SURVIVAL THROUGH LOSS

A field study of the Nicaraguan women’s movement’s perceptions of loss, its remobilisation and the motivators in the struggle for the right to abortion.
Abstract

The Nicaraguan women’s movement has remobilised through the severe loss that the total ban on abortion in 2006 implied. The women active within the movement face a shrinking political space, lack of resources, repression and threats, still they continue to struggle for the right to abortion. This field study explores the determinants of the survival of the Nicaraguan women’s movement analysing the activists’ perceptions of loss and the mechanisms of activist retention. The results of the study points to the importance of the ideology and collective identity for the feminist women within the movement, concluding that it would seem that no matter of negative perceptions of defeat, the costs of activism or how unreachable the goals are perceived to be, the activists will continue to struggle for women’s equal rights to life.

Keywords: women’s movement, abortion, defeat, remobilisation, feminism, Nicaragua.

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Abbreviations

CDD  Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir
     (Catholics for the Right to Choose)

FSLN Frente Sandinista Liberación Nacional
       (Sandinista National Liberation Front)

GEDAT Grupo Estratégico por la Despenalización del Aborto Terapéutico
       (Strategic Group for the Decriminalisation of Therapeutic Abortion)

MAM Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres
       (Autonomous Women’s Movement)

March 8th Collective Colectivo de Mujeres 8 de Marzo
       (March 8th Women’s Collective)

MF Movimiento Feminista
     (Feminist Movement)

MRS Movimiento Renovador Sandinista
       (Sandinista Renovation Movement)

RMCV Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia
       (Women’s Network Against Violence)

September 28 Campaign Campaña 28 de Septiembre por la Despenalización del Aborto
       (September 28 Campaign for the Decriminalisation of Abortion)
1. Introduction

"We, as women, do not deserve this. It’s an attack against us, a complete backlash! The world is supposed to move forward not backwards."¹

Women’s movements around the world continuously struggle for sexual and reproductive rights and health. The right to abortion is understood as a human right; women’s and girl’s rights to control their own bodies, to physical and psychological integrity, to health and ultimately to life.² In Nicaragua the women’s movement has been advocating for abortion rights since the 1980’s, linking it to issues such as women’s health, sexual autonomy, economic survival and violence against women.³ The Nicaraguan state has in general been responsive to the demands of the women’s movement and has incorporated international women’s rights frameworks into national law.⁴ However, in 2006 the National Assembly of Nicaragua passed a bill that removed previous exceptions to its abortion ban, making abortion a criminal offence for anyone who performed or underwent a termination of pregnancy.⁵ The criminalisation of the so called therapeutic abortion implied the adoption of one of the most restrictive abortion laws in the world, a grave departure from the government's commitment to improve social equality, and it has had severe consequences for the protection of the human rights of women and girls.⁶ The reformation of the law is therefore seen as a tremendous backlash and a major defeat for the women’s movement in Nicaragua and since 2006 the feminist activists have continuously faced negative political opportunities, lack of resources, repression and persecution. In spite of this, the movement has remobilised and continue to work actively for societal and political change.⁷

Previous research on loss in the context of social movement activism is limited, and in most cases the studies primarily focus on explaining failure. As Karen Beckwith, professor in political science, points out, few scholars have studied the effects of loss, and most of the conducted research have sought to analyse the negative consequences of loss.⁸ Interesting to study, in the case of Nicaragua, is how the women’s movement in spite of the backlash, and the difficult environment it operates in, has remobilised. This thesis therefore aims to increase the understanding of the consequences of loss on social movement’s remobilisation exploring the determinants of sustained activism and survival of a movement through loss.

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¹ Interview with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist, Mujeral en Acción
² RFSU
³ Disney 2008, p. 213
⁴ Reuterswärd et. al. 2011, p. 810
⁵ Reuterswärd et. al. 2011, p. 805
⁶ Amnesty International 2009, pp. 7-8
⁷ Colletti 2015
⁸ Beckwith 2015
The women’s movement in Nicaragua is confronted with extensive challenges after the total ban on abortion in 2006. I find it interesting to explore how activists find motivation to continue their engagement, and how a social movement survives, under such conditions. The Nicaraguan case provides an intriguing example and this thesis, hence, aims to explore how and why the Nicaraguan women’s movement has managed to remobilise in the face backlash and severe loss. The research question is therefore: *How can we understand the remobilisation of the Nicaraguan women’s movement?*

This thesis is based on the interviews with key activists within the women’s movement, conducted during a field study in Nicaragua. The study explores how representatives of the Nicaraguan women’s movement frame the loss that the reformed abortion law entailed. How loss is articulated by activists is, according to Beckwith, likely to be a key factor determining mobilisation attempts following social movement campaign defeats. I will therefore investigate whether Beckwith’s typology is useful when trying to understand the consequences that the defeat has had on the women’s movement. Secondly, in order to increase the understanding of the movement’s remobilisation, I will apply Bunnage’s theory on activist retention, analysing the Nicaraguan women’s motivators of sustained activism.

I argue that it is important to understand the determinants of survival through backlash since the existence of social movements are crucial for a democratic society. An increased understanding of why some activists who lose persist in their efforts and engage in repeated attempts to achieve their goals is necessary in order to enable social movements’ survivals. This thesis therefore aims to contribute to theoretical knowledge and provide empirical evidence of how we can understand the consequences of a social movement’s defeat.

2. Background

The following section will provide a background to the studied case. The background to the relationship between the Nicaraguan feminists and the political parties will be described as well as the process that resulted in the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion. I furthermore give an account for the networks of women’s organisations engaged in the abortion issue and describe the current political situation in Nicaragua.

2.1 The historical background

Nicaragua was ruled by the dictator Anastasio Somoza from 1939 until he was overthrown by the “Sandinistas”, The Sandinista National Liberal Front (FSLN), in 1979. The establishment of the revolutionary socialist government could not have been achieved without the mass urban rebellion characterised by the incorporation of a wide cross-section of the population. Women’s participation in

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9 Beckwith 2015
10 Della Porta, Diani 2006, pp. 241-249
the Nicaraguan revolution was greater than in any other recent revolution with the exception of Vietnam. Women made up approximately 30 percent of the FSLN’s combat forces.\textsuperscript{11}

Maxine Molyneux, professor in sociology, describes the revolution as having occurred in the period after the upsurge of the "new feminism" of the late 1960’s, at a time when Latin American women were mobilising around feminist demands in countries like Mexico, Peru, and Brazil. The Nicaraguan revolution gave hope to the supporters of women's liberation. The FSLN recognised women's oppression as something that had to be eliminated and gender equality was recognised as part of of the socialist ideal of equality for all.\textsuperscript{12} However, while gender equality reforms were introduced in domains such as marriage, divorce, domestic violence, political and labour participation, abortion remained the one area in which few changes occurred.\textsuperscript{13} The law permitted so called therapeutic abortions, medically necessary abortions, primarily applied when a pregnancy threatened a woman's life, however requiring the approval of three doctors and the consent of the husband or a close family member of the woman.\textsuperscript{14} During the 1980’s three main arguments were raised by the FSLN against reforms that would establish full reproductive rights. It was argued that Nicaragua was underpopulated and suffered from a labour shortage, that “the people” were against any change on religious grounds and that the issue itself was so explosive that to tackle it would only contribute to support for the opposition.\textsuperscript{15}

In the 1990’s Daniel Ortega and the Sandinistas lost the power to the liberal party and the new president Violeta Barrios de Chamorro who, in spite of being a woman, was determined to overturn the revolutionary policies that had challenged traditional gender roles eliminating programs against gender based violence and closing day cares, among other things. A positive consequence of the change of government for the feminists was, however, that they gained independence from the Sandinistas and were able to organise as the chose. In the years that followed the women's movement became increasingly alienated from the FSLN in general and from Daniel Ortega in particular, partly in response to allegations in 1996 that Ortega had sexually abused his step daughter Zoilámerica Narvaez from the time she was 11 years old.\textsuperscript{16,17}

The Nicaraguan abortion reform process can be considered to have begun in 2000, when the issue of abortion appeared on top of the public and political agenda. From then until the autumn of 2006, the debate over whether or not to criminalise therapeutic abortion was ongoing in Nicaragua. In 2000, a proposal by the Church for a new penal code to abolish therapeutic abortion started discussions in the Nicaraguan National Assembly. Anti-feminist organisations, the Catholic Church, Evangelical

\textsuperscript{11} Molyneux 1985, p. 227
\textsuperscript{12} Molyneux 1985, p. 236
\textsuperscript{13} Reuterswärd et. al 2011, p. 808
\textsuperscript{14} Amnesty International 2009, p. 7
\textsuperscript{15} Molyneux 1988, p. 124
\textsuperscript{16} Reuterswärd et. al. 2011, p. 819
\textsuperscript{17} Kampwirth 2008, p. 127
churches and politicians of different political standpoints joined forces in support of a total ban on abortion. At the forefront of the anti-abortion campaign was the conservative president Arnoldo Aleman who personally headed anti-abortion demonstrations together with leaders from the Catholic Church. Increasingly, he began to persecute the actors that openly resisted this campaign and accused organisations and activists of performing illegal abortions.\textsuperscript{18}

The women’s movement played an important role in advocating for abortion by producing research and publications, lobbying and discussing abortion publicly and presenting an alternative proposal to extend the access to therapeutic abortions for women.\textsuperscript{19} The Autonomous Women’s Movement (Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres, MAM) and the Women’s Network Against Violence (Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia, RMCV) were leading the movement, mobilising support from Nicaragua’s Minister of Health and the professional medical association (Asociación Médica Nicaragüense), as well as United Nations agencies and several international non-governmental organisations. Despite this support, internal clashes and disagreements and the hostile relationship between the movement and its former ally, the socialist party FSLN, weakened the women’s movement in 2006.\textsuperscript{20} The women’s movement, one of Nicaragua’s largest and most effective social movements, was divided. There was no disagreement over the need to defend therapeutic abortion, however the actors differed in their opinions of what strategies to choose, whether it was right to focus on defending therapeutic abortion or keeping a more radical position advocating for a legalised abortion.\textsuperscript{21}

Furthermore, the movement lacked the resources that enabled the Church to influence public opinion through for example media channels. Despite the efforts to have the arguments in favour of therapeutic abortion represented in the debate, members of the National Assembly refused to meet with feminist activists, representatives of professional medical associations or experts in health and human rights. They did, however, accept the advances and opinions of conservative, anti-abortion groups.\textsuperscript{22}

The election in 2006 was highly polarised with the Conservative Party (Partido Liberal Constitucionalista, PLC) headed by incumbent president Enrique Bolaños on one side, and on the other, the socialists in the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) with Daniel Ortega in the front. The abortion debate reappeared in the campaign as the Church, supported by Evangelical pastors, presented legislation to the Assembly that sought to abolish the paragraph permitting therapeutic abortion, claiming it had been routinely misused to terminate pregnancies. The two biggest parties, the FSLN and PLC, supported the proposal and together with other presidential

\begin{thebibliography}{99}
\bibitem{18} Reuterswärd et. al. 2011, p. 817
\bibitem{19} Ibid.
\bibitem{20} Reuterswärd et. al. 2011. p. 818
\bibitem{21} Kampwirth 2008, pp. 127-128
\bibitem{22} Reuterswärd et. al. 2011, p. 821
\end{thebibliography}
candidates claimed to be "pro-life". The only exception was the candidate of the separatist party, the Renovation Sandinista Movement (MRS) who argued for a relaxation of the penalties imposed on abortion. The Catholic Church has historically occupied a central position in Nicaraguan society, with close connections to state institutions. Being the majority faith, the influence of Catholicism on politics, culture and social issues had frequently shaped the national political agenda, even though Nicaragua is officially declared a secular state. With the elections coming up and with abortion as a prominent issue, the religious community mobilised decisively and effectively during the debate of 2006.

