of the Sandinistas. Thus, during this period, the women developed a sense of opposition towards the authoritarianism of the Sandinista leadership, against new versions of Sandinismo that did not respond to core Sandinista values; to patriarchal systems that coerced women and to gender subordination in general. In addition, they engaged in feminist organizing and the study of feminist theory as a self-improvement philosophy and a collective identity that supported women's cause.

**Describing identity negotiation:** Two metaphors that express the contradictions that many of these women encountered during the post-revolutionary period, come from the narratives of Maribel and Selma. In the case of Maribel's metaphor, a deep sense of submission towards the Sandinista project emerged: 'therefore, if they would make me eat poop, I would eat poop'. This sentence expressed the deep level of submission that Maribel experienced towards the Sandinista leadership, based on her self-evaluation of 'owing' or not having contributed enough to the revolutionary cause. A very different attitude emerged in Selma's narratives of a later moment during the post-revolutionary period, where she talked about the struggle of Sandinista women to achieve the 'equal rights and equality law' which was established in the Post-Revolutionary Constitution by the Sandinista regime in 1987: 'to this day, [the law] is what allows us to wrestle forcefully in order to say this law is not constitutional'. In this metaphor, Selma talked about 'wrestling' as a mechanism of defiance, of opposition to the 'status quo' where women would engage with all their strength to oppose a violation to their rights. It could be argued that these two metaphors reflect a transition in regards to the women's relationship with the Sandinista project.

After reviewing the results from actantial analysis of the narratives of this period, the following categories emerged:

1. Key oppositions concerning feminist work in the light of Sandinista engagement: there were many cases where the women challenged a state of disempowerment, oppression or disappointment towards the Sandinista regime –to which they were still connected- through feminist action. These opposing actant forces can be seen in the following cases: 'objecting to the Sandinista system through the 'Erotic Left' Party/supporting AMNLAE' (Selma); or 'Feeling abused by painful experiences with Sandinista army/Desire to engage in meaningful cultural work supporting the Sandinista revolution' (Maribel); or 'Engaging in political work oriented to

strengthen the cause of women during Sandinismo//Feeling restricted by Sandinista hierarchy' (Leda); or 'Engaging in theory and practice of feminism//Following the Sandinista prohibition for women in the military to engage in feminist organizing' (Edith).

2. Key oppositions concerning the defeat of the Sandinista regime in 1990: despite the women's disappointment towards the Sandinista regime, in many cases, they experienced depression and a uncertainty concerning their political defeat of 1990. The opposing actant forces can be seen in the following cases: 'Engaging in autonomous feminist organizing//feeling pain and disappointment after the Sandinista defeat' (Tamara); or: 'Finding in feminism a new place for political organizing//Depression and emptiness after Sandinista defeat' (Elina).

Through deconstruction, the points of conflict concerning the transition from a post-revolutionary to a feminist identity became more explicit. One aspect that emerged through deconstructive analysis was the Nicaraguan women's fear towards the 'uncertainty' of not being affiliated to Sandinismo, even though they rejected the party leadership coercive mechanisms. For example, these feelings appear in one of Leda's post-revolutionary narratives, where she admits her disappointment towards Sandinismo, but at the same time she perceives no choice for her; she has to either remain a 'Sandinista' or 'join the enemy', which reflected a paradox, as she also explained in her narrative how it was possible for her to express anger towards the regime. Still, from this perspective, she appeared submissive to the idea that she had no choice but to affiliate to Sandinismo. Another aspect that reflects the contradictions of the women's coexisting identities as feminists and Sandinistas became evident in the 1990 defeat of the Sandinista party. An example of this can be seen in a post-revolutionary narrative from Tamara, where she explained how Sandinista –and feminist– women remained supportive of the Sandinista party during the political campaign, and experienced significant pain when they were defeated, despite their anger towards the party system. An explanation offered by Tamara: 'it was out of fear of what was coming...' shows how Nicaraguan women were still restricted by the authoritarianism of Sandinismo.

From these perspectives, the turning point of transition from a post-revolutionary to a feminist identity in the case of Nicaraguan women had to do with two significant factors: first, the emergence of an early feminist organizing originated by the interest of many Sandinista women who felt both disappointed and abused by the Sandinista structures. A second factor that came later in time, namely the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990,

which created conditions that facilitated women's autonomous organizing aside from the structures of AMNLAE. Despite many Sandinista women's desire to embrace political feminist organizing –as it could be seen in the case of the 'Erotic Left Party', still the sense of affiliation, the fear of the unknown and a sense of commitment towards core Sandinista values, stopped them from openly disowning their Sandinista affiliation and embracing a feminist one. This process became possible after the Sandinistas lost their political power in 1990. This view is consistent with Cuadra and Jimenez (2010, p. 14) discussion on the experiences of autonomous feminists in the late 1980s. These authors point out to how difficult it was for women to leave the Sandinista Front and to construct new spaces of autonomy and independence from the state, particularly concerning the FMLN. The search for autonomy and a new identity was extended between 1990 and 1997, when the electoral defeat of the Sandinistas opened a period of uncertainty, where many women felt as if they lost their political and party reference. Some of these women experienced a period of disorientation and "political orphan hood" until the 1992 encounter of Nicaraguan women.

#### **5.1.2.d- Transition during Feminism**

The following section deals with significant social and psychological factors concerning these women's experiences with their feminist affiliation. The key themes that influenced these women's feminist involvement are the following:

- a) The higher moral quality of feminism in regards to Sandinismo: a theme that appeared in various narratives from this period refers to the higher qualities of feminism; the strengths of feminism in regards to Sandinismo as political theory and practice, but also as in terms of a philosophy of life. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Women had to fight opposing actors and tendencies within Sandinismo, but feminism gave them power to seek transformation' (Tamara); 'I was committed to Sandinista values that motivated people to rebel against oppression, the new version [of Sandinismo] seems not to care about women's rights' (Elina); 'Solidarity among women saved us before and after the Sandinista defeat' (Maribel); 'The Sandinistas became corrupt and abusive of power, they sexually abused and betrayed women' and 'Sandinismo gave me a sense of social justice, but feminism gave me a sense of total justice' (Leda)
- b) The value of feminism as transformational theory and praxis: a crucial theme from the narratives of this period, reflects upon the importance of feminism as a theory and practice that promotes both personal and social change that enriches women's

lives. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Feminism came as a form of resistance to cultural patterns of women's subordination' (Tamara) 'In solidarity, we started to exchange ideas concerning feminist theory, and that is how feminism re-surfaced' (Maribel); 'In my work with feminism, I found a collective identity that helped me develop a cause for women, both in sexual rights and political participation' (Edith)

- c) Feminism promoting personal gain and growth: feminism was also evaluated to have a dimension that promotes personal growth and recovery from painful experiences of the past. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Feminism provided meaning and understanding of my life, gave me an ethical frame, coherence [and made me realize] it's the world that is crazy and not me' (Selma) and 'Through feminism, my personal and intimate dimensions gained transcendence, making me a better person' and 'feminism helped me cleanse the anger; one cannot do feminist work without the cleansing' (Leda)
- d) Defending autonomy: many of the women expressed a need to both claim a personal sense of autonomy and also, defending the notion that feminism remains autonomous and strong in Nicaragua. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'A search for autonomy has manifested in all the spheres of my life, at home, fighting dictatorship and working for women' and 'NGOization within feminism weakens the movement and does not respond to the challenges posed by authoritarianism' (Selma); 'I am willing to enter in opposition as long as I support the demands of women' (Elina).

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned from this period –starting from the defeat of the Sandinistas to this day- is that many Nicaraguan feminist women who were revolutionary Sandinistas in the past, made a choice to support feminism, even at the expense of their previous affiliations. In the post-Sandinista Nicaragua of the 1990s, the government of Violeta Chamorro supported what Karen Kampwirth (2008) labeled 'anti-feminist' policies and practices as a response to second wave feminism. Furthermore, the Sandinistas (and the figure of Daniel Ortega particularly) continued in 2006 with a new anti-feminist campaign in the country (for more, see sub-section 'Contemporary Threats against Nicaraguan Feminists' in section 2.2.3- 'Feminism in Nicaragua') all of which leads to the conclusion that Nicaraguan feminists have been harassed by political parties -and sometimes even the Nicaraguan state- for more than twenty years now. The themes that appeared in

the women's narratives of the feminist period clearly allude to these confrontations between feminism and Sandinismo, the latter which, to this day, continues to be the strongest political force in Nicaragua. As many of these women depicted, once the Sandinista party achieved power, it became corrupt and stopped working for the cause of people, which suggests the higher moral quality of feminism. Once established that feminism, as a transformational trend is superior to Sandinismo, Nicaraguan women emphasized the value of working against patriarchal structures of the past and present (at the social level) and also reflected in their narratives upon the impact of feminist practice in their own personal growth and healing. Through their feminist work, Nicaraguan women have been able to claim and retain a sense of autonomy from other political affiliations, such as Sandinismo, and have been able to address the pain and disillusionment concerning their early Sandinista affiliation (Kampwirth, 2011, p. 10).

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, all the Nicaraguan women have experienced this period as 'progressive'. This –like the women from El Salvador- is the only life period where all the women shared a similar sense of direction. It can be argued that autonomous feminist involvement was perceived as a progressive turn in the lives of these women because it has allowed them to created and develop a sense of autonomy and empowerment vis a vis political authoritarianism in Nicaragua. Second wave feminism emerged as a response of Sandinista women in the 1980s to challenge and demand justice and equal rights for women, and ever since, it has continued to do so. In contemporary Nicaragua, feminist women –despite grievances within the movement- continue to experience more harassment from the state than in El Salvador and Guatemala. Though it may appear that being a feminist in this country may pose an extra burden in a woman's life, in all their narratives from the feminist period, Nicaraguan women have expressed a sense of satisfaction and commitment towards their affiliation with feminism. Concerning experiences of opposition and engagement throughout their feminist period, women have opposed rigid patriarchal structures, which in concrete terms refers to new forms of Sandinismo that do not respond to women's needs and demands. Some Nicaraguan feminists consider that the feminist movement should not engage in political activism, whereas others may disagree. In the feminist narratives analyzed in this study, women opposed the idea of Nicaraguan feminism developing an alliance with political parties, which may indicate the extent to which they defend the idea of an autonomous movement. On the other side, in terms of engagement, women support

principles of solidarity among women and the idea of pursuing a common cause through feminist work.

**Describing identity negotiation:** In a metaphor from a narrative of the feminist period, Selma talked about the reasons behind the defeat of socialism as a transformational force, juxtaposing it with feminism: “when everything fell apart, and this was also shown by the fact that all the East [Europe] fell down, all those so-called socialist countries fell, as they were giants with feet of clay”. This was her way to suggest that communist regimes fell because they didn’t have a solid democratic base-like Sandinismo- as their practices didn’t match the theory and a big discrepancy grew between what was expected from them and their outcomes.

When feminist practice allowed Nicaraguan women to challenge and confront their painful and conflicting experiences concerning Sandinista affiliations of the present and the past, a key opposition emerged which was unveiled and explored through actantial analysis, namely that of [‘Strength to engage in meaningful feminist involvement//a sense of disempowerment and experiences of victimization coming from former Sandinista affiliation’. ] Concerning this feminist period, this core dilemma was expressed in different ways by the women in their narratives; sometimes the dilemma had to do with a perceived feeling of disempowerment connected to a sense of ‘defeat’ from the past, like in Edith’s case: ‘fighting to challenge historical subordination of women//feelings of disempowerment as a victim of past oppression’. In other cases, it had to do with a perceived sense of internal weakness: ‘finding strength in women’s solidarity//lack of energy needed to get involved in feminism’ (Maribel), or in other case, it had to do with regret and sorrow concerning involvement with an unethical Sandinismo: ‘Coherence through feminist ethics//dramatic personal consequences connected to desperation and lack of ideals in Sandinismo’ (Selma) and in other case, it had to do with a perceived sense of exploitation by the Sandinistas: ‘development of new feminist project//manipulation of her political activism by the Sandinistas’ (Tamara). It is important to consider here that the theme of finding strength to engage in meaningful activism while feeling disempowered by painful experiences from the past is a theme that has appeared in earlier life phases, such as the pre-revolutionary and revolutionary.

Through deconstruction, the points of conflict concerning adopting a feminist identity –and leaving a Sandinista one behind- were unveiled. In the case of Selma, her narrative confirms the impact of this decision in her life, when she admitted that if she had not been a feminist –at the time when the Sandinistas were defeated- she would have killed

herself long ago. This recognition implied that she most likely thought of suicide at some point of this transition, because of the pain caused by the disappointing outcomes of Sandinismo. For her, feminism had a 'life saving' quality, and even though she admitted it in her narrative, she also refused to put herself in a vulnerable position by openly presenting her fears and vulnerability. Another case that highlights the extent to which a Sandinista affiliation from the past was perceived as damaging is presented in a narrative from Leda, who recognized that her relationship with Sandinismo remains conflicting and unresolved. She explained how she has to 'cleanse' herself from the anger that she feels, and she has been unable to do so. Her words suggest that for her, any kind of relationship with Sandinismo is impossible. Taking into account the intensity of these women's experience of separation from Sandinismo and their assertion of feminism, it can be noticed that key turning points of their feminist period were: experiences of coming together after the defeat of Sandinismo; influence of feminism after defeat; gaining knowledge about feminism in the 1990s; First feminist encounters; starting a feminist organization and feminism and life coherence/life thread.

From these perspectives, it can be argued that the turning point of transition to a feminist identity in the case of Nicaraguan women affiliated with Sandinismo had to do with the need to open democratic spaces for gender organizing. But as feminist practice involved the development of a community of women in solidarity with each other, they encountered the support and strength to fight against Sandinista anti-feminist policies as well as a venue for political expression. Not only do these women perceive their feminist organizing as source of strength and of meaning creation, but it has allowed them to develop a sense of congruency, as they link their activism of the past (demanding of justice for the weaker members of society) with their present day activism.

### **5.1.3- Identity Transition in the case of Guatemalan Women**

The following section presents a discussion concerning identity transition, the direction of the transition and identity negotiation for each of the life periods experienced by Guatemalan former revolutionaries and feminists.

### 5.1.3.a- Transition to war

Concerning the Guatemalan women's pre-revolutionary period, key themes that influenced their pre-revolutionary involvement and their transition to the revolutionary period are the following:

- a) Deep inequalities rooted in the Guatemalan social system: in some of the narratives of the pre-revolutionary period, Guatemalan women expressed dissatisfaction concerning deep inequalities rooted in Guatemala's social class system, characterized by deep inequality between social sectors that privileges the most powerful at the expense of exploiting the vulnerabilities of the weaker sectors. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'The system in Guatemala is based on inequality; the system responds to the needs of the wealthy, they have the military at their disposal' (Nelly); 'The system is permeated by relations of dominance that keeps people controlled and marginalized' (Clarissa); 'Oppression can be both in public and private spheres' (Paulina).
- b) Positive perceptions concerning revolutionary involvement: some women talked about the importance of 'getting politically involved' in revolutionary action already in their pre-revolutionary narratives. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Fighting for change was a way to achieve it' (Nelly); 'Those who were trying to do something for my country taught me a new understanding of the system, I had to get involved' (Lucia).
- c) Family traditions of dissidence: The idea of getting involved in political action originated in the family's history of political dissidence appeared in the pre-revolutionary narratives of some women. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Activism is part of my identity; a legacy from previous generations, my value and the values of my family' (Lilian); 'The legacy and stories of my women ancestors shaped my ideas about my quest of change in the lives of women' (Paulina).

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned about the key themes that emerged in the narratives of this period is that Guatemalan young women who were moved to revolutionary action were concerned with the deep levels of social inequality that existed in Guatemala during their pre-revolutionary years. As it has been discussed in the literature review (see 2.1.4- The case of Guatemala) deep economic, social and political exclusion of

the Guatemalan lower classes, composed from the most part by Mayan indigenous people, has been a constant factor in the country's history. In addition, some of these –at the time– young pre-revolutionary women were even more sensitized to these differences because they came from families with a history of political dissidence (see the cases of Nelly and Lilian) and had early childhood experiences marked by the influence of repression against their families. Thus, ideas of revolutionary involvement appeared also in their narratives, mostly influenced by their participation in religious groups that supported Theology of Liberation (like in the cases of Lucia and Odilia) or because of their participation in revolutionary student movements (as it was the case for Clarissa, Lilian and Paulina). During this pre-revolutionary period, significant turning points for most of Guatemalan women interviewed were: early family influences; impact of revolutionary religious or student groups; a move towards political activism and radicalization.