The close electoral race meant that both dominant parties needed the support of the Church in order to gain votes. Consequently, Ortega’s stance was interpreted as a political deal in which the Sandinistas agreed to make abortion laws increasingly restrictive in order to gain votes from the strongly religious community. On October 26, 2006, only days before the elections, the Nicaraguan National Assembly passed one of the most restrictive abortion laws, not only in Latin America, but in the world. The law bans all abortions, including the previously legal therapeutic abortions, that according to medical professionals are required to save the life of the woman. In November 2006, after 16 years out of power, Daniel Ortega, the historic candidate of the party of the revolution, the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN), was reelected president.

Abortion is today a criminal offence in Nicaragua in all circumstances. The Penal Code provides for lengthy prison sentences for women and girls who seek an abortion and for health professionals who provide abortion services and life-saving and health-preserving obstetric care. The criminalisation of therapeutic abortion contravenes Nicaragua’s obligations under international human rights law and it has had tremendous consequences for women and girls. As declared by Amnesty International, the restriction of women’s access to safe and legal abortion services and information, put their human rights, including their rights to health, life, and freedom from torture and other ill-treatment, at risk. Only six months after therapeutic abortion was abolished, 42 women had died as a result of the legal change. Nicaragua is the country with the highest teenage pregnancy rate in Latin America, with 28% of women giving birth before the age of 18. Sexual violence against girls is one of the major contributing factors to the high rate of teenage pregnancies in the country.

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23 Reuterswärd et. al. 2011, p. 818
24 López 2008
25 Reuterswärd et. al. 2011, p. 818
26 Reuterswärd et. al. 2011, p. 820
27 Kampwirth 2008, p.122
28 Amnesty International 2009, p. 7
29 Kampwirth 2008, p.131
30 Plan International 2015
31 Plan International 2015
2.2 The women’s movement and the abortion issue today

The different positionings in the abortion issue is a central reason to the division within the Nicaraguan women’s movement. The Autonomous Women’s Movement (MAM) is still one of the most prominent and political organisations within the movement and works continuously for the right to abortion by choice, framed as a part of women’s right to decide over their bodies and lives.\(^{32}\) The Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV) is an umbrella organisation including a variety of different organisations, more or less focused on the right to abortion, and does hence not have an official and general position with regards to the abortion issue.\(^{33}\) The Feminist Movement (Movimiento Feminista, MF) was founded in 2006 by previous members of MAM, due to the disagreements within the movement (one of them being the abortion issue). The MF promotes the adoption of a law that permits therapeutic abortion due to reasons related to health, rape or the woman’s life.\(^{34}\) Another important actor, is the Strategic Group for the Decriminalisation of Therapeutic Abortion (Grupo Estratégico por la Despenalización del Aborto Terapéutico, GEDAT) which also was created in 2006, when the abortion law was reformed, and consists of organisations and individuals from different parts of society. The GEDAT does primarily focus on the right to therapeutic abortion.\(^{35}\)

The Nicaraguan women’s movement is in general a broad and diverse movement with a wide range of different actors - organisations, networks, groups and individuals - located in different parts of the country. When referring to the women’s movement in this thesis I will be talking about all of these, including both the Autonomous Women’s Movement and the Feminist Movement.

2.3 The political context

During the last decade the Nicaraguan state has received internal as well as external critique for the increasingly authoritarian methods used by President Daniel Ortega and his regime. Since Ortega took office in 2007, the FSLN have consolidated single-party dominance over the country’s legislative and judicial institutions and concerns have been expressed with regards to underlying principles such as human rights, rule of law and democratic principles.\(^{36}\) Civil society organisations, critical of the regime, have experienced a dramatically reduced space to operate,\(^{37}\) and the government has repeatedly been accused of persecuting human rights defenders.\(^{38,39}\) Nicaragua is ranked as the most corrupt country in Central America,\(^{40}\) and Ortega has been accused of rigging municipal elections, manipulating the Supreme Court to approve his reelection aspirations, taking over the power from the

\(^{32}\) Interview with Azahalea Solís, executive director, MAM
\(^{33}\) Interview with Reyna Isabel Rodríguez, coordinator, RMCV
\(^{34}\) Interview with Sara Henríquez, grass-root activist, Mujeral en acción
\(^{35}\) Interview with Rosario Flores, lawyer, GEDAT
\(^{36}\) European External Action Service
\(^{38}\) Brenner et. al. 2008
\(^{39}\) Freedom House 2016
\(^{40}\) Transparency International
National Assembly, illegally replacing democratically elected mayors, threatening free press, and cracking down on opposition protests.\textsuperscript{41,42} In 2014 the Nicaraguan National Assembly approved changes to the constitution that allow Ortega to run for a third successive term.\textsuperscript{43} Despite of these controversies the popular support for President Daniel Ortega has remained high. Nicaragua is ranked as Partly Free in Freedom in the World 2016.\textsuperscript{44}

3. Theory and previous research

In this section I will provide a short background to the study of social movements, and present some of the research that has been done within the field of social movement outcomes. I will argue for the importance of studying loss and present the theories ought to be used in the analysis of the Nicaraguan case. The two main theories constitute the theoretical framework lastly presented as the analytical tool which I aim to use in order to answer the posed research question.

3.1 Civil society and social movements

The literature on civil society and social movements is broad and include a variety of different dimensions, approaches and definitions. Scholars differ in their definitions of civil society but in general it is agreed that civil society includes efforts to organise (in interest groups, non governmental organisations, think tanks, lobby groups) and mobilise (in movements, coalitions and campaigns) pressure and persuade governments and other citizens on matters of policy and justice in areas often thought of as private or apolitical (e.g., the family, schools, sexuality).\textsuperscript{45}

The study of social movements started developing in the late 1960s when the world was undergoing dramatic transformations characterised by strong civil rights and antiwar movements, worker-student coalitions, pro-democracy mobilisations and the beginning of women’s and environmental movements. Today theory on social movements is well established within the social science field.\textsuperscript{46}

Social movements can be defined as ”individuals with shared collective identity and identified grievances, linked and organised in social networks, who mount organised and sustained challenges against powerful agents”.\textsuperscript{47} According to Beckwith, movements are marked by activism that is both collective and challenging, in response to political structural opportunities (or discouragements or threats), new issues, and unanticipated events. Summarised shortly women’s movement can be defined as a political movement characterised by the primacy of women’s gendered experiences,
“women’s issues”, and women’s leadership and decision making. A feminist movement explicitly challenges women’s subordination applying a gender power analysis.48

3.2 The study of loss: Narratives of defeat
During the last decade there has been an increased focus on social movement outcomes,49 however, previous research on loss in the context of social movement activism is limited and the majority of the conducted studies primarily focus on explaining failure. Few scholars have therefore studied the effects of loss, and, furthermore, most of the conducted research have sought to analyse the negative consequences of loss.50

Bergqvist et al. highlight the importance of studying losses. The authors state that feminist research has to a large extent been aiming at generating insights that may be used to achieve societal change. This feature of the feminist approach entails the search for explicit tools that may help feminist activists to pursue changes, and therefore the research has been focused on the question of what conditions are beneficiary for gender equality change. The existing feminist literature has furthermore tended to cover “successful” cases where policy proposals have resulted in policy adoption and thus in policy change. Naturally it is crucial and valuable to acknowledge and learn from the ways in which feminists have been active agents of change in patriarchal societies. However, it might be equally important to analyse failed attempts paying attention to the consequences of defeat.51

In her study of loss Beckwith focuses on the potential positive effects that a defeat can have for a movement. She argues that movement activists’ framing, or “narrating” of defeat in a campaign will have implications for the movement’s remobilisation efforts, and that loss can have positive outcomes for a social movement in terms of strategic innovation and successful second tries. Identifying narratives of defeat in social movements can, according to Beckwith, serve to explain the different outcomes of losing.

Beckwith’s definition of narratives of defeat is: “a form of social movement discourse, in which selected events are linked sequentially, in causal terms, to explain loss."52” In the narratives one should be able to identify temporal starting and ending points and the conclusions that explain the defeat. According to Beckwith narratives of defeat are likely to have consequences for a movement’s survival since some narratives may be more likely to prepare a social movement for remobilisation and second tries, while others may instead confirm defeat and are therefore unlikely to imply a remobilisation. The activists’ perceptions of defeat are hence expected to determine the future for a social movement. A movement’s remobilisation efforts are likely depend on whether the narratives of defeat recast the

48 Beckwith 2013, pp. 415-417
49 Bosi, Uba 2009, p. 409
50 Beckwith 2015, p. 3
51 Bergqvist et al., pp. 280-281
52 Beckwith 2015, p. 5
outcome in positive or if the outcome is depicted in negative terms. If a movement remobilises or not after a bitter and brutal defeat does, according to Beckwith, depend on whether the activists have a way of making sense of the loss, give meaning and learn from it.

With consideration of the different determinants of remobilisation, the author presents a typology, a categorisation of six different types of narratives of defeat and their likely impact on social movements remobilisation and successful second tries. The categories will be presented within the theoretical framework further down.

Beckwith’s theory is general and applied on the labour movement. The author does hence not further discuss the possibility that remobilisation efforts might not only depend on narratives but also vary depending on the specific issue or movement.

3.3 Issues matter for persistence

In a study conducted by Joris Verhulst and Jeroen Van Laer, researchers in political science, it is argued that persistence of a movement could be dependent on the character of the issue that is promoted. Verhulst and Van Laer consider different determinants of sustained activism across movement issues and conclude that issues matter for persistence. They do not consider the effects of loss but discuss the reasons to different movement’s persistence in relation to the specific issues. It is argued that people who demonstrate for ”new movement issues” are more likely to sustain their participation than those who demonstrate for ”old issues”, associated to labour movements. The so called new issues, like peace and human rights are, according to the researches, universal and more long-term, and involving oneself for these issues naturally also means to some degree choosing to become active a longer term. Furthermore, it is concluded that protest persisters are more committed to the demonstrations’ issues, which also encourages the consideration of what implications the character of the abortion issue might have on the likelihood of remobilisation.

The results of the study imply that it might not be enough to only study narratives of defeat in order to understand the remobilisation efforts that have been made in the case of Nicaragua. The activists within the women’s movement, a so called new issue movement, are expected to be more likely to demonstrate resilience and sustain their participation through loss, than the ones in a labour movement which Beckwith applies her theory on. I argue that the idea that issues matter for persistence, and hence remobilisation of movement, motivates a closer look at the motivators of

53 Beckwith 2015, p. 6
54 Elements from different types of narratives can be deployed by the same individual.
55 Verhulst, Van Laer 2008
56 Verhulst’s and Van Laer’s categorisation of protest issues: **”New issues: peace, anti-racism, environmental and human rights. **”Old issues**: associated with labor union mobilizations, like redistribution, wages, social security, working conditions and corporate restructuring. **”New emotional issues**: large-scale mobilization following after events of random violence or other suddenly imposed grievances.
activism. Bunnage’s theory on mechanisms of activist retention may therefore contribute to the understanding of the Nicaraguan women’s movement’s remobilisation.

3.4 Retention of social movement activists

Leslie A. Bunnage, professor in sociology, argues that individual, social relational and organisational factors constitute so called mechanisms of activist retention enabling movements to remobilise in the face of backlash. A sustainable base of committed activists is, according to Bunnage, crucial for a social movement’s efficacy and survival, especially for a movement which is engaged in challenging entrenched inequities and systemic harms, like the Nicaraguan women’s movement. Activists are able to pose profound and consistent challenges to the status quo and demonstrate resilience in situations of backlash and persecution when they demonstrate strong adherence to a social movement participation over time. Social movements’ survival and possibility to succeed is therefore, according to Bunnage, strongly dependent on what she calls the “retention” of its activists. Retention is defined as the likelihood of, and process by which, activists decide to continue their social and political activities. Only a person who develops an identity, skill set, and relatively consistent motivation to make activist work part of their life course is expected to continue her or his activism in the face of backlash and persecution. For this reason Bunnage’s theory could contribute to the understanding of the remobilisation of the Nicaraguan women’s movements. In her theory Bunnage divides her identified mechanisms for activist retention into three categories; individual characteristics, identity and interaction, and organisational structure. She stresses that it is an interplay of various factors that explain processes of retention. Individual characteristics are interlinked with broader social connections established in the context of the activism.57

3.4.1 Individual characteristics

The mechanisms that can be considered to constitute a base for activist retention are by Bunnage called resources and biographical circumstances. Previous research by Robert Putnam, Steven Rosenstone and John Mark Hansen, and Almond Verba et. al. has shown that resources such as money, knowledge and education is important for an activist’s capacity to participate for a longer period of time. Biographical circumstances refers to the circumstances in life that enables or hinders activism. Bunnage discusses how one’s employment status can both affect resources directly and constrain one’s attention and time. Partnership or family responsibilities are also expected to affect one’s social movement participation.58

Other central mechanisms of activist retention, also categorised as “individual characteristics”, are commitment and efficacy. Commitment is explained as what individuals believe, how they perceive themselves, and their responsibility and ability to engage in change making. Bunnage refers to previous research that has found that activists who are motivated by concrete goals expect the benefits

57 Bunnage 2014, p. 433-435
58 Bunnage 2014, p. 436
to be greater than the costs. A critical question is hence related to efficacy, it is important that activist perceive the impact of their participation as worthwhile. Scholars differ in their conclusion of the importance of measurable change for activist retention. Karl-Dieter Opp found that sufficient for activist retention is that people recognise that change cannot happen without their participation even though achieving goals seems extremely difficult under the best of circumstances. However, other scholars like Michael Schwartz, argue that ultimately there must be some kind of victory along the way that can help fuel activists’ ongoing participation.\textsuperscript{59}

3.4.2 Identity and interactions

In the second category of mechanisms, crucial for activist retention, Bunnage places collective identity and social networks. A collective identity is argued to be important due to the sharing of values and developed senses of loyalty that it implies. David Snow, among other scholars, describe collective identity as a mutual experience of ”we-ness” and ”collective agency” while others, like Francesca Poletta and James Jasper, conceptualise it in terms of a person’s ”cognitive moral and emotional connections” with a larger community. Bunnage argues that a collective identity formation is critical for the development of sustained activism because a sense of loyalty to fellow political organisers and the feeling that “we are in it together” will help to ensure that individuals continue to participate even when the costs of activism increase, when the demands are high and the rewards are few. The social relationships within a movement and collective experiences are hence crucial, linking individual members together into a cohesive community. Social networks promote the creation of group identity and joint vision, which according to Bunnage reinforces the persistence of activists.\textsuperscript{60}

3.4.3 The organisational structure

Lastly, Bunnage argues that the structure and function of social movement organisations influence activist retention. For instance, the degree of organisational hierarchy affects the ability of participants to create social ties. Groups that are more egalitarian have many opportunities to interact and create bonds. Furthermore, it is argued that negative changes in the movement’s structure risk discouraging sustained activism. Bunnage highlights the importance of regularly bringing together and nourishing commitment and retention by reviving individual connections and keeping people linked to the movement’s networks.\textsuperscript{61}

Naturally, as both Beckwith and Bunnage acknowledge, there are many factors that may affect remobilisation probability and sustained activism. Shifts in political opportunity structure, changes in movement leadership, access to resources, policy reforms are, for instance, all considerable factors in this specific context. Beckwith argues that these factors are likely to shape the type of defeat narrative and may help to explain the transformation outcomes of defeat into remobilisation attempts that

\textsuperscript{59} Bunnage 2014, p. 437
\textsuperscript{60} Bunnage 2014, pp. 434-435
\textsuperscript{61} Bunnage 2014, p. 440
produce successful outcomes in the future. With other word, Beckwith argues that regardless of the circumstances, whether a movement remobilises or not depends on the narratives of defeat deployed by its activists. Bunnage’s theory aims at explaining the mechanisms that motivate activism and hence contribute to the survival of movement through situations of backlash, persecution and lack of resources. Both of the theories are hence applicable on the case of Nicaragua where the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion was considered a major defeat and where the movement face state repression and limited political opportunities.

3.5 Theoretical framework
In order to understand the implications of the loss that the women’s movement in Nicaragua has experienced I begin with exploring the activists’ narratives of defeat. Beckwith’s theory can possibly contribute to the understanding of the studied case where the movement has remobilised, however, Beckwith does not consider the importance of the individuals’ motivators for activism as independent from their defeat narratives. For instance, an activist who acknowledges negative outcomes of defeat, accusing the opponent for cheating, is hence not expected to contribute positively to a movement’s remobilisation even if she still is committed to the issue. I find it plausible that activists can deploy negative narratives of defeat and still sustain their engagement, which is why potential motivators for continued activism will be explored in a second stage of the analysis. Bunnage’s theory provides mechanisms of activist retention and will, hence, be applied in order to increase the understanding how the movement has managed to survive in the difficult environment that characterises the backlash in Nicaragua.

3.5.1 Narratives of defeat
Beckwith identifies six different ways of framing defeat arguing that some defeat narratives may be more likely to prepare a social movement for remobilisation and second tries, while other narratives may instead confirm defeat and may be unlikely to lead to remobilisation. By applying the theoretical framework below, I will identify the types of defeat narratives deployed by the respondents and discuss whether the narratives contribute to the understanding of the movements remobilisation efforts. The type of narrative most likely to situate a movement for remobilisation is defeat as a ”learning opportunity”. Beckwith’s types of narratives of defeat are the following.

”Defeat as a Learning Opportunity”: The activist recognises defeat and understands it as a source of learning for the next anticipated encounter. It is characterised by assertions like “we will do things differently next time,” “we learned what doesn’t work”. The activist recasts the outcome in positive terms and the narrative is therefore likely to support remobilisation.
"Defeat as Defiant Survival": The activist accepts partial defeat, but incorporates examples of limited success, partial victory. It is characterised by assertions like “we gave as good as we got;” “made the best of what could have been a much worse outcome”. The activist recasts the outcome in positive terms and the narrative is therefore likely to support remobilisation.66

"Defeat as the Good Fight": The activist valorises defeat and the struggle itself, but makes no assertions of future fights. This category is primarily descriptive, draws no conclusions, and is unlikely to support remobilisation.67

"Defeat as Cheating": The activist blames the opponent for "violation of rules", cheating. She provides an explanation of loss and constructs a hypothetical counter-narrative of victory: what could have happened if opponents had complied with known patterns of interaction which, in the past, had been the norm and which had served the social movement well. The outcome is depicted in negative terms and defeat is confirmed. The defeat narrative signals a strategic weakness and is not expected to lead to remobilisation.68

"Defeat as Betrayal": The activist describes the reason for defeat as the fault of actors who should have been supportive of the movement’s campaign, but were not. She provides an explanation of loss and constructs a hypothetical counter-narrative of victory: what could have happened if the blamed actors had supported the campaign. The betrayal by one’s own side, (or a former ally), is, hence, used as an explanation for defeat. The outcome is depicted in negative terms and defeat is confirmed. The defeat narrative signals a structural weakness and is not expected to lead to remobilisation.69

No narrative of defeat: The activist’s recounting of events is purely descriptive, and not employed as the basis of drawing conclusions about future campaigns or potential conflicts. The activist does not make sense of defeat. A lack of narrative of defeat is not expected to lead to remobilisation, but rather to the demise of the entire movement.70

In this study Beckwith’s theory is applied almost ten years after the defeat. Beckwith does not specify when the narratives of defeat are supposed to be collected or when remobilisation efforts should be studied, however, she argues that defeat narratives are likely to be transformed across time.71 In the discussion of my results I will therefore discuss the possibility that the narratives have changed during time.

66 Ibid.
67 Beckwith 2015, p. 9
68 Ibid.
69 Beckwith 2015, p. 10
70 Beckwith 2015, pp. 7, 9, 11
71 Beckwith 2015, p. 12
3.5.2 Mechanisms of activist retention

Bunnage divides the suggested mechanisms of activist retention into three categories; individual characteristics, identity and interaction, and organisational structures. The characteristics for each category are presented below and this “framework” will be used in order to understand why the individual activists, and consequently the women’s movement, has remobilised.

Individual characteristics

*Resources and biographical availability:* Factors related to knowledge, money, education, family and work situations enable activism. Lack of time and money, and family or work obligations, hinder activism.

*Commitment and efficacy:* acknowledgements like ”change cannot happen without me” and ”a victory along the way” are likely to support activist retention. Commitment and participation diminish when the costs seem to outweigh the benefits. Feelings of powerlessness, perceptions of the movement as too conflicted and ineffective, discourage activism.

Identity and interactions

*Collective identity:* a ”we-ness”, shared values, group loyalty and feelings of ”we are in it together” contribute positively to sustained activism. Without a collective identity individuals are likely to leave the movement when the costs of activism increase.

*Social networks:* social ties and friendship providing emotional support and encouragement can be beneficial for activists continued engagement. Conflicts within a social group may discourage continued activism.

Organisational structures

*Organisational characteristics:* non-hierarchical and loosely structured settings, and regular meetings between the actors, are likely to sustain activism. Perceived negative changes in a movement’s structure lower the likelihood of retention.

Important to note is that the third mechanism identified by Bunnage, organisational structures, will not be studied into detail in the specific case since this thesis is primarily based upon the perceptions and experiences of the activists. It is hence the interviewees understandings of the structure, not the structures objectively, that will be analysed.

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72 Bunnage 2014
4. Methods and data

In this section I will describe the methods used in order to answer the posed research question. I will present the interviewees, the structure of the interviews, the treatment of the data and the considerations I had during the process of conducting the study.