In the end, the factors that favored the transition to a revolutionary identity had to do with these young women's early experiences of dissidence –sometimes within their families– and with radical religious or student groups that promoted the need to challenge deep seated racial and social inequalities in Guatemala, and created spaces for political involvement and organizing, all of which moved them closer to the identity of 'revolutionaries'.

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, a majority of Guatemalan women experienced this period as 'progressive' with one woman experiencing it as mixed and another one as regressive. It can be argued that for most Guatemalan women interviewed, their transition to a revolutionary life felt like a progressive turn, since joining a radical student group and eventually, a guerrilla organization, was congruent with their commitment of challenging an unjust political system. Through the study of the themes that emerged concerning opposition and engagement, it can be noticed that these women opposed an oppressive system, such as the Guatemalan state and the power relations that it represented, characterized by exploitative and racist features in the public sphere, as well as patriarchal structures and practices of sexual violence in the private. Furthermore, these young women experienced a sense of engagement with their family's experiences of dissidence as well as the idea of getting involved in collective action.

**Describing identity negotiation:** a metaphor that captures the significance of the political involvement of these young women comes from a pre-revolutionary narrative from Lucia: "[my experience in Quiche] changed me, it turned my life a hundred and eighty

degrees". In Lucia's case, this metaphor suggested how the experience of going from one position (as a protected upper middle class student) to another (as a "guerrillera") felt for the narrator as a radical position displacement. Lucia is an atypical case within this sample, since she comes from an upper-class background, different from the other former revolutionary combatants considered for this study. Nevertheless, her desire to affiliate in order to develop a new identity as a 'revolucionaria' allowed her to achieve something else, namely, a personal sense of independence, autonomy and empowerment, as much as revolutionary activism did for other the other Guatemalan women in this study. The negotiation of this new identity was explored through actantial analysis, which uncovered that the major internal opposition during this period was: 'a need for change, autonomy and freedom/passive acceptance of one's position in the system'. These actant positions could be seen in the following examples: 'Using political organizing as means for change//passive acceptance of inescapable status quo' (Nelly); or: 'Joining a revolutionary organization and challenge social system as a way to consolidate agency//a position of advantage within the social class system' (Lucia); or: 'Gaining a sense of autonomy and strength//compliance to patriarchal and alienating views from family and society' (Clarissa); or: 'Identity connected to political action/Patriarchal mechanisms of control within family of origin' (Lilian).

Through deconstruction, the internal conflict unveiled through actantial analysis is further understood. As in the case of Salvadoran women, Guatemalan young pre-revolutionaries were deeply influenced by their relationship with significant women from their families that shaped the meanings behind their political activisms. From this perspective, these women were either wanting to do something very different from what their mothers did by claiming a sense of empowerment that they lacked (as in the cases of Paulina and Odilia) or they wanted to emulate their mothers and/or grandmothers, who they perceived as strong (as in the cases of Lilian and Clarissa). In the case of Clarissa, for example, revolutionary involvement became a way of rebelling against "all that stuff of alienation" as she called it, referring to patriarchal paradigms endorsed in her family system. Clarissa referred to a 'community of women' in her family who nurtured her desire to fight for equality and for justice for women. Another case comes from Lillian, who openly expressed in her narrative admiration for her mother's "rounded shoulders" as a way of conveying her strength, and the source of inspiration for her revolutionary activism. Another case that involved both admiration and sorrow towards her mother is Paulina's: her activism

came as a way of rebelling internally against the paradigm of the 'sacrificed' woman –such as her mother- who offered everything for others, neglecting herself

In sum, affiliation to a revolutionary identity for Guatemalan women occurred as a mechanism that allowed them to challenge internal positions of powerlessness, fear of change and a sense of alienation in their families of origin, by engaging in political activism that demanded involvement for the change of the rigid structures of the Guatemalan social system. Some women relied on the examples of their strong mothers as a source of inspiration for their activism, whereas others attempted to 'rescue' the collective story of women in their families by engaging in revolutionary action

### **5.1.3.b- Transition to a Post Revolutionary Period**

Concerning the Guatemalan women revolutionary period, key themes that influenced their revolutionary involvement, and their eventual transition to the post-revolutionary period are the following:

- a) Fighting for social change: a theme present in many revolutionary narratives was that of the women's desire to fight for social change in Guatemala. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'fighting for change is a way to achieve it' (Nelly); 'Social change must be pursued at all costs, through activism or military opposition' (Clarissa); 'I have a need for justice, I feel satisfied for doing something to change unjust structures' (Lilian) and 'I wanted to transform society' (Paulina).
- b) Radicalization: a few women from this group expressed support for radicalization and fighting from a position of fearlessness, given the extreme dangers that combatants would face in revolutionary action. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'We had nothing to lose during the war because they would kill us anyway' (Nelly) and 'It was worthwhile to have a radical position, what else is there in life?' (Clarissa). The sense of recklessness that can be inferred from these themes connected to radicalism is consistent with Kampwirth's (2001, p. 98) views how young women who became guerrilleras during their adolescence tended to underestimate the risks involved in supporting the guerrillas or did not care about those risks.
- c) being against women's oppression: in some revolutionary narratives, a theme that emerged was that of supporting the struggle of women from the family or other

women who were faced with situations of oppression. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'witnessing domestic violence marked me, women need to strengthen their boundaries in order to stop working so hard' (Paulina) and 'it was necessary to recover the history that communities of women construct' (Clarissa).

**Describing identity transition:** as it was previously explained in the literature review (see 2.1.4- The case of Guatemala) it was in the late seventies when women started to join Guatemalan guerrilla organizations in greater numbers, a trend that came along with an increased oppression of both men and women from indigenous groups by the armed forces. Thus, some of the men and women who stayed in Guatemala became radicalized in their revolutionary involvement whereas others surrendered to army troops, and many others sought exile in Mexico. Not surprisingly, a theme that appeared in the revolutionary narratives of Guatemalan women has to do with an increased radicalization and a strong quest to fight for social change. Another theme that appeared in these revolutionary narratives had to do with the vindication of family women by these young revolutionaries. As the war in the early 1980s intensified, revolutionary women saw fewer life alternatives for themselves: either to seek exile in Mexico or fight with the URNG. According to information from Date-Bah (2003, p. 118) more Guatemalan women than men sought refuge in neighboring countries, principally Mexico during the war, since men were more likely to be displaced on the run internally.

Eventually, remaining as a committed member of the guerrilla became more difficult for some women, who either lost family members during the war (as in Odilia's case) or faced risks even within their revolutionary affiliations (like Lucia, who suffered a rape attempt by a revolutionary comrade in Cuba) or discrimination (like Clarissa who received negative reactions in her revolutionary group when she came out as a lesbian). Eventually, some of these women had to leave for Mexico as the only way out of their revolutionary involvement (as it was the case for Lucia, Lilian and Odilia). Some of the turning points faced by women during this period were: involvement with religious revolutionary groups; entrance to the university and joining student revolutionary organizations; joining a guerrilla organization; loss of husband; rape attempt; disappointment with inner guerrilla conflicts; departure for Mexico and grief over guerrilla loss.

**Concerning the direction of this transition:** for the most part, based on the analysis of plot development, Guatemalan women experienced the revolutionary period as mixed, and others experienced it as regressive. None of the women considered it progressive. This

result indicates that this period presented a significant amount of challenges for these women, as on one side, their involvement gave them the opportunity to fight for social change and have an impact on Guatemalan society. On the other, they were confronted with painful experiences, like loss of a loved one, or injury, or rape attempts that eventually led them to reconsider their own revolutionary involvement. In terms of opposition and engagement, Guatemalan revolutionaries opposed what one called an 'exploitative and racist system' that incorporated unjust mechanisms and structures. They felt engaged towards a history of collective action and the pursuit of change for women.

**Describing identity negotiation** The metaphors of this period are telling of the multiple and contradictory experiences that Guatemalan women faced during the war. Some of them allude to the theme of 'loss', whereas other metaphors reflected a sense of empowerment and their capacity to move forward. One of those metaphors that addressed this sense of loss came from Nelly, and referred to her experience of leaving her family behind in order to join a revolutionary organization: "I had to leave the house, I was exiled, truly, I was exiled". This metaphor expressed Nelly's feelings concerning her family's refusal to understand and support her political activism on the grounds of being a 'woman', which made her feel "exiled" or expelled from her family's life. Another metaphor of loss came from Lucia, who at the end of her revolutionary period said: "I closed my chapter". This metaphor expressed how the end the revolutionary period felt as a moment that had to be left behind and presented a new content, like a book. As mentioned above, other metaphors emphasized feelings of empowerment, like one from Odilia, when she said: "My life is not taken apart" which reflected an evaluation of her capacity to 'pull herself together' and function after the death of her husband during the war. Some of these themes were taken up again by actantial analysis, which unveiled internal key oppositions from the perspective of the narrators.

After reviewing the results from the actantial analysis of the narratives of Guatemalan women from the revolutionary period, the following categories emerged:

1. Key oppositions concerning a sense of loss: there were some cases where the women had to overcome experiences of grief and loss from their revolutionary involvement, that had a negative impact in the quality of their revolutionary activism. These opposing actant forces can be seen in the following cases: 'new feminist engagements at the end of the revolution//grief concerning the defeat of revolutionary forces' (Lucia); or 'Revolutionary involvement//childhood and youth losses that cannot be replaced' (Nelly).

2. Conflict regarding status quo of guerrilla movements: in other cases, the women expressed dissatisfaction concerning internal conditions of revolutionary forces, while at the same time felt committed to their cause. These opposing actant forces can be seen in the following cases: 'Patriarchy within guerrilla movements//restrictions within guerrilla concerning Lesbian identity' (Clarissa); or 'remaining as a rebel//complying with traditional rules and regulations of guerrilla organizations' (Odilia)

Through deconstructive analysis, it is possible to better understand the positions behind these key contradictions. In the case of narratives that address loss, particularly looking at the case of Nelly, it can be seen that sorrow and regret are implicit in how she evaluated the consequences of political organizing in her life: "I think that if I would have stayed at home, I would have married, and I would have children and everything...". Her option, revolutionary involvement, led to a tougher, more difficult life, that she refuses to evaluate in those terms, but in her remarks, the pain of 'what if' is implicit. In another narrative where the conflicting issue has to do with the rigidities of internal status quo within guerrilla movements, the case of Clarissa stands out. Despite the fact that she joined the revolutionaries as a mechanism to transform society, she found out that her comrades internally reproduced rigidities of the Guatemalan social status quo, by rejecting her openly declared lesbianism. In her narrative, she nevertheless silenced the human factor, by focusing on the rigid structures of guerrilla movements, but did not reveal how men and women reacted to her lesbianism, and furthermore, whether there was there any other alternative but to leave the organization.

In sum, it could be argued that Guatemalan women who were drawn to revolutionary action by their desire to transform deep inequalities rooted in the Guatemalan system, gradually moved to a position of post-revolutionary involvement, as they were faced with the rigidities of revolutionary organizations, on one side; but also with the sorrows and losses experienced during the war years, on the other.

### 5.1.3.c- Transition to feminism

The following section deals with significant social and psychological factors concerning these women's experiences after some of them decided to drop out of their revolutionary organizations before the peace agreements were signed. The themes that reappear in their narratives reflect the experiences that they encountered while facing the challenges of the post-revolutionary period:

- a) Patriarchy within guerrilla organizations: a theme that appeared in the narratives of this period concerned experiences where the women felt discriminated or even oppressed by patriarchy within their guerrilla organizations. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'I have been victim of oppression by the patriarchal guerrilla system and I reproduced this exploitative scheme' (Lilian); 'Leftist men were influenced by patriarchal values, women played a lesser role in guerrilla organizations, and sometimes [women] were not aware' (Odilia).
- b) Becoming self-aware through feminism: As it was the case for almost all Guatemalan women who migrated to Mexico, the women from this study who sought exile there entered in contact with Mexican feminist groups, where they learned about feminist theory and practice. These early contacts with feminists allowed them to develop ideas concerning the importance of feminism for their own personal growth. It could be argued that these feminist messages resonated even more in the cases of those former combatant women who had internalized from women of their families a sense of strength, courage and a tradition of political dissidence. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Thanks to feminism I became aware. Women can have better relationships among them, where they can transit from rivalry to solidarity' (Lilian); 'Feminism gave me and others a framework to better know ourselves, our rebelliousness, our histories and to be saved from ignorance' (Odilia); 'feminism gave me a new understanding of the things that happened in the past, it allowed me to heal what was wounded, it gave me a reason to work for change' (Lucia).

**Describing identity transition:** As the Guatemalan war progressed, women found themselves undergoing extreme personal risks and facing not just adversity while fighting against the enemy, but also encountered that revolutionary organizations reproduced

patriarchal and hierarchical values that restricted women's agency. Cases like Odilia – who was questioned by her revolutionary comrades for having sexual partners after the death of her husband- or Clarissa – who experienced her revolutionary organization's rejection when she declared herself a lesbian- or Nelly – who suffered sexual abuse by one of her revolutionary comrades- or Lucia – who suffered a rape attempt in Cuba- exemplify the extent to which patriarchal values permeated these organizations; sometimes to the point of becoming hostile towards combatant women. The theme of patriarchy in guerrilla organizations appeared in their post-revolutionary narratives along with personal reflections concerning the difficulties that they endured during their war years. Another important theme that emerged in these narratives had to do with the impact that feminist thought had on those women who migrated to Mexico at the end of their revolutionary involvement. In some cases, women left for Mexico hoping to get back to revolutionary action in Guatemala (as it was in Lilian's case) but in other instances, Guatemalan women left for Mexico after dropping out from their revolutionary organizations not knowing exactly what would be the next step in their lives. It was during this transition moment when they met and joined other Guatemalan and Mexican feminists in women's groups, and started reflecting on their past experiences and also, gaining a new understanding of themselves. The women who did not leave for Mexico experienced the process of the 1996 Peace Agreements, which in Guatemala involved the creation of a "Civil Society Assembly" where women's groups were represented (for more, see 2.1.4- The case of Guatemala).

As it was presented in the life story charts, significant turning points that had a deep impact on these women's lives during this period were: leaving guerrilla organization; exile in Mexico; early feminist involvement; return to Guatemala; reaching out to families again; women participating in the Civil Society Assembly; beginnings with feminist NGO. Thus, what can be inferred from the analysis of turning points and storied themes is that the hostile revolutionary environment experienced by Guatemalan women within their revolutionary organizations –along with the military stagnation of war- played a significant role in the pursuit of an exit option, such as exile for Mexico. Furthermore, once these women found networks of other Guatemalan or Mexican feminists women who introduced them to feminist theory and practice, a transition began to take place, from a post-revolutionary to a feminist affiliation.

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, half of the Guatemalan women experienced this period as progressive and half as mixed. It can be argued that the combined experiences of dropping out from their

guerrilla organizations –which meant leaving behind years of political affiliation- along with departing from Mexico, and finding new political and social affiliations through feminism produced a combined experience of grief and uncertainty, but also an opportunity for an introspective look and understanding of their experiences and subjectivity. During their post-revolutionary period, many of these women developed a sense of opposition against patriarchal positions within their revolutionary organizations and the political left in general; also against sexual violence and abuse towards women; against rigid organizational views that could not deal with dissenting voices and against an exploitative and racist system, such as the Guatemalan state. In addition, the women engaged with feminist theory and practice; or with the idea of coming together for a cause oriented to the improvement of their lives and to more collaborative and supportive relations among women.

**Describing identity negotiation:** One metaphor from these women's post-revolutionary narratives clearly expresses the impact that feminist involvement had after revolution. The metaphor from Clarissa: "feminism was a kind of lifesaver", suggests how feminism offered "a life" after the war ended. Possibly, she and other women felt "saved" from anomie, depression and the strong feelings of failure that the guerrilla organizations – and its members- may have experienced back then.

After reviewing the results from actantial analysis of the narratives of this period, a core conflict emerges where the actants can be explained as representing opposing forces: 'meaningful feminist involvement//grief, depression and disappointment over revolutionary years'. This core conflict is represented in the following cases: 'Meaningful political involvement//disappointment over the lack of capacity of guerrilla organizations' (Lucia); 'empowerment to transform private sphere through feminism//post conflict leftist discourse that reflects a sense of failure and distrust' (Clarisa); 'Empowering feminist consciousness//sense of stagnation, lack of personal progress' and 'Make sense and find her own place/grief, desire to leave' (Odilia).