4.1 Collection of data

The material for this thesis was collected during a field study of eight weeks in Nicaragua. Central for the study are the perceptions and experiences of the women’s movement’s representatives and the main method used in order to answer my research questions was therefore interviews with respondents. Prior to my arrival in Nicaragua I used written material such as newspaper articles in order to gain knowledge about the specific case. As Beckwith states, activists are dependent upon and constrained by evidence in their narratives of defeat,73 written material was therefore also used to cross reference data gathered from the interviews and to provide ‘fixed material’ relating to the actors and the background to the case.74

Apart from increasing the robustness and credibility of my results by interviewing different types of respondents and using written material, I also triangulated the information I received with informant interviews. I was interested in knowing how the women’s organisations working with the abortion issue were perceived from the outside.75

4.2 Interviews

In February to March, 2016, I conducted 13 semi-structured interviews in Spanish76, and ten of them were respondent interviews. The majority of the respondents are key individuals on leader positions, two are grass-root activists within the women’s network. All of the respondents are prominent and well-known figures within the women’s movement, between the age of 45 and 60 and have been active for more than 15 years. These key individuals were identified as important for the study of defeat narratives, remobilisation and activist retention since they have continued their engagement with the abortion issue after the defeat in 2006.77

One interview with a young grass-root activist within the Feminist Movement (MF) had a mixed informant/respondent character since the activist, Gabriela Ruiz, became involved in the movement after the criminalisation and is less engaged with the abortion issue than the older women that were interviewed. The remaining two interviews were so called informant interviews with women from the

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73 Beckwith 2015, p. 9
74 Björnehed 2012, p. 82
75 Tansley 2007, p. 766
76 I did not experience the fact that I conducted the interviews in a Spanish, a language that is not my native tongue, as a hinder in following the interviewee’s reasoning or in asking relevant follow-up questions. In the occasions where I was uncertain of how to interpret an answer I simply asked for clarification and made sure that I had understood her correctly.
77 Björnehed 2012, p. 68
Association Mary Barreda, part of the Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV) who primarily work with women in prostitution. The informants were chosen due to their particular insights and knowledge, as part of the women’s movement, but external perspective with regard to the abortion issue.

The majority of the interviews was conducted in the capital Managua, but I also interviewed women in León and in Matagalpa. The interviews did in general last between 35 and 55 minutes and were conducted in the interviewee’s workplace. By studying written material on the abortion debate prior to my arrival in Nicaragua I distinguished The Autonomous Women’s Movement (MAM), and the Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV), as two of the most prominent actors engaged in the debate today as well as during the process leading up to abolishment of therapeutic abortion. A method that was used, in combination with pre-acquired knowledge about the selected case, was the snowball-technique. I identified an initial set of relevant respondents like Azahalea Solís, due to her leading position in the MAM and her visibility as a spokesperson for the organisation, and Reyna Isabel Rodríguez, the coordinator of 130 organisations within the RMCV. In the end of the interviews I requested other potential subjects who would have relevance for my object of study. Suggestions brought up by the interviewees were cross-checked with other data from the empirical material to estimate their relevance and minimise the risk of bias. As I gained better knowledge of the context and the specific case I could more easily use the method to identify the key actors and relevant respondents, broadening my scope by interviewing suggested representatives from the Strategic Group for the Decriminalisation of Therapeutic Abortion (GEDAT) and different organisations within the Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV) and/or the Feminist Movement (MF); the March 8th Women’s Collective (Colectivo de Mujeres 8 de Marzo) and Catholics for the Right to Choose (Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir, CDD), the September 28 Campaign for the Decriminalisation of Abortion (Campaña 28 de Septiembre por la Despenalización del Aborto), Mujeral en Acción and Grupo Venancia. I continued this process until I believed that the sample was large enough for the study and the respondents started repeating the same information, hence giving similar narratives.

According to Beckwith actors on different positions and levels within a movement are all expected to construct narratives. In order to get as many and as different voices as possible, I therefore chose to interview women in leading positions as well on grass-root level within different types of organisations. The individuals were selected because of their particular experiences it is however

78 With exception for one of the interviews that was 15 minutes long, however considered an important interview that generated interesting answers.

79 Only one interview was conducted in a public space which made the interviewee whisper while revealing some of the more sensitive information.

80 Reuterswärd et. al. 2011

81 Björnehed 2012, p. 68

82 The organisations belonging to the MF are the March 8th Women’s Collective and Mujeral en acción. The March 8th Women’s Collective is also part of the RMCV together with Catholics for the Right to Choose, the September 28 Campaign and Grupo Venancia (for more information about the organisations see Appendix II.)

83 Tansey 2007, p. 770

84 Beckwith 2015, p. 4
important to stress that I do not aim to generalise to the broad and diverse women’s movement in Nicaragua nor to movements in general.

4.3 Structure of interviews

In the respondent interviews the questions were centred around the process that led up to the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion in 2006, the consequences that the outcome had on the women’s movement, how the movement had kept working with the abortion issue and what motivated them to continue their activism. In the informant interviews I was primarily interested in the individual’s perceptions of the organisations working with the abortion issue. The questions therefore centred around how the movement works with the abortion issue today versus before the total ban on abortion, if the actors are more or less visible compared to before, and more general themes about the current political situation and women’s movement. According to Beth Leech, professor in political science, one should move from the nonthreatening questions to the more threatening questions in an interview. She argues that in interviews that are centred around the interviewee’s own opinions and perceptions, like the ones I conducted, questions about title and background are expected and therefore not likely to seem threatening. With this in mind I ordered the questions in a way that seemed natural, starting with questions about the interviewee, followed by questions about the outcome in 2006 and the consequences of the outcome. The more personal, “threatening”, questions about individual motivators of activism were asked towards the end of the interviews when the respondents had become more comfortable.\(^85\)

As Emma Björnehed, researcher in peace and conflict studies, points out, one has to consider the trade-off between validity and reliability in terms of selecting an unstructured or a structured approach when conducting interviews. Opposite to a structured interview, a more open-ended, narrative approach allows the interviewees to more freely associate and narrate their experiences and opinions according to their own thoughts. A drawback with this kind of data is that it is less comparable than the data obtained from a structured interview, the reliability hence suffer. However, more comprehensive information is believed to be obtained through an open-ended approach and since a purpose with the interviews in this case was to study how the activists narrate, or frame, the defeat within the abortion issue, I found the semi-structured format to be appropriate. Björnehed argues that open-ended questions in a semi-structured format demand more of the interviewer as the interview takes on a more conversational character. I, as the interviewer, therefore tried my best to be attentive and to listen carefully in order to follow-up on what the interviewee related or associated to.\(^86\)

Following up on the conversation can mean diverging from the “script” of the interview and a reduced reliability. However, I generally prioritised more fully developed answers and a flow of the

\(^85\) Leech 2002, p. 666
\(^86\) Björnehed 2012, p. 78
conversation that was not hindered by abrupt changes of chronology or topic. The follow-up questions gave the interviewees the chance to further develop their narrative and did many times generate the most interesting answers. I furthermore believe that the conversational character of the interviews served to make the respondents feel comfortable enough to develop complete, in-depth narratives and share personal opinions and experiences.

In this study, focusing on perceptions and experiences, I did not have to be concerned with the respondents’ subjectivity presenting an obstacle to the validity of the study, since the subjectivity of these particular persons, their perceptions and reasoning, was precisely what I sought. In addition to being subjective there is also a risk that the data provided by the interviewees is “contaminated” due to the interviewer’s influence on the respondent. The respondents might adjust their answers to who the interviewer is perceived to be, what they think that the interviewer wants to hear and what they feel that they can say. It is possible that my identity as a young, Swedish woman influenced the interviewees to answer in certain ways, encouraging them to speak of their demands and standpoints in a more radical way than what they generally do in order to match the opinions they imagined I would have, as a Swedish feminist. It is perhaps also plausible that the interviewees would exaggerate the negative implications of the current regime, and the lack of funding, in order to gain my sympathies and encourage me to search for potential donors in Sweden. A third possibility is that the respondents exaggerated their remobilisation, potentially trying to stay positive. As Björnehed states, being aware of this makes it easier to minimise the risks. I furthermore, as mentioned earlier, mitigated the risk of biased results by the triangulation of information through informant interviews.

I, as the interviewer, did in general make an effort to stay neutral, avoiding signalling support or interest for certain answers. The semi-structured approach can potentially have mitigated the risk that I would influence the results since it allowed for the narratives to develop freely. The themes and questions discussed during the interviews were formulated from theories but the open-ended questions allowed for the respondents to make their own associations and linkages and introduce relevant topics.

4.4 Transcription, treatment and analysis of data

All of the interviews were recorded and then transcribed by me. Any uncertainty I had while transcribing I discussed with a Nicaraguan friend. I also translated the citations, from Spanish to English. The categories of the theoretical framework, were used and the material from the transcribed interviews was organised accordingly. The typology of narratives of defeat including for example; “defeat as cheating” or “defeat as betrayal” served as categories and identified characteristics in the

87 Björnehed 2012, p. 76
88 Björnehed 2012, p. 69
89 Björnehed 2012, p. 74
90 Björnehed 2012, p. 71
material were connected to the different defeat narratives. In a similar way I categorised the material using Bunnage’s theory on activist retention. The themes highlighted by Bunnage as defining the different mechanisms of activist retention (presented in the theoretical framework) were matched with identified themes in the collected data. Furthermore, when going through the material, I identified certain themes in the activists’ accounts for how they have continued their work and I organised the material according to the activists’ different strategies. I used different colours for each of the interviewees when categorising their statements. Lastly, I cross-checked that all of the statements related to the activists’ defeat narratives, strategies for continued work, and mechanisms of activist retention had been identified by once again systematically and thoroughly going through the transcriptions of the interviews. Moreover, I made sure that all of the interviewees were identified as "belonging to" at least one category of each of the theories and considered the possibility that other statements by the same individuals would belong to other categories. In this way I, for instance, discovered that even if one of the activists mainly deployed one type of defeat narrative, other parts of her statements should be acknowledged as another type of narrative.

4.5 Difficulties encountered during the study

Unfortunately the interview with one of my identified key actors, Ana María Pizarro got canceled and she was unable to reschedule due to personal reasons. I initially also had the ambition to conduct informant interviews with key figures from the government such as representatives from the Women’s Ministry in order to triangulate the data collected from the respondents. However, I was unable to do so, possibly due to the controversial character of my object of study. I scheduled an interview with a female researcher at the Central American University in Managua but after having rescheduled the interview several of times she failed to show up. When discussing potential informants with my interviewees I was told that it is difficult for representatives from the state and the universities to talk about matters like the abortion issue. People in Nicaragua in general hesitate to speak critically about the government or express their support for abortion due to fear of losing their jobs or other reprisals. I did, however, not experience a problem with any of the respondents censuring herself. They did all, as demonstrated in the analysis, speak quite critically about the regime and the current circumstances.

It is possible that the canceled interviews would have contributed positively to the study, however I find it highly unlikely that they would have changed my general conclusions. I found that the last couple of interviews, mostly confirmed my previous findings and there were no identified uncertainties that these interviews could have helped to sort out.

91 Interviews with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist, Mujeral en Acción and Yamilet Mejía political coordinator MAM
5. Analysis

The following analysis is divided into three sections. In the first part of the analysis I will make use of Beckwith’s theory, exploring how the representatives from the Nicaraguan women’s movement narrate the defeat that the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion in 2006 entailed. The second section will cover the consequences of the narratives, exploring the remobilisation efforts of the movement, and the strategies used in the current work. In the third and last section I will discuss how Bunnage’s mechanisms of activist retention may contribute to the understanding of the remobilisation of the movement in the face of backlash.

5.1 How do the interviewees describe the loss?

"The criminalisation of therapeutic abortion implied returning to square one, when we had advanced. It has caused a trauma for the women’s groups."92

The above quotation illustrates the perception of the defeat shared by the great majority of the activists within the women’s movement that I interviewed. The criminalisation of therapeutic abortion is considered a major defeat, a huge step back and even as an attack on the women’s movement.93 Beckwith argues that activists’ articulation of loss is likely to be a key factor in explaining post loss phenomena, and particularly remobilisation efforts. Depending on how the loss is depicted, in positive or negative terms, the likelihood of remobilisation varies.94 The interviewees attributed blame and responsibility to the political party and former ally FSLN, the Sandinistas, as well as the Catholic Church or the so called “hierarchy”, within the Catholic and Evangelic church (from here after referred to as "the church"). Some argued that the responsibility is shared between the two actors, while others argued that the FSLN first and foremost is to blame stating that the party paved the way for the church to present its demands.95 All of the respondents perceived the total ban on abortion as a result of religious and political opportunism. The FSLN needed the support from the church to win the elections and the church was therefore able to pose its demands.96

When going through the material two types of defeat narratives where primarily identified. The most common narrative deployed by the respondents was "defeat as cheating", followed by "defeat as betrayal”. It should, however, be noted that an individual activist can deploy more than one type of narrative of defeat,97 and several of the narratives of cheating and betrayal were in fact also characterised by some of the features of "defeat as defiant survival". Moreover, two of the respondents were mainly descriptive in their accounts for the process leading up to the criminalisation

92 Interview with Yamilet Mejía, political coordinator, MAM
93 Interview with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist, Mujeral en Acción
94 Beckwith 2015, p. 6
95 Interview with Yamilet Mejía, political coordinator, MAM
96 Interview with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist Mujeral en Acción
97 Beckwith 2015, p. 11
of therapeutic abortion. These individuals did hence lack any particular defeat narrative. The other types of defeat narratives, "defeat as a learning opportunity" and "defeat as a good fight" were not identified.

5.1.1 Defeat as cheating
In their attribution of blame and responsibility to the church and the FSLN, several of the respondents explained the loss by referring to the opponents’ usage of illegitimate tactics. Many of them stressed the unconstitutionality of the total ban on abortions and how they never received the response to their claims that they were entitled to.

We insisted on the unconstitutionality of the abolishment, we collected thousands of signatures and protested outside the supreme court, but nothing happened. They didn't even give us an answer. The court is obligated to answer us, according to the legal procedures.98

Luz Marina Torrez’s (March 8th Collective), cited above, criticism claiming the unconstitutionality of the law is part of her general analysis of the lack of democracy and rule of law in Nicaragua. Other respondents accused the church and politicians of using dishonest and unscrupulous methods in their narratives of defeat. Sara Henriquez (Mujeral en acción) and Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective), among others, argued that the law criminalising abortion was passed due to great manipulation by the church as well as the politicians. According to the respondents, as well as the informants, media was used to manipulate the poorly informed population with anti-abortion propaganda and depicted the feminist activists as murderers, man-haters and anti-children. Representatives from the church, and political parties, used slogans such as “abortar es matar” (abortion is murder), manipulated pictures of foetuses and movies stipulating horrific consequences of abortion.99 Ruth Marina Matamoros (Grupo Venancia) stated that the politicians motivated the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion by referring to supposed facts and manipulated figures showing that women “in modern times” no longer risk dying from their pregnancies.100 These narratives could be categorised as “defeat as cheating” and by Beckwith defined as explaining a social movement’s loss as the result of the opponent violating or evading the established rules or norms.101

5.1.2 Defeat as betrayal
Beckwith describes the narrative of defeat as betrayal as one that constructs the reason for defeat as the fault of other actors who should have been supportive of the social movement’s campaign, but were not.102 The identified narratives seemingly belonging to this category can be divided into two groups. Some of the respondents attributed blame to actors within the own movement while others accused the former allies, the Sandinistas, for betraying the women.

98 Interview with Luz Marina Torrez, founder and director of the March 8th Collective
99 Interviews with Sara Henriquez, Mujeral en Acción, Luz Marina Torrez, March 8th Collective, Rosa Maria Espinoza and Aleida Maris Gonzalez Hernandez, Association Mary Barreda
100 Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venancia
101 Beckwith 2015, p. 9
102 Beckwith 2015, p. 10
A majority of the members of MAM became politically engaged during the revolution in the 1970’s, have their roots in the Sandinista National Liberal Front (FSLN). As previously described, the feminists became increasingly independent and critical towards the party in the 1990’s. According to Azahalea Solís (MAM) the movement prior to the elections in 2006 had, for different reasons, understood that Ortega was a fundamentalist and an opposer to women’s rights and they were therefore not surprised when the total ban on abortion was adopted.103 Similarly Ruth Marina Matamoros (Grupo Venancia) argued that women’s rights are always negotiated in times of elections. She described the analysis made by the women’s movement as such; ”Women’s rights are like bargaining chips for the politicians when elections are coming up.”104

Marlen Chow, on the other hand, active within MAM and sharing a similar background with Solís, did in her defeat narrative express both astonishment and outrage.

It was unbelievable. Unbelievable! Nobody believed that Ortega could do that. We believed that he at least held a minimal respect towards the demands of the women. But Ortega negotiated and sold the therapeutic abortion.105

Opposite to the emotional narrative given by Marlen Chow that easily seems to fit Beckwith’s definition of “defeat as betrayal”, Azahalea Solís (MAM), as well as Magaly Quintana (CDD), remained rather descriptive in their accounts for the process that resulted in the criminalisation of abortion.106

During the years leading up to the elections in 2006 the abortion issue rose up on the political agenda and discussions on whether to criminalise abortion completely or not, begun. Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective) explained how the women’s movement during 20 years had advocated for a liberalisation of the abortion law but suddenly was forced to start defending the law that they already had. Some of the organisations and most prominent actors however insisted on a continued fight for a legalised abortion, the right to abortion by choice. The movement was divided and when it became clear that therapeutic abortion was to be criminalised the different actors within the women’s movement turned against each other.107 According to Patricia Orozco (September 28 Campaign) the moderate positions taken by the other side of the women’s movement were, and still are, problematic. Orozco argued that they as feminists had taken a step backwards in this respect, sending the society a mixed message. As several of the interviewees defending the more “radical” position, she furthermore stated that therapeutic abortion does not recognise women’s right to decide over their own bodies since women would have to ”ask for permission by the society” in order to have an therapeutic

103 Interview with Azahalea Solís, executive director, MAM
104 Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venancia
105 Interview with Marlen Chow, political coordinator, MAM
106 Interview with Azahalea Solís, executive director, MAM and Magaly Quintana, leader, CDD
107 Kampwirth 2008, p. 128
abortion. Contrarily, Rosario Flores, previously a part of Sí Mujer but currently active within GEDAT, described how the moderate side of the movement held the actors promoting the right to abortion by choice responsible for the backlash that the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion implied. It was argued that it was their radical demands that provoked the removal of the law which at least had given them some possibilities.

The above presented examples are narratives of betrayal. The FSLN or actors within the own movement are argued to have counteracted the cause or as Beckwith puts it “failed to provide the kind of assistance that was both expected and seen to be necessary for success.” The loss is hence explained by several of the interviewed activists as a consequence of these actions.

5.1.3 Defeat as the defiant survival

Even if the defeat was primarily explained in terms of betrayal or cheating, several of these narratives were also characterised by what Beckwith calls the ”spark that incites outrage and deepens commitment”. Yamilet Mejía (MAM) stated that the criminalisation had forced them as feminist activists to insist more, and talk more about the problems related to the abortion issue. Sara Henriquez (Mujeral en acción) even argued that she perceived the criminalisation as strengthening to the movement and the cause, arguing that it gave them further reasons to fight, to go out on the streets protesting. This demonstrated resistance could be considered fitting into the category defeat as defiant survival.

Opposite to defeat narratives of cheating and betrayal, narratives of defeat as the defiant survival is according to Beckwith likely to lead to remobilisation of the movement. Activists who talk about defeat in terms of the defiant survival recast an outcome in positive terms which is argued to be crucial for a movement’s survival. Patricia Orozco (September 28 Campaign), among others, argued that the process that resulted in the total ban on abortion opened up the space to discuss the issue, which is recognised as a positive outcome of the loss.

Before the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion the abortion issue was little discussed in public, however with the criminalisation we got the opportunity to talk, the different positions became clearer. We got the opportunity to use media, to mobilise and include the youth, in ways that were difficult before 2006 because of the taboo.

108 Interview with Patricia Orozco, coordinator, September 28 Campaign
109 Ana Maria Pizarro, the director of the women's clinic Sí Mujer, and a prominent actor during the campaign, argued in a similar way, in the interview conducted by Kampwirth, stating that the cause was hurt by the moderate positions taken by the other side of the women's movement (2008, p.128)
110 Sí Mujer is a women's clinic and held a "radical" position, campaigning for a completely legalised abortion in the 2000s
111 Interview with Rosario Flores, lawyer, GEDAT
112 Beckwith 2015, p. 10
113 Beckwith 2015, p. 2
114 Beckwith 2015, p. 8
115 Interview with Patricia Orozco, coordinator, September 28 Campaign
This perceived consequence of the process that lead up to the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion is also shared by the informants. Rosa María Espinoza, executive director for the Association Mary Barreda, stated that even though the abortion issue is still taboo it is more discussed today than before 2006.\textsuperscript{116}

There are hence some characteristics in the narratives of the respondents that fit Beckwith’s category “defeat as the defiant survival” and would implicate remobilisation. However, only one of the interviewee’s narratives included acknowledgment of partial success which Beckwith states as central for this type of defeat narrative.\textsuperscript{117} Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective) highlighted the important role played by the women’s movement and the attention they received from media and the international community. She also acknowledged the achievement of mobilising public support from officials, academics, doctors, priests and other important and influential people.\textsuperscript{118} A characteristic of this defeat narrative, completely missing from the respondents’ framings of loss, is the expressed feeling of having "made the best of what could have been an even worse outcome".\textsuperscript{119} The recasting of the outcome in positive terms is limited. Dominating in the narratives are instead negative perceptions of the outcome as the worst possible and a major defeat.

To summarise this section, the identified defeat narratives primarily depict the outcome in negative terms. The most prominent type of narrative identified in this study was defeat as cheating, followed by defeat as betrayal. However, some characteristics of the two types are missing in the women’s narrative. The respondents did not construct hypothetical counter-narratives of victory including considerations of what could have happened if the cheating or betraying actors had acted in a different way. As expected, however, the narratives produced a causal sequence of events leading to conclusions about the reasons for loss. A problem with these two narratives and a disadvantage for remobilisation is, according to the Beckwith, that although each defeat narrative identifies a set of explanations for defeat, these reasons are more likely to confirm defeat than to explain it. Beckwith states that narratives of cheating and betrayal signal strategic versus structural weakness in the movement, hindering remobilisation. The fact that activists talk about a loss in terms of cheating does in the light of the theory imply that the movement failed to recognise a shift in repertoire by the opponent.\textsuperscript{120} Beckwith states that “a social movement’s claims of opponents’ violation of rules or norms is an indication that the opponents engaged in strategic innovation, for which the social movement was unprepared”\textsuperscript{121}. The structural weakness of the movement is, according to Beckwith, demonstrated by the internal accusations of betrayal and the split among the feminist activists.\textsuperscript{122}

\textsuperscript{116} Interview with Rosa María Espinoza, executive director Association Mary Barreda
\textsuperscript{117} Beckwith 2015, p. 7
\textsuperscript{118} Interview with Luz Marina Torrez, founder and director of the March 8th Collective
\textsuperscript{119} Beckwith 2015, p. 7
\textsuperscript{120} Beckwith 2015, pp. 9-10
\textsuperscript{121} Beckwith 2015, p. 9
\textsuperscript{122} Beckwith 2015, p. 10
The narratives did to some extent correspond to the category defeat as defiant survival due the resistance expressed by in particular one of the activists who did acknowledge partial success, however, the recasting of the outcome in positive terms was limited to the description of the increased attention to the issue.