Through deconstructive analysis the points of conflict concerning the transition from a post-revolutionary to a feminist identity became more explicit. One significant aspect that emerged was how Guatemalan women omitted from their narratives the experience of reuniting again with their families of origin by the end of the war and the emotions that were associated with this experience. In the case of Nelly, she admitted that there was a significant cut-off between her and her family, but did not disclose in her narratives how her re-encounter with her family after the war took place. In Lilian's case, she described her painful return to Guatemala after living in Mexico and El Salvador, leaving out of her

narrative the re-encounter with her family. In yet another post-revolutionary narrative, Odilia avoided reflecting on her emotional status after the war. All these silences and personal information removed from their narratives (or 'hidden events') could be considered markers of trauma (see sub-section 'The impact of trauma on the story told' in theoretical review) that according to Ben Ezer (2009) are identifiable in the way a traumatic experience is recounted within a narrative.

From these perspectives, it could be argued that the transition from a post-revolutionary to a feminist identity in the case of Guatemalan women had to do with a gradual disillusionment concerning how guerilla organizations reproduced gender discriminatory and hostile practices towards many female combatants. As the war situation became more extreme, many women opted for exile in Mexico, where they encountered community support and an opportunity for self-reflection in local feminist organizations. The impact of feminism was significant in the lives of these women, and resonated with experiences of the past. Thus, the women gradually incorporated feminism values and priorities. Upon their return to Guatemala, and possibly enduring some kind of 'sanctuarial traumatic stress' (see 2.3.5-Trauma in life narratives of former combatants) these women became engaged in rebuilding a life, and found a way of doing so through feminist organizing.

#### **5.1.3.d- Transition during Feminism**

The following section deals with significant social and psychological factors concerning these women's experiences with their feminist affiliation. The key themes that influenced these women's feminist involvement are the following:

- a) The importance of solidarity relations among women: a theme that appeared in the narratives of most Guatemalan women has to do with the value of relations of solidarity and a sense of community among women, as a necessary path for achieving better results in their activism for women's rights. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'it is necessary to recover the history that communities of women construct. This community has been crucial in my personal development' (Clarisa); 'Women have to develop solidarity towards each other and protect themselves from abuse' and 'women can do a lot if they come together' (Nelly) and 'Women can have better types of relationships among themselves, where they can transit from rivalry to solidarity' (Lilian).

- b) Social change for the benefit of women: an important theme that had to do with the need to produce social change that yields a better quality of life for women and the opening of new spaces. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Social change must be pursued at all costs, through activism or military opposition' and 'It is possible to create a social collective force among women that can change how sexuality is constructed through radical feminism' (Clarissa); 'A political agenda is crucial for feminism, aiming at having an impact and creating representation' (Odilia); 'I have a quest for change in the lives of women' (Paulina)
- c) Legacy from preceding women: a theme that has appeared previously and connected with revolutionary activism, reappeared in the feminist period, mostly connected with visions that women have concerning their perceptions of feminism as trans-generational. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Activism is a legacy from previous generations, my value and the values of my family, its who I am' (Lilian) and 'the legacy and stories of my women ancestors shaped my ideas about my quest for change in the lives of women and those that will follow me' (Paulina)
- d) Identity connected to activism: another theme of this period concerns some women's view that their identity is connected to their political activism. Some expressions of this topic can be seen in the following storied themes: 'Activism is part of my identity' (Lilian) and 'my revolutionary and feminist identities are independent but share common concerns: transforming society' (Paulina).

**Describing identity transition:** what can be learned from this period is that many former combatant Guatemalan women after the war seemed to embrace a feminist affiliation on the grounds of working with a community of women who also sought social change in order to have a significant impact on women's lives. They were probably sensitized to the importance of developing a sense of community among women after having experienced authoritarianism and discrimination within their revolutionary organizations during the war.

For the Guatemalan women of this study, it became important to work for the benefit of other women, including themselves, differently from what revolutionaries stood for during the war, namely that combatants were expected to sacrifice themselves for others. A theme that reflects this point appeared in one of Lilian's feminist narratives: 'I have been victim of

oppression by the patriarchal guerrilla system and I reproduced this exploitative scheme. Thanks to feminism, I became aware of this problem'. Furthermore, another relevant theme for Guatemalan feminists is that of having a sense of legacy from preceding women (mothers, grandmothers) and a commitment to work in the pursuit of women's rights, also from the idea of creating a trans-generational community of women. Another crucial element is one that connects a guerrilla involvement to a feminist one, namely an identity based on 'activism' in which women who are now feminists can trace a link of their current activism to their previous political activism.

As it was presented in the life story charts, significant turning points that had a deep impact on these women's lives during their feminist period were: transition to peace; personal life and feminism; beginning of feminist organization; development of organization and team structure; opening spaces for lesbian feminists and development of feminist identity. Thus, what can be inferred from the analysis of turning points and storied themes is that feminism in Guatemala was grounded in the idea of a supportive community of women who worked for women's rights and engaged in transforming their societies from a feminist perspective. Some of these women were able to see their feminist activism as part of a historical thread of women ancestors working for a better life, and saw their feminist affiliation as another expression of their pursuit of activism, that started during the revolutionary period.

**Concerning the direction of the transition:** based on the analysis of plot development, almost all the Guatemalan women experienced this period as 'progressive' with only one woman (Odilia) feeling it as 'mixed'. Like in the cases of El Salvador and Nicaragua, where all women shared the same sense of progressive direction, in Guatemala, the overwhelming majority of women had a positive evaluation of their lives as feminists. Nevertheless the case of Odilia stands out, as she has faced both difficult and satisfactory situations during her feminist period. This can be explained by the fact that Odilia has regarded herself as an 'individual' feminist who refused to be 'assimilated' by a feminist group, and retained her rebel identity at all costs. Her position in the context of Guatemalan feminismo proved difficult to carry through, since these women clearly stood for the development of supportive women's communities, which may have had normative implications in the way women relate to each other. Concerning experiences of opposition and engagement throughout their feminist period, women opposed patriarchal thinking within the political left; sexual violence and abuse against women and rejected parts of the Guatemalan state that still reproduce relations of inequality. On the other side, in terms of

engagement, women supported the idea of coming together as a community for a cause and creating a new culture of sexuality.

**Describing identity negotiation:** two metaphors capture how Guatemalan women have experienced feminism as a guiding source in their lives. For example, the metaphor: “they were showing me the way”, shows how Nelly felt about Guatemalan feminists who supported her personal efforts to seek justice after her daughter was sexually abused. In this context, she became the “apprentice” that needed to be taught ‘the right way’ by these feminists. In another metaphor from Lilian: “[they] gave knowledge so women could wake up” she expressed the extent to which knowledge shared by Mexican feminists allowed Guatemalan women to become aware and engage in social activism. Interestingly, this metaphor suggests that Central American women had a dormant consciousness of themselves during the war years. This is consistent with Luciak (2001, p. 196) comments concerning the fact that Guatemalan female combatants were not mobilized by gender interests during the war.

Through actantial analysis a key opposition emerged, namely that of ‘a sense of powerlessness, embarrassment or pain from past revolutionary experiences//a desire to overcome, engage and work with and for other women’. This core dilemma was expressed in different ways by these women in their narratives. In Nelly’s case, for example, it emphasized the need to overcome powerlessness in order to engage in political action. In the case of Lucia, the dilemma was expressed by her desire to overcome and repair damage as opposed to guilt over pain caused to her family in her previous life as a guerrillera. In the case of Lilian, the opposing actants were ‘anger and frustration over being unfairly treated and oppressed in the past//desire to engage in feminist work with other women’.

Through deconstruction, the points of conflict concerning adopting a feminist identity –and leaving behind that of a revolutionary were unveiled. Two women from this group, Nelly and Odilia, expressed dissatisfaction concerning totalizing ways of framing feminism that have shaped the women’s movement in Guatemala. Both regard themselves as ‘atypical’ within the movement, and have a difficulty with complying with what is expected from them. Nelly talks about a ‘good side of feminism’ leaving implicit that there may be a ‘bad one’ which –from her narratives- can be deducted and has to do with the pressure for compliance among its membership. In the case of Odilia, the distance is greater; she still sees herself as a feminist – an ‘individual feminist’, but perceives feminist organizations in Guatemala as lacking democratic mechanisms and fully accepting diversity. The problems that these women encounter enter in stark contrast with the theme of a

'community of women' that is so strongly endorsed by most Guatemalan feminists. This contradiction may shed light on the issue that Guatemalan feminists aspire to become a community of women working together, but are yet not so.

From these perspectives, it can be argued that the turning point of transition to a feminist identity in the case of Guatemalan women had to do with their desire to promote a trans-generational feminist community of women who work for social change that would benefit other Guatemalan women as well. Being able to still see themselves as activists for social change has allowed these women to find continuity between their former revolutionary identities and their current ones as feminists.

## 5.2- Placing the contribution of this study in the light of Existing Literature

In this sub-section, I attempt to place the previously discussed results of this study in the context of the broader literature concerning the emergence of second wave feminism in post-revolutionary Central America. The first part of this sub-section is concerned with summarizing the respects to which the results of this study tie in with those of previous research, whereas in the second part, I highlight the specific contributions of this project in regards to the literature.

### 5.2.1- Points of Encounter between this study and the Existing Literature

**1) Characteristics of Second Wave Feminist Movements in Central America:** in general terms, the literature in the field supports that second wave feminists were radically different from their ‘first wave’ predecessors; while the highly educated women of the first feminist wave sought to persuade totalitarian governments of women’s rights by participating actively in democratization processes or by gaining or maintaining political influence<sup>55</sup> (two Nicaraguan historians, Victoria Gonzalez-Rivera and Gema Santamaria, among many others, have discussed the connections between the Somoza regime and first wave feminists) the majority of the women from the feminist second-wave radically placed themselves against the state, as it was confirmed by all the women who were interviewed for this study. Paradoxically, former combatant women and second-wave feminists were not always concerned with gender rights and only became acquainted with feminist ideas through their exile in countries like Mexico or Cuba, as the women who participated in this study affirmed. Hipscher (2001, p.143) has argued how spending time abroad and getting in touch with foreign feminists was a turning point in the lives of many revolutionary women from El Salvador), which, in the case of this study, was true for Sara. In the case of Nicaragua, close ties between foreign feminists and the Sandinistas favored that the women the party eventually came together in order to denounce patriarchal practices among the Sandinistas, which, concerning this study, was also reflected in comments from Selma and Leda from

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<sup>55</sup> For more on this topic, see Victoria Gonzalez-Rivera (2010) chapter: “Gender, Clientelistic, Populism and Memory. Somocista and Neo-Somocista Women’s Narratives in Liberal Nicaragua” where through the stories of old and young women involved in the Nicaraguan Liberal Party, Rivera traces the way in which official story of Somocismo has changed over the years.

Nicaragua. In the case of Guatemala, second wave feminists were deeply inspired by the experiences of some former-combatant women in exile, who returned to Guatemala after spending time in Mexico, but who, in addition, were also influenced by feminisms from other countries, including Latin America, the United States and Europe (Carrillo and Stoltz Chinchilla, 2010, p. 144f). This is consistent with the experiences of some of the Guatemalan women interviewed for this study, namely, Odilia, Lilian and Leticia.

**2) Gendered and Non-Gendered Discourses of Transformation in the Region:** Based on the literature, it is also known that in the 1970s and early 1980s, women who joined clandestine leftist organizations in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, demanded social justice and political freedoms, more than anything else. When these women later created revolutionary female organizations within their guerrilla structures, their objective was to recruit more women to support the revolutionary processes, but not necessarily to bring gendered demands to the forefront of their organizations. At that time, these women were still more concerned with class and political rather than gender inequalities. As an unexpected outcome of revolutionary organizing, women's secretariats and organizations that were affiliated to guerrilla organizations eventually facilitated joint women action, and allowed these women to capitalize on early experiences in order to develop later feminist organizations (For more on this topic, see Kampwirth, 2002, 2004; Stephen, Cosgrove and Ready, 2000). These views are consistent with the results of this study concerning the storied themes that emerged in feminist narratives, where the women discussed the importance of their previous activism as a way of preparing themselves for their current feminist involvements. Some of the storied themes that reflected these relationships are: "political involvement during feminism", "social change for the benefit of women", "identity connected to activism", "feminism as transformational" and "solidarity among women".

**3) Factors that explain revolutionary involvement of women in Central America:** As argued by Karen Kampwirth (2002, p. 10f), who has written extensively about the 'revolucionarias' of El Salvador and Nicaragua, structural and ideological factors do not fully explain why some women chose to become *guerrilleras*. It is clear that not all the women touched by structural and macrosocial change in Central America in the 1980s joined revolutionary organizations. Kampwirth argues that 'birth order' in families with a history of dissidence was a crucial factor, noticing in her research that firstborns or the first girl to be born eventually joined revolutionary movements. Nevertheless, in the light of this study, is

interesting to note an opposite trend; in fact, half of all the women interviewed were the youngest sibling –or among the youngest – in their families. This was particularly significant in Nicaragua, where most women interviewed were the youngest in their families. In addition, Kampwirth discussed research conducted by Vilas (1986) which suggests that ‘family structure’ played a role concerning the decision to join revolutionary activism, implying that girls born out of wedlock and raised by a single parent (mostly the mother) developed a predisposition to rebel against arbitrary authority. In the case of this study, similar results appear in the case of Guatemalan women, where four women out of six come from households supported by a single mother, although, concerning the overall sample of women interviewed, ten out of eighteen former revolutionaries came from a households run by both parents.

Kampwirth also talked about another structural factor, namely, ‘traditions of resistance’ when discussing how some girls were socialized into dissidence through their parents or extended family involvement, and how these extended family networks in churches, schools and labor unions provided ‘safe places’ for recruitment into the guerrillas. Looking at the sample of revolutionaries interviewed for this study, this mostly holds true for El Salvador, where four out of six women interviewed came from families with a history of political dissidence. In Guatemala, only two women came from families with this background, whereas in Nicaragua, none of the women interviewed had this type of family experience.

Another element from Kampwirth’s research pertains levels of literacy, implying that higher levels made it more likely for a girl to have access to oppositional materials, such as pamphlets and newspapers. Education, in this sense, as an indicator of class, suggests that those families who were able to ‘at least’ send their young girls to schools were more likely to produce a young woman with a revolutionary mindset. In this regard, the characteristics of the sample of this study are consistent with her data, since the majority of the women interviewed attended schools and for the most part, obtained their high school diplomas.

Finally, another structural factor mentioned, ‘age at the time of a major societal turning point’ –such as the introduction of liberation theology in Central America- gave a particular meaning to the social reality that directly affected students of Catholic schools and organizations in the 1970s and 1980s. Based on the experiences of the sample of women that participated in this study, the age-range at the time of the emergence of these religious and political trends was between twelve and eighteen years old, which is consistent with studies in field of life course that argue how adolescents are deeply affected by social

change. In the words of life-course sociologists Crockett and Silbereisen (2000, p. 5) “adolescence is viewed as a staging ground for adulthood, a period when young people make decisions (knowingly and unknowingly) that have implications for their subsequent development. The choices adolescents make affect the opportunities and obstacles they encounter in their adult lives”, something that, in the light of the results of this study, can be also confirmed.

#### 5.2.2- Contributions of this study to the Existing Literature:

The following points summarize some findings that offer more insight and expand our understanding on the experiences of revolutionary women of this region:

**a. Feminism as Progressive Life Period in Women’s Narratives:** One of the most conclusive results of this study, after conducting extensive narrative analysis, is that almost all the feminists interviewed from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua constructed the feminist period in their life stories as a progressive narrative with one singular exception from a Guatemalan feminist, which constructed this period as “mixed”. A progressive narrative in the context of this research is a type of ontological narrative that depicts a pattern of ‘change for the better’ over time, where people are able to see themselves and their surroundings as capable of improvement (Gergen and Gergen, 1997). It is important to keep in mind that, as Kielhofner et al. (2008, p. 110f) reminds us, a narrative plot sums up where life has been and where is going, and in this process, in a progressive turn some events may positively change where life is headed. Thus, people evaluate each new unfolding circumstance of life in terms of how things have gone before and in terms of where they might lead. The implication here is that based on the results of this research, it can be argued that a feminist involvement has yielded for these women a sense of life arrangements ‘changing for the better’; a sense of improvement or a desirable direction in their lives. When reviewing literature concerning the experiences of feminist Central American women, it is interesting to notice how information concerning self-evaluation of the impact of feminism in the lives of the former combatant women seems to be absent. For example, when political scientists like Karen Kampwirth (2004, p. 7) ask “why feminism?” when looking at the case of revolutionary women, she refers solely to the sociological phenomenon of the emergence of feminism as an unintended outcome of revolution in Central America, but does not offer an introspective look to the women’s experiences, and does not look at the meanings that women construct concerning feminism. When looking at literature that attempts to offer this perspective, the book “Women Mountain” (Mujeres Montaña) from Vasquez et al. (1996) stands out. This

publication discusses the results of sixty in-depth interviews with Salvadoran former combatant women a few years after the signing of the Peace Agreements and is regarded as one of the first classic studies that attempted to explore meanings behind revolutionary women's actions written by two psychologists. The authors concluded that the women interviewed could only evaluate their revolutionary experience in positive terms if they had joined the guerrilla voluntarily, which was the case mostly for urban women; but in the case of peasant women, the tendency was to evaluate their experiences rather negatively. Again, there is no connection established between feminist organizing and positive evaluations of life experiences (1996, p. 230). Interestingly, another researcher, Silber (2004), who conducted research on post-war disillusionment in El Salvador, encountered demoralization and disappointment in revolutionary women who did not join women's movements.