Not all of the respondents had any particular narrative of defeat. Azahalea Solís (MAM) and Magaly Quintana (CDD) explained the process that lead up to the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion in a purely descriptive way. The lack of any particular defeat narrative signals, according to the theory, the demise of the entire movement.\(^{123}\)

Even though the narratives did not fit Beckwith’s categorisation perfectly the defeat was hence primarily described in terms of cheating, betrayal or in a purely descriptive way. Based on the respondents’ narratives of defeat, or lack thereof, the movement would hence not have remobilised, according to Beckwith’s theory. However, as we will see in the following section, the Nicaraguan women’s movement has indeed continued to struggle for the right to abortion.

5.2 How has the movement remobilised?

The analysis of the respondent’s narratives of defeat in the previous section did not leave us with an understanding of why the movement has remobilised. According to Beckwith the most successful narratives of defeat, most likely to situate a social movement for remobilisation, are those that identify and articulate political learning from loss. There are no signs of “lessons learned” or post-defeat strategies that take these lessons into account in the narratives of the interviewed women. The different narratives, or lack of narratives, has not implicated different consequences on the activist’s remobilisation efforts. The activists have continued to struggle for the right to abortion, the movement has hence remobilised, opposite to the expectations raised by the appliance of Beckwith’s theory. In this section I will examine the consequences of the loss in 2006 and how the Nicaraguan women’s movement have continued to work for a legalisation of abortion.

The different positionings in the abortion issue that contributed to the division within the Nicaraguan women’s movement were further cemented after the total ban on abortions. After the elections that were won by Ortega and the FSLN in 2006, the different sides of the movement chose different approaches and strategies in their continued work. The Autonomous Women’s Movement, MAM, shared both political background and similar grievances with the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), consisting of former Sandinistas, and they therefore became allied.\(^{124}\) Marlen Chow (MAM) explained that the only way of influencing politics in Nicaragua is through a political party since

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\(^{123}\) Beckwith 2015, p. 11

\(^{124}\) Interview with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist, Mujer en Acción
actors from civil society are no longer invited to the National Assembly or able to advocate for political change:

The previous conservative governments gave us the opportunity to participate through different institutions, without any greater influence, but at least we had the possibility to enter (the National Assembly), participate, present documents and our arguments. This window was closed with Ortega in 2006.125

The decision to join forces with a political party was criticised by the other side of the movement. Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective) argued that all parties are the same, referring to corrupt methods and a lack of an integrated feminist perspective. She furthermore stated that a small party like the MRS is unable to influence politics.126 Unlike MAM, the other side of the women’s movement organisations primarily focuses on the therapeutic abortion, arguing that it is a strategy and that a complete legalisation of abortion is impossible to achieve at the time. Sara Henriquez (Mujer en acción) furthermore highlighted the fact that this cause has received more funding as a reason to why she, as part of the Feminist Movement, focuses on raising awareness for the need of a law that permits therapeutic abortion. All of the women I interviewed did, however, personally support a complete legalisation of abortion as women’s right to make decisions about their own bodies. Magaly Quintana is the leader of Católicas for the Right to Choose (CDD) which also was founded after the total ban on abortion. The argument presented by Quintana is similar to many of the other activists’, she stated:

Our fight for therapeutic abortion does not imply that we do not acknowledge the importance of a complete legalisation of abortion. Meaning, we have benefitted from defending the right to therapeutic abortion because it has given us the possibility to keep talking about the issue and it is important to keep moving forward. It is a strategy.127

The great majority of the interviewees described the change of the political climate since 2006, arguing that the regime has become increasingly authoritarian. Signs of the movement’s efforts to remobilise, in spite of these challenges, are the new actors that emerged after 2006. Organisations were created for the specific cause of a legalised abortion, and furthermore it would seem like the youth became increasingly engaged. Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective) argued that the women’s movement grew considerably after the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion.128 Several of the interviewees explained how young women, Gabriela Ruiz being one of them, joined the movement in an urge to “do something” in a time of the backlash on women’s rights.129

One of the new actors emerging in 2006 was the Strategic Group for the Decriminalisation of Therapeutic Abortion (GEDAT). As its name indicates, the group has made strategic choices in terms

125 Interview with Marlen Chow, political coordinator, MAM
126 Interview with Azahalea Solís, executive director, MAM
127 Interview with Magaly Quintana, leader, CDD
128 Interview with Luz Marina Torrez, founder and director of the March 8th Collective
129 Interview with Gabriela Ruiz, grass-root activist, MF, Reyna Isabel Rodríguez, coordinator, RMCV, among others
of keeping a less confrontative position towards the FLSN, focusing on therapeutic abortion and presenting evidence of the consequences that the total ban on abortion has on women and children. Rosario Flores (GEDAT) previously worked for the more “radical” Sí Mujer advocating for a completely legalised abortion but has since the total ban on abortion been active within GEDAT. She explained the moderate positioning of the group as follows: “If you first accuse them of being corrupt, and then ask them to change the law, how will you succeed?” As part of their strategy of how to influence the politicians Flores therefore highlighted the importance of not appearing as an opposition to the government and to only focus on providing evidence of the need for therapeutic abortion. Flores did in this way stress the difference between activism and advocacy, arguing that GEDAT only is pursuing the latter. She explained how their strategy has enabled them to keep advocating, presenting reports on the suffering the abortion ban has had on women and girls, and proposals of an alternative abortion law to the National Assembly.

The loss that the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion entailed does hence not seem to have discouraged activism. On the contrary new actors devoted to the issue have emerged and many argue that they work harder than ever before. However, it is evident that the movement has become weakened in terms of resources. As Ruth Marina Matamoros (Grupo Venancia) stated:

The movement is not dependent on whether or not abortion is criminalised. What has been reduced is the external cooperation, we have less resources to mobilise and continue fighting. Some organisations have survived. We continue resisting.

The lack of resources is not the only factor described as weakening the movement. Because of their critical position towards the regime, activists within the women’s organisations have during the last decade suffered tremendous consequences in terms of threats and persecutions. Marlen Chow (MAM) described how she several of times had found her house broken into, her computers stolen and books, especially on the subject of abortion, torn out of the bookshelf. These threats do however not seem to have had any significant consequences for the individuals’ continued activism. Chow stated:

They are making a great effort to weaken the women’s movement but there is also a fight for our part, to strengthen the movement and to adjust to the current conditions.

Several of the activists described how they have had to adapt to the lack of resources and the shrinking political space by primarily working locally and regionally to raise awareness, educate and change norms and attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health and rights. Many of the interviewed women expressed the importance of raising awareness and engaging people to participate actively in the society. Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective) explained that their aim is to foster future politicians who will respect women’s rights and will change the law that criminalises abortion.

130 Interview with Rosario Flores, lawyer, GEDAT
131 Interview with Rosario Flores, lawyer, GEDAT
132 Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venancia
133 Interview with Marlen Chow, political coordinator, MAM
It was also identified as crucial to keep the discussion on the abortion issue going, and several of the respondent’s did pride themselves in having succeeded in this respect. Azhalea Solís (MAM) stated:

Our fundamental strategy is to not be silent, to maintain the public discussion, keep shedding light to the issue and presenting the problems before international organisations.  

Rosario Flores (GEDAT) described how they sometimes are refused when approaching schools and universities to talk about the right to therapeutic abortion. She explained that when GEDAT is not allowed to talk about sexual and reproductive health and rights they talk about violence and that with this kind of framing the can include sexual violence against girls, and the abortion issue. Yamilet Mejía (MAM) among others, described that another strategy to deal with the controversy of the abortion issue and to raise awareness around issues concerning sexual and reproductive health and rights is by talking about the prevention of pregnancies and the right to decide over the own body.

The movement does, however, still realise public activities, demanding the state to respond to the appeals against the suffering and death that women are exposed to as a consequence of their reproductive capacity. The problem with a corrupt media is raised by several of the respondents but the organisations today use alternative media in order reach out to people. The movement has managed to draw international attention to several cases where women risked dying from their pregnancies. Some of the interviewees described how it had put pressure on the regime and that secret abortions had been performed on several of women, however, too late to save their lives.

The information received from the respondents about the consequences of the loss in 2006 and their remobilisation and current strategies does correspond to the statements of the informants. It is evident that the movement appears weakened from the outside, it is stated that the movement is less visible due to the lack of resources, the political climate, persecutions and threats. However, it is acknowledged that the movement has remobilised, continues to demand political change, but primarily works locally. Rosa María Espinoza’s (Association Mary Barreda) concluding words were: “They keep fighting. It is what we have to do. It is brave.”

In sum, the movement has chosen different strategies in their continued work after the defeat in 2006. The Autonomous Women’s Movement’s alliance with a political party could be understood as a strategic innovation derived from the loss, however, it is also a consequence of the shrinking spaces for civil society organisations. Other strategies, the focus on long term and local work are adopted in order to adjust to current circumstances, lack of resources and shrinking political space, however, it is

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134 Interview with Azahalea Solís, executive director, MAM
135 Interview with Rosario Flores, lawyer, GEDAT
136 Interview with Yamilet Mejía, political coordinator MAM
137 Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venencia
138 Yamilet Mejia, political coordinator, MAM
139 Interview with Magaly Quintana, leader, CDD
140 Interview with Rosa María Espinoza, executive director, Association Mary Barreda
a strategy that always have been used by the movement in order to achieve societal change. The choice to mainly focus on therapeutic abortion should perhaps rather be understood as a direct consequence of the backlash rather than a strategic innovation. However, GEDATs strategy to keep a less confrontative profile might be seen as a new strategy that has the potential to lead to future success.

It is obvious that the lack of funding, the persecutions and the shrinking political space have considerable implications on the Nicaraguan civil society, but as Beckwith argues, a movement can find strategies to continue their work and, according to this research, the Nicaraguan women’s movement seem to have done so. The movement has managed to adapt to the current circumstances, however independently of the discouraging narratives of defeat including negative depictions of the outcome in 2006. Beckwith’s theory can, hence, not explain the movement’s remobilisation efforts. In spite of the fact that defeat was mainly explained in negative terms of betrayal and cheating, and that some of the respondents completely lacked any particular defeat narrative, the Nicaraguan feminists continue their activism and the movement has remobilised.

In the following section I will further explore how we can understand the survival of the movement. Potential explanations to why the movement has remobilised, opposite to the expectations raised by the defeat narratives, will be discussed in the light of Bunnage’s theory on mechanisms of activist retention.

5.3 Why did the movement remobilise and what motivates activist retention?

“We have gone through serious situations of crisis but the movement always rises again.”

As indicated by Ruth Marina Matamoros (Grupo Venancia) above, the Nicaraguan women’s movement has remobilised after the backlash in 2006. This section explores the possibility that the remobilisation is driven by factors related to individual characteristics, identity and interactions, and organisational structures. Aiming to provide an answer to the posed research question the analysis below reviews the mechanisms belonging to the three categories and discusses their applicability to the studied case.

5.3.1 Individual characteristics

According to Bunnage, individual factors are often assumed to be the primary determinants of social movement participation, and are therefore essential to consider when analysing the prospects of retention.