Though this may suggest a trend, it is not possible -from the perspective of this project- to conclude that there is a connection between depressive states/demoralization and the absence of feminist involvement in former combatant women. But this study does establish that there is a clear sense of progression constructed as a consequence of feminist involvement. This point is also acknowledged in a publication from a Salvadoran feminist organization called "Las Dignas"<sup>56</sup>. Interestingly, as these women describe the process of developing a feminist organization in their country, they did not seem to reflect 'progression' in a traditional sense, but rather referred to a life turn that emphasized a stronger sense of agency connected with personal and political engagement, as it can be seen in the following excerpt from the publication:

*"We gave birth to our organization with pain, because we wanted a place that could help women to address our own needs and worries, that could serve as a tool for our quest as women... our conception and birth was not easy. Our decision to exist became a trial of fire, particularly at the time of the war, [yet] we [made] the decision to fight and overcome... and we did".*

From these written words, and from the ones that I collected from the women that I interviewed, I argue that feminist involvement is constructed as a progressive story in the lives of former Central American combatant women, and a significant reason for this is that, for the first time in their lives, these women have worked for constructing change that places them and their needs at the center of their own efforts.

Another dimension among feminist groups that supports a progressive plot development is a strong sense of solidarity among women, as the Nicaraguan women

<sup>56</sup> From the publication: "Una Decada Construyendo Feminismo... Las Dignas" (July, 2000, p. 17)

interviewed in this study expressed. Paradoxically, the issue of solidarity among Nicaraguan feminists has been debated in the literature. For example, those who perceive that is not a central issue, such as Anna Criquillon<sup>57</sup>, a well known Nicaraguan feminist and author, wrote already in 1992 that the feminist movement lacked infrastructure and was dispersed, although it was able to connect women in a context of independence, autonomy and equality, leaving solidarity out of the picture. Karen Kampwirth, who has spoken widely about the antifeminist threat in Nicaragua (2006, 2008) has discussed the strategies that feminists use to challenge anti-feminist politics, where, despite differences and conflicts among them, are still able to support each other.

**b. The framing of the culmination of a lifetime of social activism and oppositional consciousness as a redemption sequence.** Another angle supporting the framing of feminism as not only progressive, but also redemptive in the life of these women has to do with the fact that, in spite of the ruptures and fragmentations in their life stories, as literature on biography and social activism supports, new activisms that make sense can emerge from old ones which may have lost meaning. This can be seen in cases when feminist or gendered consciousness is the outcome of a woman's life filled with previous forms of non-gendered social activisms. Those who have studied the life stories of feminist activists across the globe know that gendered activisms are interconnected with non-gendered ones, which serve as sensitizing experiences regarding power and oppression, as for example, was the case of North American women in the 1960s who reached feminism through their earlier involvement in other political causes (Evans, 1979); or Indian women fighting for independence, who found themselves later developing a feminist movement (Ray, 1999). Furthermore, the opposite may also happen, as alternative cases show how women can move from gendered activisms to seeking social transformation at a broader scale, as the case of the Afghan women of RAWA (Revolutionary Association of the Women of Afghanistan) shows, where paradoxical objectives involving radical and welfare feminism coexist in a women's organization that has gone from supporting gendered demands to engaging in radical political action by entering the war against the Soviet Union in 1999 and against the Taliban's human rights violations in the 1980s. The women from RAWA show that strategic gendered and non-gendered objectives can coexist in a feminist agenda.

Thus, I argue that for the women interviewed for this study, feminist activism allowed them to achieve a sense of redemption in their lives (moving from sacrifice to recovery and

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<sup>57</sup> "Criquillon, Ana (1995) "The Nicaraguan Women's Movement. Feminist Reflections from Within".

growth)<sup>58</sup> by framing their activism –which at times appeared contradictory– in the form of a continuum that ultimately led to feminism in a way that made sense: they were and continue to be activists, but it is the content of their activism what has changed, not their identity as activists. Mansbridge (2001, p. 6) supports this point by arguing how “oppositional consciousness is not a single thing that one has or doesn’t have.... it is not the one point of a binary, but a loose continuum, not a unity but a congeries of competing elements, and not static but constantly changing in its content”. Based on some of the insights gained through actant analysis in this study, it is possible to infer that the women interviewed found congruency in their life story in spite of experiencing ruptures as revolutionaries, because much of what they went through ultimately led them to a higher level of personal growth and a theory of higher value such as feminism, which allowed them to construct their overall life experiences as a redemption sequence. This can be seen in how many of the women interviewed (Selma, Odilia, Tamara, Leda, Maribel) spoke at length of the higher quality of feminism in regards to socialism and the experience of finally growing subjectively and personally out of becoming a feminist.

As researchers have pointed out, narratives of conversion, continuity, connection and conflict have served to mark boundaries, identify out-groups and create and sustain collective consciousness among their adherents (Hunt and Bendford, 2007, p. 446). I would argue that all these elements have been re-signified in the narratives of the women in this study –as they moved from their revolutionary to feminist life periods– and have not only served to mark out-groups and boundaries, but have ultimately constructed their sense of a ‘self as an evolving activist’ which over time continue to define and re-define the direction of their oppositional consciousness.

In the case of the women who participated in this study, it can be seen how their early political involvement was the first step in the long process of becoming an activist for life; and a core construction that brings meaning and cohesion to their current narratives is the conviction that feminism represents growth and redemption not only for them, but also for other women with whom they continue to identify –their in-groups. Thus, I argue that the ‘master narrative’ for this group is one of redemption that was only possible through feminism. In the end, there is still an oppositional consciousness, a dominant group against

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<sup>58</sup> For a discussion on redemption in narratives, please see: McAdams, D. and Bowman, P. (2001) *Turning Points in life: Redemption and Contamination*. In: McAdams, Josselson, Lieblich, (Eds.) *Turns in the Road: Narrative Studies of Lives in Transition*. Washington, DC: The American Psychological Association Press (pp. 3-34).

which to rebel, a need to transform society and unfair structures, but their current activist work is now done from a different emotional position, which is that of personal growth and meaning as a feminist.

**c. Influence of mother/other significant women in revolutionary activism:** Important contributions of this study are based on how the analytical methods used yielded results that are not frequently seen in other studies concerning revolutionary Central American women; for example, a theme that the researcher identified as ‘a very intense relationship with the mother, either very close or conflicting’ emerged as new information that explains and refines understandings concerning the influences on women’s revolutionary identity formation. Karen Kampwirth (2002) talked about “family traditions of resistance”, emphasizing how families with a history of political dissidence can have an impact in the following generations; whereas Reed and Foran (2002, p. 339f) propose that emotional experiences, cultural idioms, ideologies and organizational structures may come together in the form of “political cultures of opposition”, which allow broad coalitions of actors (across class, race, gender) to initiate and sustain social movements and revolutions. Both perspectives refer to traditions of political dissidence that consider family and culture as crucial factors influencing individual’s decisions of joining revolutionary movements. I argue that contribution of this research project expands Kampwirth’s idea of “family traditions of dissidence” and looks at how particular kinds of family constellations regarding mother-daughter relations may have also influence a daughter’s decision to join a dissident movement.

Through narrative analysis, it has been possible to unveil the influence of the mother (or other significant women) as a crucial factor supporting the revolutionary involvement of women. In some of the cases studied here, the mother’s support has been crucial simply because she has either fostered or nurtured revolutionary involvement. This is along the lines of Kampwirth’s “traditions of dissidence” concept; but, in other instances that emerged in this study, particularly when the relationship with the mother was defined by a need –on behalf of the mother- to constrain the daughter’s rebelliousness by emphasizing rigid family structures (that could be defined by gender and class) the end result became the daughter’s affiliation to a revolutionary group. In addition, and along the lines of this theme, another influence is based on the idea of what a few Guatemalan feminists called a “trans-generational community of women”. In this case, revolutionary women seemed to be ‘pushed’ to action by carrying with themselves a sense of legacy from preceding women (mothers, grandmothers) and a commitment to revolutionary work, as a way of

compensating for these women's experiences with injustice and discrimination. Furthermore, significant older women outside the family of origin had also a deep influence in fostering revolutionary affiliation, as it was demonstrated in the case of a Guatemalan feminist who entered in contact with a nun that supported her political involvement and promoted ideas of 'theology of liberation'. I would argue that in this particular story, this relationship nurtured revolutionary affiliation as much –or even more- than religious ideas of social transformation.

**d. The connections between feminism and mental health in post revolutionary periods:**

Another significant result from this study refers to how the women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala emphasized the way in which feminism strengthened their coping capacities and allowed them to develop resilience in the face of uncertainty during the post-war period. Many women claimed that they felt 'rescued' from depression or that feminism became some sort of 'life saver' precisely at the end of the war, where many of them endured some kind of 'sanctuarial traumatic stress'.

In the case of the Nicaraguan women that I interviewed, as much as those who Kampwirth (2001, p. 59) interviewed for her book 'Feminism and the Legacy of Revolution', they moved from one activism to the other when circumstances changed; for example, from guerrilla to party activists after the defeat of Somocismo, and from party activism to feminism after the Sandinistas lost the 1990 election. Nevertheless, I argue that these activisms had different types of impact regarding their psychological wellbeing. Based on the results of this study, it became evident that their feminist involvement supported their psychological healing and recovery and in this way, it was experienced as a different type of activism. But why did this particular form of feminism have a healing quality for them? Teske (2009, p. 53f) explored the connections between activism and healing with a group of activists of different sorts (political and non political) in order to look at different types of 'involvement stories' where the idea of healing as a consequence of their activisms emerged. More specifically, the activists that he interviewed spoke of periods of crisis, doubt or depression that led them to change their direction in life and to get involved in activist work, and –in their narratives- they often referred to a wholeness or psychological fulfillment brought about by their activisms. In this context, Teske talked about how political participation gave to one of his interviewees (Regina) -who had complained about depression and apathy- what he called "a route to psychological health [by using] *politics as therapy*" (Teske, 2009, p. 54). His fundamental thesis is that active involvement in politics can

be deeply fulfilling to the individual and that the construction of identity for activists is about what one wants for oneself. Notwithstanding, Teske studied activism in the United States where the lives of political activists are not threatened by their activism in the same way that participants in this research experienced, nevertheless his results have an implication for this study, and, I would argue, confirm that even for activists that engage in political participation at higher costs, activism has a psychological fulfillment potential. But, again, paraphrasing Teske, I also think that the kind of activism that has a healing potential is that which allows a woman to achieve what she wants for herself. In the case of second wave feminism in Central America, another significant component that set feminism apart from other types of involvement that these women experienced before is (and was) feminism's concern with women's subjectivity. This intrinsic interest in subjectivity along with the realization that many feminists were traumatized, led women's groups of the region to offer therapeutic and support groups to their former combatant feminist membership. In the case of the Salvadoran feminists that I interviewed, these experiences were described as 'healing' and 'life changing'. These views are supported by publications from the feminists themselves. Salvadoran psychologist Norma Vasquez (2000, p. 62) wrote about the support groups that she, along with Spanish psychologist Cristina Garaizabal, conducted with former combatant women, the following:

*"I saw one by one, in these support groups, [women] making an effort to break their silence of many years, of their individual, family and collective tragedies. There was so much pain condensed in their faces, in their expressions... and they were content with so little, after so much suffering! For many of them, the recent discovery of feminism appeared like a lifesaver to which they could hold themselves onto. The feelings of solidarity that were developed in those days where we shared everything seemed to mitigate their personal injuries".*

**e. Cross examination of narrative themes through analytical methods yields a deeper understanding of 'transitions' in life stories:** From the methodological point of view, the combined use of actantial analysis, metaphors and deconstruction as ways of uncovering inner conflict produced results that served as a form of cross-checking and confirmed the results obtained through the different methods. For example, actantial analysis unveiled the opposing forces (actants) that were at the core of the conflict experienced and metaphors placed those oppositions in a language figure that deconstruction deciphered. The combination of these three methods seemed to produce results that offered a deeper understanding that allowed me to go beyond the narrator's interpretations and unveiled that was left 'unsaid' by the interviewees. Even though 'Identity transition' was difficult to

capture, the use of 'plot development' as a form of analysis, helped me understand what transitions really meant for participants, by looking at how they perceived the direction of their lives concerning certain episodes. I argue that it was through the combined use of these methods that it was possible to reach a deeper understanding of the conflicts that underlay the decision to join –or to abandon- a revolutionary movement. For example, through actantial analysis, it was possible to see that some young women joined a revolutionary movement in order to challenge internal states of weakness or disempowerment and increase their sense of strength. In other cases, it was a way of overcoming a preoccupation with being weaker than men. Again, from the political point of view, Kampwirth (2001) has discussed some underlying psycho-social factors that possibly influenced revolutionary affiliation pointing out to cases where joining either the revolutionary left or radical right (in the case of Nicaragua) seemed like a genuine opportunity for poor young women, in a country where there are very few opportunities for them. She added that an additional incentive for these women was to escape the multiple inequalities that they had to confront on a regular basis in their everyday lives. As Kampwirth (2001, p. 98f) puts it, joining a guerrilla group allowed these young women to leave the "tedium of their homes, see the world, and develop a new identity through the use of pseudonyms". Her observations support those of this study, but I argue that my analysis contributes to expand the understanding of personal constraints that may have pushed young women into revolutionary involvement. I argue that it was more than 'tedium' or a desire to see the world. While conducting this research project, it became clear for me that for many young women, meanings connected with joining revolutionary organizations had to do with developing a sense of empowerment in regards to men or women of their families; confronting an internal sense of weakness; challenging men; challenging oppressive family structures and the need to rebel. From this study, it is also clear that their identity change involved more than the use of pseudonyms! An additional element that came out in the case of one Nicaraguan former revolutionary that I interviewed was the exploitation that revolutionary groups did of young women's idealism and their desire to become heroines. I argue that the myth of hero/heroine is an additional internal element that needs to be considered in the light of what is known of youth's revolutionary affiliations.

### 5.3- Conclusions

I collected the life stories analyzed in this study through interviews conducted in the Spring of 2008 in San Salvador, Managua and Guatemala City. Since then, the political landscape in Central America has shifted, and emerging democratic processes in El Salvador and Guatemala finally opened the possibility of presidential candidates coming from political leftist parties -that originated from revolutionary organizations- finally reach political power through electoral processes. These changes have drastically transformed the idea of what seemed possible in political terms not so long ago in these countries. The case of Nicaragua is different: Daniel Ortega from the Sandinista Party has consolidated his power and the 'Sandinistas' –under the leadership of Ortega- have “won” the 2011 Presidential elections in a process characterized by a “lack of neutrality and transparency” according to the Mission of Electoral Observers of the European Union<sup>59</sup>.

Nevertheless, despite the fact that these leftist political parties – the FMLN in El Salvador, the URNG in Guatemala and the FSLN in Nicaragua- have long sustained the relevance of policies supporting women's rights, the numbers of women who are victims of violence and femicide have significantly increased in the region. The implications of these political changes for the third sector in general, and for the women movements in particular, do not seem particularly encouraging<sup>60</sup>. This is by no means a surprising development for feminists, as historically, the complex relationship between the political left and feminist women in this region, has been of conflicting nature: leftist organizations have both enabled the development of feminism and constrained the women's efforts for autonomy (Hipscher, 2001; Kampwirth, 2001, 2002, 2004).

As it was previously argued in the literature review, there is a wide array of literature –from both scholars and revolutionaries themselves- that has explored the connections between the participation of women in the revolutionary wars of El Salvador,

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<sup>59</sup> For the full report concerning the Nicaraguan elections (in Spanish), see: <http://www.eueom.eu/nicaragua2011/home?LANG=es>, retrieved on November 12, 2011

<sup>60</sup> See critique of feminists towards the government of leftist president Mauricio Funes (the first elected president of the FMLN in El Salvador), see <http://www.lasdignas.org/>. In the case of Guatemala, see the article: “Es Tiempo de Cambiar las Reglas” (“It's time to change the rules”) by Rosalinda Hernandez Alarcon in the online feminist journal “La Cuerda”, at <http://www.lacuerdaguatemala.org/cuerditas.html>, retrieved on August 12, 2011.