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142 Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venancia
143 Bunnage 2014, p. 437
144 Bunnage 2014, p. 434
Resources and biographical availability

Research has shown that resources like time, money, education and knowledge play an important part in enabling and sustaining activism.\textsuperscript{145} Individuals’ participation in a movement might be hindered due to family or work obligations, since activism often implies voluntary and unpaid work. The basic factors enabling the survival of a movement do hence relate to, what Bunnage calls, activist’s resources and biographical availability. The majority of the most prominent women in the movement are, according to the interviewees, educated, middle class women between the age of 45 and 70, and have a long experience within politics and social movements. Marlen Chow (MAM) is one of the many who joined the Sandinistas in the 1970’s and who have been involved in the women’s movement since the early 1990’s.\textsuperscript{146} With regards to the so called biographical availability, the possibilities that work and family obligations leave activists, the fact that a considerable part of the important actors are older women can be considered beneficial for the movement. The retired women are likely to have more time to engage in the activities organised by the movement. The majority of the interviewed women had grown up, independent children, which facilitated their engagement. Several of the women highlighted that the support from their husbands and children enabled and motivated them to continue their work.\textsuperscript{147} These important aspects related to resources and biographical availability can hence be considered to enable the sustainment of the movement, in spite of the reduced funding that the organisations have faced. The engaged women, as older, economically stable, experienced and independent individuals, have had the possibility to sustain their engagement which seems crucial for a movement’s remobilisation. However, equally important, is to further understand why they have chosen to continue their engagement.

Commitment and efficacy

Bunnage identifies activist’s commitment to be crucial for long term activism and remobilisation in situations of backlash. Commitment relates to ideology and concrete goals, and characterised all of the narratives of the interviewees. Several of the respondents argued that it was the desire to change the circumstances for their own children that motivated them in their work.\textsuperscript{148} The abortion issue was by the majority of the respondents described as a matter of life or death, leaving them no choice but to continue the struggle. Reyna Isabel Rodriguez (RMCV) answer to why they continued their work, in spite of the persecutions and perceived impossibility of achieving political change, was short but concise; “We do not want any more women to die in our country.”\textsuperscript{149}

Rosario Flores (GEDAT) described the concrete cases of women and girls, suffering and even dying from their pregnancies, as evidence of the need to change the abortion law, urging her to do

\footnotesize
\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{145} Bunnage 2014
\item \textsuperscript{146} Interview with Marlen Chow, political coordinator, MAM
\item \textsuperscript{147} Interview with Yamilet Mejía, political coordinator, MAM and Sara Henríquez, grass-root activist, Mujeral en acción
\item \textsuperscript{148} Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, Grupo Venancia, Sara Henríquez, MF, Yamilet Melia, MAM
\item \textsuperscript{149} Interview with Reyna Isabel Rodriguez, coordinator, RMCV
\end{itemize}
something. Some of the respondents furthermore perceived it as their duty as citizens to enlighten other women about their rights. Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective) stated: "I find strength in being well informed, I feel the need to inform other women. Enough of these consequences; women suffering and dying!"151

The great majority of the women referred to abortion as a fundamental right and argued that knowing their rights fuelled them to keep fighting. When I asked Yamilet Mejía (MAM) what motivates the continued struggle she answered;

The conviction that you have rights, as anyone else in this world. The conviction that I am the one in control over my body, it is my right. We do not question men’s rights but we do question women’s rights to a life in freedom, without violence, to being able to decide whether or not to have children, without the pressure from society of how to be as a woman - when one should marry and have children.152

Azahalea Solís (MAM) furthermore talked about the necessity to defend their own lives as a motivator for activism; “If we would stay quiet it would mean that men have all rights and women have none, it is a principle, women cannot be treated this way.”153 Another citation that clearly demonstrates the commitment and the ideological strive shared by all of the respondents is the following by Magaly Quintana (CDD):

I find strength in the lives of the women, in being a woman. We cannot rest until all women have the possibility to full citizenship, including having the right to decide over their own bodies and lives.154

Central in the narratives of the women, and explicitly or implicitly integrated in all of their analyses of the situation, is the feminist ideology. Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective) explains how she is motivated by the challenge and the urge for change as follows; "I deeply question the patriarchy, I believe that as long as women and men are not living in equal, egalitarian societies, we will not be able to achieve development.”155 When I asked Marlen Chow (MAM) why she in spite of the repeated threats she has received continue struggling she answered;

In my case it is a principle. Feminism is a philosophy in which I believe, and I believe that it is an energy that enable us to continue fighting. I have a lot of energy for this.156

The interviewed activists’ deep commitment to the issue, wanting to achieve social change, does hence provide an explanation for the movement’s survival. However, Bunnage argues that commitment is not enough to motivate activists to continue their engagement. Previous research has shown that feelings of powerlessness and ineffectiveness risk interfering with activists’ commitment, 157

150 Interview with Rosario Flores, lawyer, GEDAT
151 Interview with Luz Marina Torrez, founder and director of the March 8th Collective
152 Interview with Yamilet Mejia, political coordinator, MAM
153 Interview with Azahalea Solís, executive director, MAM
154 Interview with Magaly Quintana, leader, CDD
155 Interview with Luz Marina Torrez, founder and director of the March 8th Collective
156 Interview with Marlen Chow, political coordinator, MAM
resulting in “activist burnout”. Scholars differ in their conclusions of how important actual victories are for sustained activism but they do agree on the importance that activists’ feel that they are making some kind of difference.\textsuperscript{157} As affirmed by both Aleida María González Hernández and Rosa María Espinoza (Association Mary Barreda), the movement has continued their struggle during the almost 10 years since the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion although little change has been achieved.\textsuperscript{158}

Is there, in spite of this, a perceived efficacy that motivates the activists?

A majority of the respondents argue that they are unable to advocate for political change due to the current circumstances, and that the goal of a legalised abortion is almost impossible to reach.\textsuperscript{159} In spite of this, when I for instance asked Yamilet Mejía (MAM) what motivates her to keep fighting she provided an illustration of the shared perception of the importance of the movement answering: “The conviction that if we don’t do it nobody will”\textsuperscript{160} In a similar manner Luz Marina Torrez (March 8th Collective) argued the civil society organisations have to work to educate and change attitudes towards sexual and reproductive health and rights due to the lack of political will and effort. The state has, according to Torrez, never made an effort to educate about sexual health, contraceptives or sexual infections. The actors of the civil society therefore have handled these issues. The feeling of efficacy is explained in terms of having achieved change in the society with regards to sexual and reproductive health and rights. Torrez stated; ”It is a challenge that we have take, who will do it if not us, we have worked to change everything. We have to keep fighting.”\textsuperscript{161}

The activists, hence, demonstrate the belief that change cannot happen without them, even if achieving the goal of legalised abortion is perceived as extremely difficult. It is by some scholars argued that activists furthermore need a “victory along the way” in order to feel motivated enough to continue their activism and keep the movement alive.\textsuperscript{162} A few of the respondents highlighted the change that actually has been achieved in the past. Even if they acknowledged the situation of backlash, poverty, violence and the macho-culture that they struggle with in Nicaragua, Yamilet Mejía (MAM) and Sara Henriquez (Mujeral en acción), claimed that people’s mentalities and opinions are changing. Mejía explained how she finds motivation in the small steps forward that have been taken arguing that each woman who stands up for her rights is an achievement and makes it worth the fight;

\begin{quote}
The minds of the people are changing, slowly. We still have a long way to go. Things have changed in the sense that we today are teaching women that their freedom depends on their economic independence, and this would not have been possible 10 or 20 years ago. A tiny little step forward.\textsuperscript{163}
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{157} Bunnage 2014, pp. 435-437

\textsuperscript{158} Interviews with Aleida María González Hernández, legal advisor, Association Mary Barreda and Rosa María Espinoza, executive director, Association Mary Barreda

\textsuperscript{159} Bunnage 2014, p. 437

\textsuperscript{160} Interview with Yamilet Mejía, political coordinator, MAM

\textsuperscript{161} Interview with Luz Marina Torrez, founder and director of the March 8th Collective

\textsuperscript{162} Bunnage 2014, p. 437

\textsuperscript{163} Interview with Yamilet Mejía, political coordinator, MAM
Henriquez listed positive developments such as education for girls, the vote for women, women’s rights to paid work and to power positions, an increasing number of women deciding over their bodies, even if millions of women still do not. She argued: “Everything is not negative. If you look back in time you will notice that important change has been made, that motivates me.”

The victories that the women’s movement have had in Nicaragua are not the only ones mentioned as motivators for activism. An encouragement, mentioned by Rosario Flores (GEDAT), has been the success by the movements in Colombia and Mexico to restore the law permitting abortions.

In sum, it would seem that individual characteristics related to resources and biographical availability have enabled the women to continue their activism. However, it is the activists’ great commitment to the abortion issue that stands out as an important part of the explanation to the movement’s remobilisation after the defeat in 2006. Actual victories seem to be have a limited explanatory power, since victories are highlighted only by a few of the respondents and, furthermore, little positive change has been achieved during the last decade. Even though the goal of a legalised abortion is perceived as a remote one, the interviewed women demonstrate a feeling that change cannot happen without them. The perception of efficacy is hence limited but can possibly have served to mitigate the risk of “activist burnout”, contributing to sustained participation and the movement’s remobilisation.

5.3.2 Identity and interactions
According to Bunnage, collective identity and social networks are crucial for the development of sustained activism because it helps to ensure that individuals will continue to participate even when the costs of activism increase, out of a sense of loyalty to fellow political organisers. As in the studied case, where the rewards of activism seem few and the demands are high, the sense that “we are in it together” might fuel activists.

Collective identity and social networks
A collective identity is the shared sense of belonging to a group which is clearly demonstrated by the respondents. In general the interviewed women talked about themselves in terms of a “we”, referring to themselves as ”feminists”. Citations such as “it is up to us feminists”, “the fight is ours” and ”we do not deserve this” are illustrative.

164 Interview with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist Mujeral en Acción
165 Bunnage 2014, p. 438
166 Interview with Luz Marina Torrez, founder and director of the March 8th Collective
167 Interview with Reyna Isabel Rodriguez, coordinator, RMCV
168 Interview with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist, Mujeral en Acción
Evident in the narratives of the women, and important for activist retention according to Bunnage, was the expression of shared values and the feeling of not being alone. Ruth Marina Matamoros (Grupo Venancia), for instance, stated:

I am motivated by being a part of the women’s movement, by the feeling that I am not alone, that other women think like me, believing that the human rights we have achieved should not go lost.169

The collective identity of the respondents expands beyond national borders, many of them explained how they find strength in the fact that the struggle for sexual and reproductive health and rights is shared by all women. Sara Henriquez (Mujeral en acción), furthermore, expressed the feeling of being connected to other feminists across time; “The inheritance of the struggle of women through centuries around the world has contributed to the possibilities I have today. This inheritance has made me who I am.”170 Henriquez argued that her actions can benefit other women, that she viewed herself as a role model for other women who can follow in her footsteps, and stated that if we all strive to be good role models, this would automatically generate change.171

The majority of the respondents described how they become empowered by uniting with the other women in the movement. Ruth Marina Matamoros (Grupo Venancia) explained how she has found identification with regards to her experiences as a woman, within the movement. Matamoros provided support for Bunnage’s theory that stresses the importance of social networks in situations of backlash;172 “I have found friendship, I have found that we are rebels transgressing the system and it has given me energy.”173

It is hence evident that a collective identity and social network, provide motivation and emotional support, as Bunnage claims. However, it is in the theory argued that social networks not only work as beneficial for activist retention and the survival of a movement. Controversies and quarrels between friends are likely to develop which can result in activists leaving the movement. Since 2006 there have been ideological differences and power struggle between the Nicaraguan activists and different strategies in tackling the abortion issue (advocating for therapeutic abortion or legalised abortion) have been chosen.174175 This has however, according to the majority of the respondents, not caused people to leave the movement but rather to create their own space for activism or to join another. The Feminist Movement (MF) was for instance created in 2006 by some activists, previously members of the Autonomous Women’s Movement (MAM).176

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169 Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venancia
170 Interview with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist Mujeral en acción
171 Ibid.
172 Bunnage 2014, p. 439
173 Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venancia
174 Interview with Marlen Chow (MAM), Sara Henriquez grass-root activist, Mujeral en acción
175 Kampwirth 2008, pp. 127-128
176 Interview with Sara Henriquez, grass-root activist, Mujeral en acción
5.3.3 Organisational structures

The third and last mechanism of activist retention argued by Bunnage to enable remobilisation in situations of backlash and loss, relates to organisational characteristics of a movement. According to Bunnage, favourable for activist retention are non-hierarchical, loosely structured organisations with face-to-face settings since these create opportunities for consciousness raising that can solidify participant engagement. The fact that the actors within the Nicaraguan women’s movement regularly unite\textsuperscript{177} does, according to Bunnage, nourish commitment, it revives individual connections and keeps people linked to the movement’s networks. As previously mentioned, the majority of the respondents described how they become empowered, from meetings with the women in the movement.