Nicaragua and Guatemala and the emergence of second wave feminism in these countries (see section 2.3.3- Narratives and Testimonials of women's lives). Academics interested in the connections between democratization and gender (Luciak, 2001; Shayne, 2004; Viterna & Fallon, 2008) have mostly focused on issue areas such as democratization; political participation of women; grassroots movements and transformations in political culture. Though many of these studies have also looked into why women joined revolutionary organizations and how this experience was transformational for them (see Golden, 1991; Stephen, Vasquez et. al, 1996; Stephen, 1997) to the knowledge of the researcher, narrative studies concerning how Central American revolutionary women experienced identity transition, going from revolutionaries to feminists have not been conducted. Typically, narrative studies of Central American women tend to come from the field of literary studies, and have focused on the narrative work of Central American feminist and revolutionary writers, such as Gioconda Belli, Claribel Alegria or Michelle Najlis (see Barbas-Rohden, 2003) or have focused on contemporary topics in the region, such as diaspora, migration and disappointment after revolution (see Silber, 2004; Rodriguez, 2009).

I have outlined in section 5.3 what is known about the connections between revolutionary periods and feminism in Central America and discussed them in the light of the results of this study. What I believe has been less explored in the literature concerning Central American feminists with a revolutionary background is how they themselves have navigated transition processes before and after revolution in their respective countries. As former 'revolutionary women turned feminists' from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala continued to struggle with social injustice, structural inequality, extreme violence, massive emigration and increased economic pressures, their feminist organizations had to re-define their roles and strategies in order to cope with increasingly hostile economic and political environments (See discussion on post-conflict challenges of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala in each of the sections concerning historical background of these countries). Some of these roles demanded that feminists become welfare providers, contractors of international organizations, trainers on gender matters, research partners, alliance builders and pressure groups within political parties. An assumption that has guided my work throughout this project is that these feminists' new roles as "executants" and "gender experts" –sometimes even working for government agencies- did not sit comfortably with their previous experiences as militants from the guerrilla who lost family members pursuing social transformation. Thus, if an inner identity conflict is assumed –concerning their early revolutionary and the post-conflict feminist identities- further questions emerged: How did

these women make sense of this dissonance? How were the identities of feminist women shaped by the conflictual subject positions in which they encountered themselves? How did these women re-negotiate their war-memories, while having to pursue new social affiliations and thus, new identities? Were feminists settling for less as they became “institutionalized” and socialized in new ways of dealing with repression in a transition society? How were these “new” positions of “gender experts” being enacted in their actions? Were new feminists more concerned with “coping” as opposed to “resisting”? How did these women make sense of their post-war transitions? To my surprise and interest, I did not find extensive information concerning these particular topics.

Thus, in order to address the issues posed by the previously stated questions, I decided to explore revolutionary women’s identity transitions, from their pre-revolutionary years until their feminist involvement, by looking at how these women construct meanings through the act of narrating their lives. The themes that emerged in their stories allowed me to interpret how transition experiences are framed in their contemporary personal narratives. From this perspective, I attempted to shed light on how identity is constructed and re-negotiated while reflecting on major life transitions in revolutionary women.

More specifically, my objective in this study was to conceptualize how Central American feminists make sense of their identity or perhaps, their conflicting identities, by using narrative psychology as a useful analytical framework. The focus was placed on exploring identity transformations and how these shaped ways in which these women ‘engaged’ or ‘opposed’ the state and/or their revolutionary organizations at a given moment of their lives.

In order to address these issues, I combined narrative analytical methods (such as ‘storied themes’ and ‘analysis of plot development’); along with deconstructive approaches (like the study of silence, interruptions, the use of metaphors and the ‘collective subjective’) as well as structural analysis (‘actantial analysis’) in order to infer the ‘intersubjective meanings’ from the life story narratives of the participants. In addition, I developed ‘life story charts’ in order to map the women’s experiences. The latter method, widely used in life course research, allowed me to visualize significant ‘turning points’ that influenced the direction and meanings of the different life phases.

Moreover, I used different methods while analyzing “change narratives” of the participants in order to answer the guiding questions. For example, in order to understand how ‘*identity transition*’ was framed in these narratives, I relied on methods such as ‘analysis of plot development’ as well as the study of life phases mapped in the ‘life story charts’

because it was important to unveil both the direction of the transition as well as the turning points that influenced it. Furthermore, the construction of 'life story charts' yielded the understanding that women's lives shared common 'life phases' marked by crucial turning points. From this analytical process, I was able to determine that there were some life transitions in which participants shared similar meanings and sense of direction concerning their experiences.

Secondly, in order to analyze how experiences of '*opposition and engagement*' were constructed in participant's narratives, I used 'narrative tracing' and 'deconstructive' approaches. My objective here was to identify themes associated with both opposition and engagement that reappeared throughout their life stories in order to unveil how the participants framed and constructed meaning for those experiences. Furthermore, I analyzed these themes in the context of progression and regression, in order to explore the sense of direction assigned to experiences of opposing and engaging. The use of deconstruction allowed me to tackle inconsistencies, conflicting positions and deeper meanings concerning opposition and engagement.

Finally, in order to analyze how 'narrative identity negotiation' as well as 'roles' and 'identifications' were constructed in the narratives, I relied on methods such as actantial analysis, the study of 'life story charts' and deconstructive approaches. In this case, creating a 'semiotic square' for each one of the selected narratives of change, allowed me to look into oppositions, contradictions and the desired end-state concerning transitions in their life stories. In addition, I brought deconstructive approaches again in order to highlight conflicting positions and deeper meanings associated with these negotiated identities, roles and identifications.

Though the objective of narrative analysis is to retain the flow in the data obtained from the participants in the form of a narration, because of the extensive amount of information collected in the research process, I constructed 'summaries' for each participant's life story –incorporating the insights gained through the different analytical methods- with the purpose of recreating the 'story lived' out of the 'story told' for each participant, and eventually be able to – as Freeman (2004, p. 70) put it - "tell the 'collective' story within which the individual stories emerged". Hence, informed by a narrative approach, the discussion of results offered an insight into the 'collective story' of Central American revolutionary/feminist women, looking at the life periods that emerged from their stories. Despite the emphasis on individual lives, I aimed at moving beyond the subjectivity of each woman interviewed and attempted as Freeman -paraphrasing Ricoeur- puts it, to go

beyond subjective meanings localized in the person of the author, extending the reach of the texts through interpretation, to the social realities constitutive of them (2004, p. 69). In this research then, I attempted to go a step further by offering at times different meanings from the ones suggested by the women themselves through the different analytic approaches.

In the remaining part of this section, I present the answers found to the questions posed at the beginning of this study:

#### 5.3.1.- Answer to the Main Question:

**How did feminist and revolutionary women from Central America experience the process of radical identity transition as they perform new forms of activism in their post conflict societies, and in which way was their radicalization linked to the national contexts in the cases of women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala?**

This study found that the experience of **identity transition** for Central American feminists/former guerrilla combatants can be summed up as follows:

Though women from all the three countries explored experienced three crucial life transitions (first, from a pre-revolutionary to revolutionary period; second, from a revolutionary to a post-revolutionary period and third, from a post-revolutionary period to feminism) each one of these transitions were experienced differently, depending on the evaluation of the inter-subjective meanings that the revolutionaries/feminists attached to the 'turning points' as well as 'personal' or 'environmental' changes that they experienced for each period in their different countries. Following this logic, inter-subjective meanings were distinctively of two kinds; one, the 'personal kind', namely those dealing with meanings about themselves; and the second 'environmental kind', referring to those dealing with meanings about the socio-political-historical environment/national contexts in which the women lived and the repercussions of these processes in their lives. Based on the analysis of these women's life story narratives, I concluded that each transition period was experienced as follows:

**"Transition from a Pre-Revolutionary to Revolutionary Period":** for the most part, and in similar ways in the three countries, revolutionary/feminist women had a progressive sense of their lives during the pre-revolutionary period, which, then changed to a 'mixed' direction (that incorporates both progressive and regressive experiences) when they joined their

revolutionary organizations. During the pre-revolutionary period, these women constructed themselves as rebellious, committed to their political and religious networks or connected to the legacy of the women in their family; sometimes willing to sacrifice their personal goals with the purpose of empower themselves – and challenge internal feelings of powerlessness- through their political affiliations. Later, these internal perceptions of themselves moved them into a position of radicalization and increased oppositional consciousness, favoring the priorities and needs of their revolutionary organizations, while experiencing also conflict concerning personal losses due to traumatic experiences of separation and abuse during the war. The sequence described, reflects a ‘moderate contamination’ pattern, going from an emotionally positive to an emotionally regressive-mixed outcome. Concerning transition regarding inter-subjective meanings about the constructed experiences connected to country-specific environments during the pre-revolutionary period, these early revolutionary women were influenced by ideas of social justice, affiliation to a leftist ideology, ideas of justice based on Theology of Liberation, the need to change oppressive structures and a commitment to revolutionary groups or revolutionary partners. These meanings remained for the most part during the revolutionary period, only adding an additional one, namely, ‘leftist authoritarianism’ that existed within the revolutionary organizations .

Pertaining similarities and differences among countries based on narrative analysis, it can be argued that Nicaraguan and Guatemalan women appeared to construct their early revolutionary involvements in a more progressive way than Salvadoran women, as their focused on achieving a sense of empowerment through their revolutionary quest for social justice and transformation, whereas Salvadoran women constructed their early revolutionary participation as more constrained by external factors such as family loss, political oppression or family expectations. Furthermore, in the Nicaraguan case, differently from El Salvador and Guatemala, radicalization and oppositional consciousness was constructed around the all-encompassing “Sandinista” revolutionary identity, whereas in El Salvador and Guatemala, various opposing views pertaining revolutionary objectives coming from the variety of guerrilla organizations that existed in those countries contributed to the experience of different types of organizations and multifaceted views concerning revolutionary experiences as opposed to the Nicaraguan case.

In sum, based on these results, I argue that revolutionary/feminist women experienced narrative identity transition from a pre-revolutionary to a revolutionary

involvement as a process where they prioritized collective (revolutionary) over individual (self-development) goals in order to achieve a sense of empowerment based on challenging not only authoritarian political systems, but also traditional gender roles in their families, while at the same time, keeping a sense of congruency in regards to the legacy of the significant women of their families and or family expectations, particularly in countries like El Salvador and Guatemala, where family activism played a more crucial role in women's radicalizations.

**“Transition from a Revolutionary to a Post-Revolutionary Period”:** Based on the results encountered, for the most part, Central American revolutionary feminist women had a mixed sense of life direction during the revolutionary period, which remained mixed during their post-revolutionary period, when women from El Salvador and Guatemala decided to resign or desert their revolutionary organizations, even before Peace Agreements were signed. The post-revolutionary period was experienced differently in Nicaragua, as the Nicaraguan revolutionaries defeated the national armed forces, achieving power and establishing a Sandinista regime where former revolutionaries joined the political structures through bureaucratic positions. Concerning personal transitions, during the revolutionary period, as described above, the women from all countries constructed themselves as willing to sacrifice their personal goals over the revolutionary ones which implied a radicalization of their political involvement and surrender of personal agency and a commitment to favoring the priorities of their revolutionary organizations, while experiencing also conflict concerning personal losses due to traumatic experiences of separation and abuse during the war.

These internal perceptions of themselves changed into a position of what the women called ‘awareness’ of their situation as women combatants, and the emergence of the need to search for individual autonomy accompanied by a desire to rebel from their revolutionary affiliations; disappointment of their guerrilla organizations and a strong sense of personal loss in the case of the three countries. However, the expression of disappointment and loss took on different forms in the different national contexts.

Concerning transition regarding their environments and based on the results, I argue that during the revolutionary period, these women were influenced by discourses demanding commitment to social change and to revolutionary groups or revolutionary partners, while at the same time developed an increased oppositional consciousness against the authoritarianism that existed within their revolutionary organizations. The inter-subjective

meanings concerning their national environments significantly changed when feminist discourses entered their lives, which occurred by the end of the revolutionary period for all countries as well. Thus, new environmental inter-subjective meanings emerged in the post-revolutionary period, such as the recognition of patriarchal values within revolutionary organizations; the acknowledgment of the military defeat of guerrilla groups (in the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala); anger/disappointment concerning corruption within the Sandinistas structures (in the case of Nicaragua) and new feminist organizing for all the women. The sequence described above does not reflect a transition characterized by progression or regression, but also does not necessarily imply stagnation or stability; rather, it may suggest that during the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, women from the three countries were confronted with macro-social events beyond their control (military defeat or success of revolutionary movements and signature of peace agreements in the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala, and a new political arrangement after the wars ended, such as Sandinista authoritarianism in the case of Nicaragua) which possibly limited the women's perceived sense of self-direction.

In spite of the described similarities, it is important to emphasize that the Nicaraguan case concerning the construction of transition during the post-revolutionary period is significantly different than the Salvadoran and Guatemalan one, given the fact that Nicaraguan women were able to experience a successful revolution and a 'revolutionary state' which never occurred in El Salvador and Guatemala. The impact that this had on Nicaraguan women is that their associations with Sandinismo were beyond their military experiences as revolutionaries and remained a significant and stable source of identity well beyond the war was over. In this sense, breaking up with Sandinismo in 1990 carried a stronger sense of loss for Nicaraguans than for Salvadorans and Guatemalans concerning their revolutionary affiliations.

In sum, based on these results, I argue that revolutionary/feminist women from the three countries experienced narrative identity transition from a revolutionary to a post-revolutionary involvement as a process where they went from prioritizing collective (revolutionary) goals to developing both a consciousness concerning their surrender of agency and developing a critical stance regarding their revolutionary involvement, and a strongly felt need to re-prioritize individual over collective goals in their lives, which was informed by feminist discourses that had already emerged in the region.

**“Transition from a Post-Revolutionary to a Feminist Period”:** Based on the results obtained, I encountered that revolutionary women from the three countries had a mixed sense of life direction during the post-revolutionary period, which then changed to an overwhelming sense of ‘progression’ in their feminist period, when they created and affiliated themselves to feminist organizations in their respective countries. The fact that the overwhelming majority of women (seventeen out of eighteen) framed feminism as a progressive period in their life narratives, stands as one of the most conclusive results of this study for the three countries studied. Concerning transition regarding personal meanings, during the post-revolutionary period, as described above, women from the three countries talked about an internal position of ‘awareness’ of their situation as former combatants, and began pursuing different forms of political and personal autonomy accompanied by a need to distance themselves from their revolutionary affiliations.

The women’s internal perceptions of themselves changed into a position of concern for women’s subjectivity; a perceived sense of ‘we-ness’ among former revolutionaries turned feminists in El Salvador and Guatemala; or among “former Sandinistas” in the case of Nicaraguans, and gradually grew a pursuit of emotional ‘healing’; the development of what some of the women called ‘feminist consciousness’; a sense of connectedness with trans-generational communities of women, a re-prioritization of personal goals and ultimately, a definite sense of identity connected to their new feminist affiliations.

In terms of differences among countries, and based on the results, I argue that the need for Salvadoran and Nicaraguan women to distance themselves and seek autonomy from their previous affiliations with guerrilla movements grew stronger in their cases as opposed to Guatemalan women. The theme of autonomy did not seem to be so prevalent among Guatemalan feminists as there were social factors that influenced and favored a certain kind of dialogue that was supported by the United Nations during the Guatemalan Peace Process. Another country difference pertains how the women from El Salvador and Guatemala were influenced by both the military defeat of guerrilla groups as well as anger/disappointment concerning corruption in the management of the peace agreements, differently from the Nicaraguan case, where the Sandinista electoral defeat was constructed as a sad moment, and was not the determining factor of the breakup between Sandinistas and Feminists.

In general terms, the transition to a feminist period implied the consolidation of feminist inter-subjective meanings that had emerged already in their post-revolutionary period. During the feminist period, women from the three countries consolidated the following meanings: understanding feminism as a life practice, not just in theoretical terms;

development of political feminist involvement; viewing feminism as a better, more encompassing social theory as opposed to socialism; the need for solidarity among women and the pursuit of social change that benefits women.

In sum, based on these results, I argue that revolutionary/feminist women experienced narrative identity transition from a post-revolutionary to a feminist involvement as a redemption sequence, where they went from questioning the surrender of agency to revolutionary groups and experiencing a sense of loss and need to re-prioritize individual goals, to an engagement with feminism as a social practice that allowed them to bring together the pursuits of individual and collective goals, emphasizing the importance of a synergy between the two of them.

#### 5.3.2.- Answer to Subordinate Question 1:

**How are current notions of ‘opposition’ and ‘engagement’ sustained by radical feminist women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, given the existence of contradictory meanings that date back from their revolutionary periods? And, are there any similarities and differences concerning how this process takes place across women from the different countries?**

Based on my analysis of storied themes, it became evident that these women developed a sense of ‘opposition’ and ‘engagement’ towards different social actors or situations across the life periods identified in their life stories. These actors varied depending on the national contexts, and similarities and differences across countries are established for each one of the periods described below:

#### **Opposition and Engagement during the Pre-Revolutionary Period**

**Opposition:** for the most part, and similarly across all three countries, young pre-revolutionary women opposed state systems that exercised political and military oppression (i.e. the Somocista dictatorship in Nicaragua, military regimes in El Salvador and Guatemala); but they also experienced a strong sense of opposition to social discriminatory practices, based on socio-economic level (i.e. economic exclusion, exploitation, lack of opportunity for the poor); ethnicity (particularly in the case of the social exclusion of Guatemalan indigenous population) and gender (concerning discriminatory practices which favored men over women; or that forced women into stereotypical roles, which were reproduced in their families of origin).

**Engagement from the position of opposition:** young women from the three countries developed a strong sense of commitment to different forms of affiliation that supported revolutionary goals, such as Christian Base Communities that endorsed Theology of Liberation, or Revolutionary student groups, be at high school or university levels. Furthermore, mostly in the cases of Salvadoran and Guatemalan women, support for political opposition was constructed from a strong sense of commitment to their family of origin's political dissidence stories, and to their romantic partners revolutionary affiliation as well. In the Nicaraguan case, differently, histories of family dissidence did not seem to play the same role

### **Opposition and Engagement during the Revolutionary Period**

**Opposition:** across all three countries, these women's revolutionary commitment led them to oppose the state's monopoly of force, and to seek confrontation against the national armed forces. The women saw the military regimes as systems that oppressed and committed injustice against people (known and unknown to them) and developed a strong oppositional consciousness against these regimes. Later during their revolutionary period, women from El Salvador and Guatemala became aware of gender discrimination within their own revolutionary organizations, but in spite of their opposition to these sexist practices, it did not lead them to concrete oppositional actions.

**Engagement from the position of opposition:** across all three countries, revolutionary women developed a strong commitment to the revolutionary (collective) goals or their guerrilla organizations; particularly supporting the goal of 'social transformation' even at the expense of personal goals, as discussed before. In the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala, women remained supportive of family's traditions of dissidence, sometimes involving other family members in their own revolutionary quest.

### **Opposition and Engagement during the Post-Revolutionary Period**

**Opposition:** After revolutionary women dropped out from their guerrilla organizations - in the case of Salvadoran and Guatemalan combatants- they found themselves in a transition process which sometimes involved exile, or re-entry of their family and social networks while trying to come to terms with the ending of the revolutionary period. Differently in the case of Nicaraguan women, as the Sandinista party centralized and restricted women's organizing, former combatants experienced strong opposition against the 'Comandantes' and their authoritarianism and corruption. It was around this time when women developed

stronger feelings of opposition against discriminatory and authoritarian practices from their revolutionary organizations (in the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala). In the Nicaraguan case, differently from the other countries, gender discrimination coming from Sandinista structures led some Sandinista women to develop a position of opposition to government policies and actions. In the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala where Peace Agreements were signed, some women opposed the mechanisms that were used during the peace agreements for demobilization and for assigning compensation resources.

**Engagement from the position of opposition:** for the most part, revolutionary women from the three countries developed a sense of commitment to early feminist organizing that supported the exploration of subjectivity and the development of a 'feminist consciousness' focused on prioritizing women's rights and personal needs over revolutionary priorities. In the case of Nicaraguan feminists, the development of a feminist political initiative, the "Erotic Left Party", became a mechanism that 'institutionalized' feminist dissidence against Sandinista patriarchy. Generally speaking, the revolutionary women from the three countries supported ideas of an autonomous feminism separated from the political left.

### **Opposition and Engagement during the Feminist Period**

**Opposition:** when former revolutionary combatants from all three countries openly declared their feminist identity and began developing joint actions from their feminist organizations, they declared their opposition against oppressive systems that would violate and discriminate against women. This notion included political parties from the right and the left. As women from the three countries consolidated their positions as feminists throughout the years, they continued to denounce the violation of women's rights by different sectors of society; not just the national states, but also, by economic and family systems. In general terms, women from the three countries have developed networks that work against domestic violence; labor exploitation; femicide; legal discrimination; lack of women's representation in politics; lack of resources assigned to reproductive rights and patriarchal views of representatives of the state, among many others. In the Nicaraguan case, feminists singled out corrupt and abusive practices from the Sandinista leadership, and also denounced 'anti-feminist' practices from both governments of the right and the left. As I was able to observe, the national feminist movements of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala are not necessarily free of conflict and cohesive internally. Some critical voices point out to the problems of an "NGOed" movement that prevents women from dissenting

and risking their jobs. These feminists oppose this trend within the movement arguing that it depletes it from its political character making it a business.

**Engagement from the position of opposition:** for the most part, feminists from the three countries have fully committed and support the work for women's rights while developing a community of feminist women or a 'movimiento feminista' (feminist movement) of national proportions. Despite discrepancies within the movement, women from the different countries joined forces and developed networking strategies that brought their organizations together. Furthermore, some feminists from El Salvador eventually decided to run for political positions (as deputies or city hall representatives) with the FMLN framing their political participation as part of their job as feminists. This is different in the cases of Guatemala and Nicaragua, where feminists distanced themselves from electoral politics. Despite their previous revolutionary affiliations, feminists from El Salvador and Guatemala have been able to engage in establishing alliances with representatives from the political right or with international donor agencies trying to retain a sense of congruency by negotiating with donors and entering in alliances for projects that are relevant for their organizations.

### 5.3.3.- Answer to Subordinate Question 2

**What are the key turning points that influenced the process of political radicalization in the lives of revolutionary and feminist Central American women from El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, and are there any similarities and differences concerning the factors that influenced these turning points across women from the different countries?**

Based on my narrative analysis, identity transition from a revolutionary to a feminist identity was influenced by key turning points that appeared in the four life periods analyzed in the study, which are presented below:

#### **Key turning points during the Pre-Revolutionary Period:**

Based on the narratives analyzed, the following junctures of change took place during the childhood, adolescence and early adulthood of the participants before they joined a revolutionary organization. In terms of the turning points identified in narratives for this period, I would argue that there were more similarities than differences across countries, as the Central America socio-historical landscape of the 1960s and 1970s -when these women were growing up- was influenced by social and political trends which were strongly felt and influential in all three countries. Based on the data obtained, I did not find that these trends

had more influence in one country than on the others for these women's pre-revolutionary periods.

- **Influences of women of the family/family traditions of dissidence:** A bit more than half of the women interviewed across all three countries explained how a very intense relationship (either emotional closeness or conflict) with the mother or other significant woman in the family (a grandmother, a relative) shaped their early ideas of strength and autonomy. In some cases, the mother was a single parent who modeled to her daughter the necessity to become autonomous from men. In other cases, a conflictive relationship with the mother was related to the mother's insistence on traditional rules that prompted rebelliousness in her daughter. In some cases, these women were influenced by their family's history of political dissidence, and, particularly in the case of El Salvador, sometimes, family members prompted early revolutionary affiliations, by involving these –at the time- girls in supporting revolutionary action (distributing revolutionary materials; delivering mail, etc.) all of which led them to a later affiliation. As mentioned before (see section 5.3- "Placing the contribution of this study in the light of Existing Literature") unveiling the influence of significant family women concerning these women's revolutionary affiliation is a contribution of this study.
- **Participation in religious/student revolutionary groups:** almost all the women from all three countries that participated in this study joined some kind of group, during their adolescence, which promoted a revolutionary agenda; be it a "Christian Base Community" that supported values of Theology of Liberation or a revolutionary student group, either at high school or university levels. In these groups they were socialized into discourses that emphasized the need to challenge social injustice and promote social change. This result is consistent with the literature that has widely discussed the influence of these groups in revolutionary affiliation (Kampwirth, 2002, 2004; Luciak, 2001)
- **Disappearance/Death of a revolutionary family member connected to military oppression:** in some cases, the death/disappearance of close family members or members of their communities (typically a brother, a boyfriend, a neighbor, the son or someone known to them) created a constraining factor where some women felt prompted to step into revolutionary action as a response to this life changing event. The

women from El Salvador were distinctively more influenced by this experience than the women from Nicaragua and Guatemala.

- **Social macro events that altered perceptions of social reality:** in some cases, these –at the time- young women from the three countries experienced a significant impact in regards to events that shaped the political history of their countries and had macro-social implications. For example, the murder of Monsignor Romero in El Salvador; the murder of journalist and newspaper owner Pedro Joaquin Chamorro in Nicaragua; the massacre of twenty-seven Ixil indigenous that had occupied the Spanish Embassy in Guatemala city, and so forth. These macro social events had a more significant impact in the lives of these women in part due to their youth and the implications that they had for later social mobilizing.

**Key turning points during the Revolutionary Period:**

Based on the narratives analyzed, the following junctures of change took place during their late adolescence and early adulthood, beginning what later became a life period. Similarly to the previous life period, there were no major differences across countries identified for the revolutionary period, possibly because these turning points reflect experiences that tend to be generalized across women who engage in combat situations.

- **Joining a revolutionary organization/going clandestine:** a significant turning point in the lives of these women was the moment where they finally joined a revolutionary organization and had to enter a clandestine life. These events implied for them changing their identity, cutting family ties; moving to different parts of the country or even leaving the country.
- **Motherhood:** experiences of motherhood were complicated while women had to carry on with revolutionary work. For the most part, these pregnancies were unexpected and demanded solutions that involved extended separations from their babies. In some extreme cases, these babies were sent abroad (to Nicaragua or Cuba) disappeared or were stolen (in one dramatic case studied here).
- **Loss of a loved one(s):** in many cases, revolutionary women had to suffer the loss of a family member, be it a husband, a brother, a father. Sometimes loss meant being unable to get in contact with family members, or experiencing a breakup with the family of origin, which left many the women feeling ‘family-less’ and on their own during the war.

- **Imprisonments/Injuries:** at some point during the war many women faced extreme dangers. In the case of the women that were part of this study, imprisonments and severe injuries forced them to either leave their countries, seek new identities or abandon their revolutionary organizations.

#### **Key turning points during the Post-Revolutionary Period:**

Based on the narratives analyzed, and given the different outcomes of the revolutionary periods in the three countries studied, I found relevant differences in terms of the turning points experienced by women from El Salvador and Guatemala, as opposed to those experienced by women from Nicaragua, during their post-revolutionary periods. In the case of El Salvador and Guatemala, the following junctures of change took place after the women decided or had no alternative but to leave their revolutionary organizations when peace agreements in both countries were negotiated. In Nicaragua, as the post-revolutionary period started with the Sandinista victory, turning points reflected the different constructed reality in which these women found themselves:

#### **Turning Points for El Salvador and Guatemala:**

- **Seeking asylum in Mexico/Cuba/Nicaragua:** many women from El Salvador and Guatemala at some point of their revolutionary involvement sought the possibility of leaving the country and seeking political asylum somewhere else. The reasons were diverse: for some, departure gave them the possibility to seek distance from their revolutionary organizations; for others, this was prompted because of injuries or the need to escape a very risky situation. In any case, the consequences that these departures had in their lives were significant and unanticipated.
- **Entering in contact with foreign feminisms and women's groups from Mexico, Nicaragua, Cuba:** while in exile, many women entered in contact with other women from their countries who were in similar situation, and had already been approached by local feminist organizations. Eventually, the women joined these organizations and learned about feminism, and in some specific cases, they became recipients of therapy and participated in support groups under the umbrella of these feminist organizations.
- **Signing peace agreements/demobilization/re-entry in family/community life:** in the case of the women who did not leave El Salvador and Guatemala, the end-of-the-war transition was marked by the signature of the peace agreements, which established demobilization mechanisms that had a direct impact on how the women underwent this period. From being asked to join the National Civil Police, to remain connected to their

leftist parties, the women faced a new period that for the most part was characterized by fear for their security; distrust; sense of loss and having to re-establish themselves in a post conflict society.

#### **Turning Points for Nicaragua:**

- **Experiencing discriminatory gender practices from Sandinista structures:** with the victory of the Sandinista revolutionaries, the former combatant women expected to build a more egalitarian society. To their dismay, the Sandinistas established an authoritarian regime that reduced the women's capacity for political action. The result to these practices was a sense of anger, disappointment and engagement in transforming these structures without resigning to the feminist identity.
- **Contact with foreign feminisms:** many Nicaraguan combatant women entered in contact with foreign feminists who visited the country during the 1980s and expressed concern over patriarchal and discriminatory practices promoted by the Sandinistas. The discussion of feminist ideas had a profound impact on these former combatant women, as these ideas were fitting to their perceived dissatisfaction with the Sandinista regime.
- **The creation of a feminist party, "The Erotic Left":** as an expression of dissidence, and influenced by feminist thought, a group of –still- Sandinista women developed a strategy aimed at challenging patriarchal views of the 'comandantes'. The movement was bold and risky, but proved successful as the Sandinistas conceded that a dialogue with women was necessary.
- **Defeat of the Sandinistas in the 1990 elections:** despite the differences between women and the Sandinista leadership, the women backed and supported the 1990 presidential election candidate, Sandinista commandant Daniel Ortega. His defeat, as well as the election of Violeta de Chamorro, which meant the end of the Sandinista era, had a deep profound impact on all the Nicaraguan women considered for this study. The experience was extremely painful, disorienting and lead to depression and health deficits in many women, as the women were confronted with uncertainties and the loss of a known life.

#### **Key turning points during the Feminist Period:**

Given how Nicaragua transitioned from a "Sandinista" to a "Post Sandinista" period in 1990, differently from the cases of El Salvador and Guatemala, where the guerrilla organizations never achieved power, the differences in political culture across the three

countries continued to influence how the feminist period was lived by these former revolutionaries. Based on the narratives analyzed, I found that there are both similarities and differences among countries pertaining how women transitioned from a revolutionary to a feminist identity. The following junctures of change took place after former combatant women from the three countries joined forces and began creating the first batch of feminist organizations in the early 1990s.

**Turning Points for all three countries:**

- **Breaking ties with the left/search for autonomy:** in a generalized trend among former women combatants and early feminists from the 1990s, most women decided to distance themselves from their former revolutionary parties and develop a sense of autonomy from their previous revolutionary affiliations. For many, this meant losing friendships and a sense of security grounded on their political affiliation that had lasted for more than a decade.
- **Creating new feminist organizations:** as foreign feminist combatant women came together and took on the model of other feminist groups, they developed their own concept for new feminist organizations that attempted to engage in political action and welfare provision for women. Another important feature of these organizations was the offering of psychological services, such as support or therapeutic groups for former combatant women. This part of their work allowed the women to engage in forms of psychological recovery.

**Turning Point for El Salvador and Guatemala:**

- **Political involvement as feminists by engaging with the political left:** feminist women from El Salvador and Guatemala engaged in the late 1990s and early 2000s in electoral politics, running for positions such as town councilors and deputies at the National Legislative Assembly, which broadened their political perspectives and capacity to engage in political bargaining and negotiation with other parties, where sometimes they encountered 'enemies' of the past. These experiences shaped these women's views – and political identities- as they developed these new political skills. This turning point was not experienced by Nicaraguan women, as they refused to engage and be part of the political agenda of the Sandinista party.

The following section addresses the implications of these findings, placing them in the context of peace building processes, grassroots feminist organizing and the use of narrative analytical methods for the exploration of identity transition.

#### **5.4. Implication of Findings**

In this section, I will look at the implications of the findings, placing them in the context of broader discussions in the areas of peace building processes, grassroots feminist organizing and the uses of narrative research in the exploration of identity transition.

##### **5.4.1- Implications for Peace Building Processes**

**a) Learning from mistakes from the Peace Agreements of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala concerning handling of combatant women's needs:** The Guatemalan Peace Agreements supported the creation of a 'Civil Society Assembly' that attempted to involve the 'third sector' in a national dialogue of reconciliation. Though well intended, and certainly a step forward from what was done in El Salvador<sup>61</sup>, this Assembly was perceived as chaotic by the participants in this study who had the opportunity to attend this Assembly (see narratives of Clarissa and Paulina) and, as they evaluated the experience, the Assembly did not promote conditions of collaboration but rather of competition for resources among women's groups, which obviously did not contribute to create a healing effect among the women involved. According to Ilja Luciak (2001) who studied extensively the Central American peace agreements from a gender perspective, in the case of El Salvador, there were early instances of overt gender discrimination and sexism that were corrected, but gendered differences between male and female FMLN members were not taken into account for the design and implementation of programs, which ultimately contributed to the suffering of female militants. In the case of Nicaragua, Luciak has argued that there is simply not enough data concerning gender differences and reintegration; and in the case of Guatemala, though the program was regarded as ambitious and forward looking at the time, according to Luciak, there were significant factors that impeded its full implementation. I argue that the data gathered for dissertation can contribute to create awareness concerning

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<sup>61</sup> The fighting parties in El Salvador signed a Peace Agreement in 1992, four years before than the Guatemalans. Both processes were mediated by the United Nations.

the importance of developing a gender perspective concerning the specific needs of female combatants in peace making efforts. For instance, despite the fact that Central American female combatants experienced severe instances of sexual abuse, these were not taken into account concerning the design of programs for female combatants. This was particularly the case in El Salvador, where according to David Tombs (2006) the “Salvadoran Truth Commission” failed to “speak the unspeakable” account and silenced episodes of sexual violence in the report “From Madness to Hope: The 12-year War in El Salvador” presented by this Commission as a thorough research conducted by the United Nations. In the Guatemalan case, the CEH Commissioners<sup>62</sup> summed up in their conclusions that “sexual violence was a widespread and systematic practice carried out by agents of the state as part of their counterinsurgency strategy” (Tombs, 2006, p. 66f). Furthermore, not only these peace agreements did not provide assistance to victims of trauma, but failed to support women in their re-integration processes. As this research demonstrates –which is consistent with historical accounts- Central American former combatant women who later developed feminist organizations had to negotiate startup funds with international donors on their own. In any of the interviews that I conducted in the three countries, a single woman referred to resources from these UN sponsored Peace Agreement processes that they were able to use for the development of their organizations, and thus, engage in collective recovery. The implication is that peace processes that do not support and include programs that deal with specific gendered needs of female combatants fail to attend not only these women, but the needs of their families and extended social networks, which is crucial in post conflict societies. As Alison (2009, p. 2) has argued, “a greater acknowledgment and understanding of women’s involvement as combatants is needed as part of an overall struggle towards peace”.

**b) The importance of supporting women’s organizing in post-conflict societies in order to strengthen collective coping mechanisms:** The stories told by former women revolutionary combatants offer further understandings of how women who were involved in war underwent the end of hostilities as a transition period in their lives. As the narrative study of these women’s lives showed, the end of a life as a combatant produces significant grief and sense of loss among those who experience it. Furthermore, women are a

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<sup>62</sup> CEH (Commission of Historical Clarification in English) was the common title given to the “Commission to Clarify Past Human Rights Violations and Acts of Violence that have caused the Guatemalan Population to Suffer”, the United Nations commission that investigated, documented and reported cases of political violence during the conflict. (Tombs, 2006)

population particularly at risk of developing ‘sanctuarial traumatic stress’ as they tend to be singled out and criticized by members of their families of origin or others, because of the decisions that they made in the light of their military organizing (particularly if they sacrificed their families for the pursuit of war-related goals). This study has shown that, as peace agreements in El Salvador and Guatemala failed to provide and take care of the special needs of former combatant women, many came together and developed collective spaces –through their feminist organizing- which allowed them to explore and understand their needs for self care, particularly pursuing psychological recovery and healing. In this sense, feminist organizing after the war had mental health implications for the women of the three countries, who joined feminist organizations as they developed a deeper sense of subjective understanding and a sense of inner strength that allowed them to move forward and to integrate their war experiences, instead of dissociating or expressing them through illness. In the case of Central American former revolutionary women, what seemed to be a common trend in their life narratives was their positive evaluation concerning the impact of feminism in their capacity to cope with the sorrows of war and post-war life. Without using the word ‘resilience’, these women emphasized how their feminist involvement allowed them to develop and strengthen their coping skills and bounce back from emotional difficulties. Nowhere this is more clear in this study than in words from Selma from Nicaragua, when she said: *“others have asked me, ‘how come –with all the stuff that happened in this country, and the stuff that happened to you- how is it that you didn’t break? How is it that you had the enormous strength to bear all this ‘shit’? and I tell them: ‘the force is not mine. The force is of feminism. If I was not a feminist, I would have killed myself years ago! But I have to say it: my life, my lucidity, and my capacity for political autonomy, is something that I owe to feminism....”* Thus, a state-of-the-art peace building process necessitates as part of its core strategy, the facilitation of former combatant women’s spaces that support the creation of communities of women focused on their subjective experiences and oriented in developing a sense of direction, creating meanings that can carry them forward and help them take care of themselves and their rights during the difficult post-war transition.

#### **5.4.2- Implications for Grassroots Feminist Organizing in Central America**

**The importance of individual goals in collective action:** The feminist organizations that began their grassroots work in the early 1990s in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala, have been active now for more than fifteen years, and as some feminist women that participated in this study argued, they have supported conflicting goals; for instance, on one side, they have engaged in political action by denouncing women’s rights violations that

come from the state or private organizations or have demanded better services for women, while at the same time, they have conducted welfare provision for women with the support of the state and international agencies, which challenges their possibility for autonomy and unbiased work. The result is that these organizations attempt to strike a balance between goals for self-sustainability (and their own survival) and social impact. As the results of this research suggest, mobilizing women for the promotion of social change should involve a strategy where the pursuit of individual goals should go hand-in-hand with the pursuit of collective goals. Looking at the written materials used by grassroots feminist organizations created by former revolutionaries/feminists of the region, it can be noticed that they still tend to frame their values and objectives mostly in terms of collective goals. For example, the organization “Movimiento Autonomo de Mujeres” (Autonomous Women’s Movement-MAM) in Nicaragua frames the idea of a feminist identity as “a quest against subordination and oppression, as well as the removal of patriarchal identities, affirming the need of a collective identity as the necessary pursuit of individualism and political work”<sup>63</sup>. Another example of emphasis of collective goals comes from the website of “Las Dignas” from El Salvador, where feminist women explain that they see themselves as “proposing the eradication of a patriarchal, capitalist and heterosexist order, by seeking the social, political, cultural, environmental and economic transformation of society that eliminates subordination and oppression against women”. In addition, they “promote that women pursue individual and collective breakups, defying sexual division of work and sexist socialization in order to pursue happiness without discrimination.”<sup>64</sup> In the light of this study, these arguments are even more problematic than the ones used by the MAM women in Nicaragua. Here, “Las Dignas” promote the transformation of society as well as the pursuit of personal breakups as a mechanism to achieve individuality and happiness. As this study has shown, what made feminism progressive and healing for women was precisely the emphasis on both the importance of individual and collective goals, as well as the need for congruency and personal progression. Hardly, young women will be reached through this discourse, which appears to reproduce the values of the 1980s political left. Finally, in Guatemala, the feminist organization “Tierra Viva” sees its mission as “the pursuit of

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<sup>63</sup> See section: “Quienes Somos” (Who we are) from website of MAM:  
<http://www.movimientoautonomodemujeres.org/quienessomos.php>, retrieved on October 9, 2011.  
 Translation by researcher.

<sup>64</sup> See section: “Quienes Somos” (Who we are) from website of ‘Las Dignas’:  
<http://www.lasdignas.org/quienes.html>, retrieved on October 9, 2011. Translation by researcher

transformation of oppression, subordination and exclusion of women, the defense of sexual rights and the construction of a culture without sexism, racism and violence, through the promotion, empowerment, leadership and improvement in the quality of life of the Guatemalan women.”<sup>65</sup> In here, Guatemalan feminists reflect on more concrete skills that support women’s agency (quality of life and leadership) but still focus mainly on collective goals.

A valuable aspect of emphasizing individual goals as much as collective ones – though certainly not the only one- concerns how, for former combatant women, moving towards a position of personal empowerment and agency through their feminist activism was framed as a progressive turn in their lives; a turn which allowed them to become more resilient and better able to cope with the traumatic experiences of war.

Another important aspect that emerged in this study is the importance that supporting subjectivity exploration has for women’s grassroots organizing. I argue that based on these results, successful women’s organizing necessitates a focus on women’s subjectivity, personal congruency and a sense of life progression, just as much as the promotion of values of solidarity, sisterhood, fighting against patriarchy and political organizing. The promotion of the very qualities that made feminist organizations of the 1990s so crucial for the emotional survival of women need to be recognized and promoted among newer generations of feminists. Ultimately, if contemporary Central American feminist grassroots organizations want to mobilize younger women –who tend to be more individualistic- to social action, they need to emphasize how the intertwined pursuit of individual and collective goals can produce a progressive turn in their lives.

#### **5.4.3- Implications for Narrative Research**

As it has been discussed before, the clear interconnectedness between the revolutionary periods of the 1980s in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala and the impact of these processes on second wave feminism have been thoroughly explored by literature focusing on political systems, social movements and contemporary history, not to mention an extensive testimonial literature. Less frequent is to find a study with a psychological focus that expands on the impact of transitions in the lives of the individuals who were protagonists of these events. Many publications dealing with the experiences of

<sup>65</sup> See section: “Quienes Somos” (Who we are) from website of “Tierra Viva”: <http://www.tierra-viva.org/quienes.htm#mision%20vision>, retrieved on October 9, 2011. Translation by researcher

revolutionary and feminist women in Central America do offer a section where they explore the personal background and psychological impact of these experiences in the women's lives<sup>66</sup>, but, for the most part, they seek to reach a social explanatory level. This study attempted to offer a deeper look at these revolutionaries-later-turned-feminists experiences as they dealt with identity transition and made sense of the significant turning points that shaped their life directions. The perspective of a narrative psychologist researcher allowed me to frame this study differently from the 'typical study' concerning Central American feminism, which tends to focus on how macro-social events shaped and constrained individual's activisms. Here the logic was reversed, as this study explored how individual experiences and inter-subjective meaning creation shaped macro-social events – for example, how women's need to pursuit identity congruency shaped the development of a particular kind of feminist movement that had a focus on subjectivity in the early 1990s. The following are implications for narrative research derived from my work in this study:

- a) **Expanding Gergen and Gergen's "Plot Development" narrative typology:** As this study drew from Gergen and Gergen (1986) classification of narratives as progressive, regressive and stable, as a way of categorizing the sense of direction in narratives, I realized that, though this distinction helped me understand how women framed personal meanings, this categorization sometimes did not allow me to classify a certain type of narrative that emerged in my interviews which did not 'fit the mold'. I realized that some narratives did not convey a clear sense of progression nor regression, but were not stable either, as these experiences did not leave the narrator 'unchanged' with respect to an evaluative position. My solution to this dilemma was to create another category which I called the 'mixed' narrative. As I saw it, the 'mixed narrative' referred to that story where the protagonist experienced both progressive and regressive instances that could have a transformative significance, but did not convey a clear sense of direction. I encountered that far too many women interviewed were not able to frame progression and regression in a clear way, and needed to tell long stories that were constructed as mixed. In this study, I did not find whether these mixed narratives tended to be framed as redemption or contamination sequences either (following on McAdams and Bowman, 2001). This is certainly a matter for future examination.

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<sup>66</sup> See in 'Introduction' footnote 3, for a detailed list.

**b) The importance of narrative studies of resilient women who engage in social transformation:**

The women who I had the opportunity to interview for this research shared life stories where instances of both trauma and resilience coexisted creating paradoxical scenarios where they positioned and constructed themselves over again, going from a combatant, guerrilla and revolutionary 'heroine' to a 'fallen' former guerrilla, who rose again to a feminist activist and in some instances, a successful politician. These women showed me that I should not make any assumptions concerning the roles of women in war, or the impact that trauma can have in the life of a person. I share the view of Alison (2009, p. 2) who has argued that the -relatively new- academic field studying women, gender and armed conflict has traditionally emphasized a view of women as victims of armed conflicts; neglecting that women can also be agents of political violence, and ultimately overlooking women's power and agency. By conducting narrative analysis of the life stories of revolutionaries in Central America, it was possible for me to trace the connections between feminist organizing and resilience, as well as how memories of recovery –not just of trauma- are constructed. Alison (2009, p.33f) reminds us that narrative research presents challenges, where questions of how participants construct their accounts for a specific researcher or the choices that the researcher makes in terms of which story to share must be acknowledged. But, along with Alison's view, I also consider that the focus on women's narratives and understandings of their experiences as combatants has the potential to shed light on the under researched topic of war, trauma and resilience and in order to do so, utilizing the voices and beliefs of women by valuing their own accounts as primary documents is fundamental. Again, narrative research is not a value nor a conflict free exercise, and following a certain methodology (or methodologies) does not immediately solve the problems that the narrative researcher confronts concerning the nature of the results obtained. As Alison (2009, p. 33f) has pointed out, in qualitative narrative research, privileging accounts of former combatant women has positive and negative results: while it allows for a deeper and richer understanding of the motivations and experiences of women combatants, it relies on their self descriptions or their self-understandings which are often far from accurate. Thus, the focus should not be on generalization, but on a spur for further development of theory and new questions. I believe that what we have learned through these life stories can generate new questions more concerned with how women construct resilience in the midst of war and peace building, and how personal and social transformation is framed when a theory that promotes hope for

women, such as feminism becomes available. Ultimately, as Dawson (2009, p. 200) argues, “trauma persists, but reparation is about mobilizing the resources of hope, so that living can go on its wake”.

#### **5.4.4- Implications for Future Research**

Following on Dawson’s previous comments, I argue that qualitative research has a generative nature, and based on the previous discussion, I believe that this research project can serve as a departure point for further inquiry concerning -at least- the following three aspects:

- a) **Further exploration of the connections between feminist organizing and mental health:** As mentioned in the section concerning contributions to the literature in the field (see sub-section 5.3.b- point d. “Connections between feminism and mental health in post revolutionary periods”) the consistency of my results concerning the connection between feminist activism and psychological recovery in the studied sample of former revolutionary women invites the question of looking at what happened in terms of psychological recovery to former combatant women from El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua who did not engage in feminist organizing. How did these women deal with the uncertainties of their post conflict societies? Did they identify ideologies or theories that supported hope and resilience? And ultimately, how did they construct memories of recovery in comparison to their feminist fellow combatant women? I believe that this line of research would contribute to expand current understandings of how the construction of healing in Central American post conflict societies is connected with the involvement of women in feminist and/or human rights groups. These connections can possibly be expanded to the experiences of women in other parts of the world, as the recent awarding of the Nobel Peace Prize 2011 to two women’s and pacifist activists in Liberia and Yemen, Leymah Gbowee and Twakkol Karman, respectively, appears to indicate.
- b) **Instances of trauma in life stories of combatant women:** Though this research was not concerned directly with looking at how trauma shaped the life stories of Central American revolutionary and feminist women, nevertheless, instances that these women regarded as traumatic simply emerged in their accounts, when they referred to their experienced losses, abuses, separations, the witnessing of violence and critical decisions that they had to face at certain points of their lives. Though I included a

section on “The impact of trauma on the story told” (See section 2.3.5-“Trauma in life narratives of former combatants” in literature review) where I listed narrative signals of trauma in life stories identified by Ben Ezer (2009), the impact of trauma in the life stories that I collected requires more in-depth treatment, in order to understand and make sense of how experiences of trauma are transferred to life stories; or how these traumatic experiences shape the stories told, in order to ultimately learn how trauma is culturally and politically constructed by former female combatants.

- c) **Positioning Feminist leadership in Central America:** though feminist leadership in Central America is not a topic directly addressed in this study, it has been a question in my mind for a long time. This concern is based on the selection of my sample: many of the women that I interviewed –if not most- are leaders in their feminist organizations. Furthermore, women like Sara and Mireya in El Salvador; Tamara and Selma in Nicaragua and Nelly, Leticia and Paulina in Guatemala, all share the experience of having founded (or co-founded) and headed a feminist organization and/or feminist media in their countries. Each one of them is widely known among the broad national feminist movements of their countries as well as by international feminist organizations. They are national representatives, authors and politicians who represent the feminist vanguard and lead the way in terms of where feminist organizations should go. Given the constraints in this study, I had to prioritize topics that pertained to identity transition, but more social science researchers are interested in the subjectivity of those who ‘shaped history’ and the issue of feminist leadership may be relevant for researchers interested in understanding how “dissident elites” in Central America function. For more on this topic, see research by D. Kruijt<sup>67</sup>
- d) **Exploration of the evolution of narrative feminist identity:** as it has been said throughout this study, identity is considered to be in flux, not static, ever evolving; and from this perspective, it is feasible to hypothesize that a ‘feminist identity’ is not the end point for these women. But what could follow? Some women like Leticia from Guatemala already talked about a ‘post-feminist’ period, where she incorporates but goes beyond the values/ideals of feminism. Her latest endeavor suggested –at the time of the interview- her interest in developing broader and holistic (racial, political)

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<sup>67</sup> A recent study by Kruijt D. (2008) “Guerrillas: War and Peace in Central America” has a subjective focus on revolutionary leaders of the 1980s Central American revolutionary periods. Kruijt (2008, p. 2) has argued that “the emergence of this guerrilla generation and its leaders has received scant attention”.

categories for herself and others. In the case of Maribel from Nicaragua, her interest in religious experiences had led her to call herself a 'theologian and feminist'. Thus, future explorations of identity should consider the question of, what are the latest stages of identity development of radical women activists, and if –in the end- there could be such thing as a holistic identity that surpasses but encapsulates all previous identities.

### **5.5- Limitations of the Study**

As Holloway and Freshwater (2007, p. 122) remind us, among the criticisms made to narrative research and narrative interviewing is the question of truth: how does the researcher know that the participant is telling the truth? And furthermore, is the objective 'truth' important? Though Atkinson et. al (2003) argue that the truth is 'unknowable', they nevertheless make the claim that narrative researchers should have a proper analytic stance, where the motives or drives of participants to tell the story in a particular way ought to be examined. This issue is not an easy one to disentangle. As I could confirm, some of the women interviewed for this project admitted having been interviewed in the past, whereas others did it for the first time as they became participants in this study. It could be argued that these different experiences may have had an impact in terms of interview performance, but also on how the stories were presented and the objectives pursued in the telling. Thus, a limitation of this study is that other than using narrative and deconstructive methods for the analysis of the 'narratives of change' I did not engage in performative analysis, which would have better addressed Atkinson et al's concerns by focusing on the underlying objectives of that what is displayed in paralanguage.

Additionally, Holloway and Freshwater (2007, p. 124) have argued that narrative research places much emphasis on the reader of the text (in other words, the researcher), even though post-modernists argue that different readings of texts can coexist in scientific research as well. Though traditionalists assume that a relativistic stance may be perceived as non-scientific, narrative researchers such as Bamberg (2007, p. 31) argue that narrative research is indeed scientific as observations about persons or social interactions are linguistically based, and arguments are constructed based on those observations. In addition, Bamberg has argued that narrative and mainstream researchers are both equally prejudiced by the choice of which observations should be included or excluded in the argument. Thus, following this academic practice, narrative researchers select segments of

text that make sense of their observations. Therefore, concerning the issue of narrative selection in this study, I opted to analyze those narratives that captured a period or a moment of change; but the selection of these narratives was not always easy, or perhaps, even successful. Many of narratives produced by the women were extremely lengthy and included 'moments of change' that could not be disentangled or separated from context material or from the narrators own evaluations. The option of 'cutting out' the moment of change from a narrative text would completely alter the narrative structure, so I opted instead for including long portions of text that appeared before or after of the 'moment of change'. The result was that long portions of text were left un-analyzed, despite the fact that they were presented as a 'narrative of change'. The 'lack of analysis' of these texts was –to a certain extent-unavoidable as it would have meant addressing far too extensive amounts of material, though in this regard, I acknowledge that this reflects a limitation of this study. Another limitation that is similar to the previously mentioned, pertains the analysis of the feminist life period. In fact, what was considered a 'feminist period' in the lives of these women involved a significant amount of time of their lives (almost twenty years) which cover a series of events that were not analyzed in the context of this study, due to the extensive amount of information that this would have yielded, which exceeded the scope of this life period. A possible effect of these limitations could be that readers of this document may find themselves searching for the narrative analysis of portions of text which are not included in the overall analysis.

In addition to the issues previously mentioned, it is important to discuss limitations pertaining external validity or generalization of the results obtained in this study, given the relatively small sample of revolutionary women that I interviewed. The following sub-sections address this issue; the first sub-section, placing particular importance on reviewing critically how sampling strategies influenced the outcome of the study and the second sub-section, looking at issues of external validity or generalizability in small samples.

#### **5.5.1- Critical discussion of the criteria used for the selection of participants:**

The objective of this section is to critically discuss the impact that the participant selection criteria may have had in the results of this study. The selection criteria defined for the participants as well as the factors that where not controlled for and the criteria for data analysis is presented in detail in section 3.2.2- "Sampling of Participants" in Chapter Three.

As I attempted to explore the emergence and transformation of radical identity construction and oppositional consciousness in revolutionary and feminist women, the logic behind my data analysis criteria is to analyze the narratives of women who had fully committed to both revolution and feminism to an extent that would exceed the efforts made by many more women that had been also vocal in terms of seeking social transformation in the Central American region, but had not undergone risks to such an extent in the service of their 'revolutionary' and 'feminist' pursuits.

Making these decisions clearly defined the kind of sample that I ended up with: what was gained in terms of assuring that the selection criteria was met by all participants, was lost in terms of the diversity of the narratives considered for analysis. Indeed, achieving a sample where each woman would represent a feminist organization was a problem that I faced, as it was not possible to find women who would fulfill all the criteria and come from different feminist organizations within their national women's movements. As I found out by conducting field work, some organizations tended to recruit more women who met the selection criteria and were both available and willing to participate in this research project; and in the cases of Nicaragua and Guatemala, some women who met the selection criteria did not affiliate themselves with a particular feminist organization and rather regarded themselves as "independent feminists".

In addition, I did not seek geographic diversity either, as my traveling resources were limited (and traveling alone as a female researcher to some remote areas in Central America can also be dangerous), which led to a sample that was concentrated for the most part in the capital cities of El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala (with the exception of two small cities of El Salvador and Nicaragua). This decision, knowingly, left out smaller and poorer feminist organizations located in the inner parts of these countries, or organizations that represent the feminist views of women coming from rural areas or –in the case of Guatemala- indigenous feminists.

Another unintended outcome of the sampling method, namely, snowball sampling, is that I ended with contacts and names of women who were widely known within the feminist movements, and in many cases, of women who occupied positions of responsibility in their organizations at the time of the interviews. Given the previous factors, the overall composition of the sample can briefly be described as follows: out of the eighteen stories analyzed, ten came from women who had been either founders or "directors" of feminist organizations; four came from "independent feminists; and the remaining four, from women who –at the time of the interview- were full time employees of their organizations. This

meant that more than half of the stories included in the narrative analysis belonged to women who either were at the time of the interview or had previously been in leadership positions in their organizations. Does this mean that these narratives do not represent their feminist movements? Or that these women were easily located because they belonged to an elite within Central American feminist movements? Karen Kampwirth's (2002) has argued that many women who have been involved in revolutionary organizations as medium level military members (members of the ranks or the base) were precisely the ones who went on to found feminist movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala after their revolutionary involvements ended. This argument would support the conclusion that, to a certain extent, my sampling outcome was unavoidable, as my selection criteria required women who had both committed extensively to military involvement and later, to feminism. Thus, I argue that any researcher attempting to find a sample of feminist women with previous years of revolutionary and military involvement in Central America invariably would end up encountering that many of the women identified would most likely be also founders of directors of feminist movements.

The question of whether their stories truly represent the experiences of the women who joined both revolutionary and feminist women's movements in El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala cannot be answered with a simple „yes“ or „no“. From my experience as a researcher collecting stories, after numerous visits and interviews conducted at these women's organizations, I consider that the meanings associated to the experiences that these women narrated for this study have been widely circulated and –arguably- have shaped the views of younger women who later joined these organizations. As some of the women who are part of my sample went on to found feminist groups, they also discussed, presented and widely disseminated within their groups those ‚early stories‘ concerning their transitions from revolutionaries to feminists. To support my argument, it is important to mention that, five women from the sample of participants in this study are well known feminist writers and poets who have published extensively about their personal views and experiences through their feminist organizations and have become a reference point for many other feminists in the region.

Thus, I would argue that this study explores meanings that can be representative of movements, not in terms of the diversity among the participants interviewed and the stories that were analyzed, but rather in terms of the influence that those stories and inter-subjective meanings had within their movements.

To summarize, I propose that even though the sampling method used in this study led to a sample of cases with unique characteristics that cannot be generalized to the overall population of feminist and revolutionary women in Central America - that could be even deemed as demographically biased by not reflecting the experiences of women from the inner parts of El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua- I argue that, ultimately, the women's narrations included in this study have provided rich and in-depth data which has allowed me to explore at length the construction of a radical narrative identity among feminist and revolutionary women that are active members of the women's movements of these countries in the way in which was originally conceptualized for this study. In this sense, the types of stories that I ended up collecting were the kinds of stories that, as a researcher, I was looking for: stories filled with transition experiences embedded in revolutionary and feminist contexts in which the protagonists radically immersed themselves fully informed by their oppositional consciousness and had identity transformational outcomes for them. The fact that some of these stories came from women who –later in their feminist movements- came to occupy leadership positions within the women's groups, could be regarded also as a finding on its own right and not necessarily a sampling bias, as it can be inferred from Karen Kampwirth's arguments mentioned above.

Admittedly, the results of this study cannot represent the full range of experiences of a larger universe of revolutionary and feminist women in the Central American region who engaged with both revolutionary and feminist movements in different ways and constructed other identities from the ones presented in this research project (i.e., women currently affiliated with leftist political parties; women coming from the labour, indigenous and human rights movements, etc.) but these were not the cases that I attempted to explore in my study either. Given the fact that this research project is immersed in the tradition and discourse of qualitative research, it would also not seek to offer data that in itself represents the different discursive and narrative experiences of all feminist and revolutionary women in these three countries, but rather put, it would seek to offer analysis and interpretation of the rich accounts of these unique group of revolutionary and feminist women, whose experiences have been influential and fundamental in their movements.

Further studies focusing on the emergence and transformation of the radical political consciousness of groups of revolutionary and feminist women in the Central American region could explore the radical identity construction of other groups of women who were not considered in this sample, offering the possibility to compare those results with the ones obtained in this study.

### **5.5.2- Issues of External Validity and Generalizability in Narrative Research**

According to the “Encyclopaedia of Research Design – Volume 3” (2010), questions of external validity address whether the investigators appropriately generalize observations from their research projects to relevant situations (Salkind, 2010, p. 36). But, as experts in narrative methodology, such as Catherine Kohler Riessman (1993, p. 70) argue, there is a tension in narrative studies between generalization on one side, and the close attention to narrative form on the other. For Kohler Riessman, a way of bridging this problem is to present more than one case study if the researcher wants to show variation, since in order to reach theoretical levels of abstraction, comparative work is desirable.

From this perspective, I argue that this research project has attempted to capture variation by including the cases of eighteen women from three different countries, namely El Salvador, Nicaragua and Guatemala. The selection of these cases followed a logic that cannot be equated to that of selecting “multiple respondents” of a survey, but as Yin (2009, p. 53f) has argued, regards the study of multiple cases as one would consider the development of multiple experiments in a laboratory, following a replication design. To explain this ‘replication logic’ in more detail (a brief introduction to this topic is presented in section 3.2 of Chapter Three) the idea is that, after uncovering a finding from a single experiment, the experimenter’s priority would be to replicate this finding by conducting a second, a third, and even more experiments, where some replications might attempt to duplicate the exact conditions of the experiment, whereas others might alter one or two experimental conditions, to see whether the finding could still be duplicated. Only with such replications, the finding could be considered robust. This is the logic underlying multiple-case study designs like the one that has guided this research. Thus, I argue that this project has explored eighteen cases, where country variation has been introduced in order to see whether the findings can be considered robust. An important aspect of these replication procedures is the development of a rich, theoretical framework that becomes the vehicle for generalizing to new cases. Thus, in the light of ‘replication logic’ it is possible to conclude that Central American former revolutionary women experienced crucial life transitions that were experienced differently depending on the evaluation of personal/environmental inter-subjective meanings attached to turning points.

Another way of bridging intrinsic problems of narrative studies and generalizability according to Kohler Riessman (1993) is to combine narrative methods with other forms of qualitative analysis, even though, combining methods forces investigators to confront

troublesome philosophical issues regarding different scientific traditions and the additional task of educating readers about them. Again, I argue that the research design of this study already incorporates the combined use of narrative methods with other types of analysis, such as semiotic analysis, deconstruction and the mapping of the life narrative through 'life story charts'. In this way, I have attempted to inform and complement narrative analysis with insights drawn from other methodologies. As Kohler Riessman reminds us, science cannot be spoken in a singular universal voice, and since any methodological standpoint is partial and incomplete, diversity of representations are needed. In the end, as she points out, narrative analysis is one approach suitable for some research situations, but not for others, and should be used for the systematic study of personal experiences and meaning. In the case of this study, a narrative perspective is congruent with the objectives of this project, which has focused on gaining insight on personal meaning creation by revolutionary/feminists; an objective which guided the development of my work as researcher.

Ultimately, though small samples are regarded as problematic and can be considered a limitation, eloquent and enduring theories have been developed on the basis of close observation of a few individuals (i.e. Piaget's children) and there is a long tradition in science of building inferences from cases (Kohler Riessman, 1993, p. 70). Furthermore, some authors proclaim that qualitative research yields findings that only need to be valid for the cases under study. For example, Patton (2002) has shown reservation towards generalizing since he argues that, by their nature, qualitative findings are high in context and case-dependent. He states that the focus of qualitative research is on understanding and illuminating important cases rather than on generalizing from a sample to a population (Boeije, 2010, p. 180)

Can the findings of this study be extrapolated to the experiences of revolutionaries and feminists from other societies and cultures? I would hesitate to extend these findings to contexts outside of Latin America, based on one side, on the unique characteristics and conditions that shaped the political cultures from where these women come from; and on the other side, on how snowball sampling method cannot be duplicated and expected to yield a similar sample as the one I obtained in any other cases.

As it is widely known, case studies have limited generalizability, which represents a limitation of the design itself, but on the other side, they can provide thick descriptions of the complex processes and influences within a particular context, offering a rich portrait of that what is studied (Daymon and Holloway, 2011, p. 124). Thus, despite external validity

limitations, I believe that this study has provided a 'rich portrait' of the construction of narrative identity in the lives of Central American feminist and former revolutionary women.

### **Final Words**

After close to five years of work, I have been able to bring myself to some kind of closure concerning this research project. Somehow it feels that narrative research is never ending... despite the length of this thesis, I can assure the reader that there was much more to analyze!

I still –after all these years- remember the great enjoyment that I derived from these interviews. The women’s personalities were as captivating as their stories. Some of them struck me as very tough, almost in a military manner. Others were softer, one could even say, ‘feminine’ in a rather traditional way, an association that sometimes made me wonder about my own bias concerning how a feminist –and former revolutionary- should look or behave like. Yet others broke my heart. I cannot forget their tears... the sorrows that they endured. The story of the woman that I call “Dilsia” in this project felt overwhelmingly sad as she told it. I will always be grateful for her trust in sharing it with me. I was also grateful to “Selma”, who was just wonderful to listen; an amazing storyteller, she is a true feminist and political strategist at heart, and her strong voice and key-chain smoking made her unforgettable for me to this day. Furthermore, I think now on the amazing women that I met and interviewed, but did not include in the final sample of participants of this study. Their stories deserve to be analyzed, and my decision not to include them was based on methodological grounds. Out of this group of women, a gender sociologist from Guatemala made a profound impact on me.

By offering these last words, I open a place to position myself, my own bias and subjectivity in the context of this research. Being both Nicaraguan and Salvadoran by citizenship, and having lived in Guatemala, I thought that I had the ideal background for this kind of research. Some would wonder if precisely for these reasons, I would lack objectivity and would just find in the stories justifications for my own explanations; but I must admit that I was surprised by some of my results, and going through the transcriptions, I experienced my engagement with the interview material very differently from speaking with the women. I learned a lot concerning the impact of political violence in the lives of Central American women and the mechanisms that they used to overcome the pain. Feminist organizing, as a survival tool, became alive through their stories, and gave me a complete new understanding of the reasons behind its emergence. Furthermore, I must admit that my learning from their stories was enriched by countless hours spent reviewing the literature on Central American political history, which opened my eyes to traditions of injustice and

institutionalized cruelty that, in my region, have historically run in parallel to those of dissidence and a search for social transformation.

Talking about learning, these women educated me, as I placed myself as a student of human behavior. Entering their storied worlds opened a door of understanding to a revolution that I only lived as a spectator.... I know that these stories will also teach others about resilience and hope in a region that continues to struggle...

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