On the other side, there has been changes in the movement’s structure, internal clashes and division as previously accounted for, this does, however, not seem to have discouraged sustained activism like Bunnage suggests.\textsuperscript{178} All of the respondents state that they stand united in the strive for the right to abortion, and that in days such as the International Women’s Day the march together, some with placards demanding a legalised abortion and others with demands of therapeutic abortions.\textsuperscript{179}

I interviewed women from different types of organisations, some of them bigger with a more hierarchical structure like the Autonomous Women’s Movement (MAM) and other smaller, more egalitarian groups within the Feminist Movement, all of which have remobilised. The 30-year-old activist Gabriela Ruiz explained how she had found it difficult get established within the women’s movement, be acknowledged and listened to, as a young feminist.\textsuperscript{180} However, the youth has created their own spaces within the movement and the hierarchical structure, with older women as leaders, does hence not seem to have hindered them from getting involved. As Reyna Isabel Rodriguez, among others, argued; ”The entering of young people during the last decade has contributed to strengthen the movement.”\textsuperscript{181}

It is plausible that the organisational structures, organised meetings among other things, have contributed to activist retention and the remobilisation of the movement. However, the structure of the organisations within the broad and diverse movement does not seem to be a central explanatory factor. As illustrated by the case of Gabriela Ruiz, feminists seem to find or create ways and forums to struggle for the right to abortion, regardless of the structure of the established organisations.

\textsuperscript{177} Interview with Yamilet Mejía, political coordinator, MAM and Patricia Orozco, coordinator, September 28 Campaign
\textsuperscript{178} Bunnage 2014, p. 440
\textsuperscript{179} Interview with Sara Henríquez, Mujer en Acción, and Magaly Quintana, CDD
\textsuperscript{180} Interview with Gabriela Ruiz, grass-root activist, MF
\textsuperscript{181} Interview with Reyna Isabel Rodriguez, coordinator, RMCV
6. Concluding discussion

The activists in the Nicaraguan women’s movement operate in a difficult environment. They have experienced a tremendous backlash within the abortion issue and continuously face negative political opportunities, repression and persecution. The activists’ framings of loss was explored in the first part of the analysis. Some of the defeat narratives included so called "sparks that incites outrage and deepens commitment", argued to be beneficial for a social movement’s likelihood of remobilisation. However, the defeat in 2006 was primarily described in descriptive or negative terms of cheating and betrayal, which is not likely to situate the movement for remobilisation, according to Beckwith.

In spite of the negative perceptions of the defeat the movement has remobilised, adapting to the current circumstances in different ways. The split in the movement, provoked by the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion, resulted in a different use of strategies in the continued work for the right to abortion. The Autonomous Women’s Movement (MAM) continue to demand the right to a legalised abortion, abortion by choice, while other parts of the movement has focused on advocating for therapeutic abortion. It is possible that the split has weakened the movement, as suggested by Beckwith, however, there is a shared idea within the movement that they will achieve more if they are united and they still unite to discuss potential strategies or to march for the right to abortion.182 Besides, it is possible that the use of different strategies will prove beneficial for the movement. MAM is allied with a new political party and has the possibility of posing demands of the inclusion of a feminist perspective in the political party’s agenda. The Strategic Group for the Decriminalisation of Therapeutic Abortion (GEDAT) has chosen a moderate and less confrontative position and has during the past 10 years managed to keep advocating (for the right to therapeutic abortion), presenting evidence of the current law’s consequences and suggestions of an alternative law to the National Assembly. The movement in general has continued to work locally to change attitudes and raise awareness for the necessity of, and right to, abortion. It is a long-term strategy aiming at constructing active and informed citizenship that will generate future change.

The movement has therefore continued to work actively for societal and political change, opposite to the expectations raised by their narratives of defeat. Almost ten years have passed since the defeat in 2006 which might have changed the activist’s narratives. It is possible that the respondents have become more negative in their perceptions of the defeat since time has passed without any significant positive change. However, Beckwith argues that activists in their defeat narratives are likely to become more optimistic about the past across time.183 Another possible reason to the limited explanatory ability of the theory could be that the actual narratives did not completely fit the categories provided by Beckwith. However, there are reasons to consider alternative explanations.

The fact that Beckwith’s theory is applied to the labour movement made me speculate on whether it would be applicable to a women’s movement. Can the perceptions of loss really be expected to affect

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182 Interview with Patricia Orozco, coordinator, September 28 Campaign
183 Beckwith 2015, p. 12
all types of movements in a similar way? Is not the character of the promoted issue likely to determine commitment and continued activism? I therefore developed the analysis by exploring the mechanisms of activist retention using the theory of Bunnage. Bunnage argues that motivators for sustained engagement relate to individual characteristics, identity, interactions, and organisational structure. It should be noted that in the theory by Beckwith the importance of collective identity, efficacy and ideology is highlighted, however, as connected to the interpretations of loss. Beckwith does for instance argue that a collective identity contributes to positive interpretations of a loss and that ideological elements may allow activists to frame defeats so that they are understandable and so that belief in the efficacy of the movement can be sustained until new political opportunities emerge. These factors were, however, not connected to the activists’ perceptions of defeat.

As demonstrated in the third part of the analysis, several of the mechanisms of activist retention are identifiable in the interviewed women’s general perceptions and experiences of their activism. An answer to the research question for this thesis; "How can we understand the remobilisation of the Nicaraguan women’s movement?”, seems to lie in the combination of individual and collective characteristics. As suggested by Bunnage, an interplay of various factors are likely to have contributed to the Nicaraguan activists’ sustained engagement, and the remobilisation of the movement through loss. Individual characteristics related to the activists’ own resources and biographical availability seem to provide a basis for their activism. However, most prominent was the great commitment demonstrated by the interviewed women. The activists argued for women’s sexual and reproductive health and rights, however, their commitment goes beyond an urge for change and social justice. Their engagement with the abortion issue is understood as natural, more than as a choice, since the alternative is perceived as impossible; to give up their right to life. The right to abortion is, with other words, not only defended as a principle important for gender equality but as a matter of life or death. Every day passing without the possibility of abortion directly implies tremendous suffering, even death, for girls and women. The feminist ideology evidently plays an important part and it connects to, and possibly also reinforces, the role of the collective identity. The collective, and ideological, identity as feminist women seems to be a great source of empowerment for the activists and, hence, a central mechanism of activist retention in the studied case.

Almost a decade has passed since the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion and little change has been achieved. There is therefore, as Bunnage argues, an apparent risk that feelings of powerlessness and ineffectiveness would discourage activists in their engagement with the issue. The majority of the respondents acknowledged their own importance for the cause, however, many of them were rather pessimistic about the future arguing that the goal of legalised abortion seems almost unreachable. The mechanism of efficacy does hence seem to provide an explanation, although a limited one, to the understanding of the remobilisation of the movement. Lastly, the analysis of the perceptions of the organisational structures gave ambiguous results and does not seem to be a central explanatory factor.

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184 Beckwith 2015, p. 5
Even if organised meetings within the movement seem to benefit activist retention, the changes within the movement and the somewhat hierarchical structures are likely to discourage sustained activism.

The nature of a women’s movement, the combination of shared identity and ideology, is hence likely to be key in the understanding of the Nicaraguan women’s movement remobilisation and provides an answer to the posed research question. The activists are motivated and empowered by shared experiences as feminist women. The identification and friendship within the movement provide support and encouragement contributing to the movement’s survival through loss. When I asked Ruth Marina Matamoros (Grupo Venancia) if the backlash have made women think that it is not worth it, she answered illustratively:

You know what? No. Nothing signals that the fact that abortion was criminalised has made women take a step back in their struggle. I think that one of the strengthening facts about the women’s movement is that the struggle does not depend on whether or not the Nicaraguan state agrees. It depends on our awareness of what is just and human. That we as women have the resources to save our lives, and by resources I do not solely mean legal resources but also a critical conscience, the capacity to identify the actual problem and I am talking about us as women knowing our rights and we have different ways of making resistance towards the aggressions we receive.\textsuperscript{185}

The repression, the shrinking political space and the lack of resources do hence not seem to discourage the respondents activism, nor do the negative understandings of defeat, the limited sense of efficacy or the changes within the movement’s structure. Reyna Isabel Rodriguez (RMCV) stated that the movement experience further backlash each and every day, but still she concluded that the struggle is permanent and will continue always.\textsuperscript{186}

6.1 Implications of the study and suggestions for future research

Social movements are crucial for an inclusive and democratic society and it is important to understand their sustainment in order to enable it. This study contributes to theoretical knowledge and provides empirical evidence, suggesting that Beckwith’s theory is inadequate when trying to understand the Nicaraguan women’s movement’s remobilisation efforts. It would seem that no matter of the negative prerequisites, or their perceptions of a devastating loss, the feminist activists will continue their struggle for the right to abortion. The results of this study points to the importance of both the issue promoted and the type of the movement and its activists, for a movement’s remobilisation in situations of backlash. It would be interesting to further investigate the significance of both the type of movement and the character or severity of the issue promoted. Are women’s movements more likely to prevail than other movements and are activists more likely to sustain their engagement in matters of life or death? Can the combination of collective identity and ideology be found in other types of movements and explain their retention? Do other mechanisms become more important in less homogenous and ideological movements or are these less likely to remobilise in situations of loss? Hopefully this thesis will inspire future research on the importance of the character of the movement, and the issues promoted, for a social movement’s survival though loss.

\textsuperscript{185} Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venancia  
\textsuperscript{186} Interview with Reyna Isabel Rodriguez, coordinator, RMCV
7. References

7.1 Literature


7.2 Internet sources


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Appendix I: Interview guides

1. Women’s organisations working with the abortion issue

Interview questions

• What is your name and position within the organisation?

• For how long have you worked with women’s rights? In the same organisation?

• Could you briefly tell me about the history of the organisation?

• Which questions are central for the organisation?

• What are your thoughts on the course of event that led up to the total ban on abortion? How was it possible?

• What is your organisation’s goal regarding the right to abortion?

• What were the demands before the reform/after? Have the demands changed?

• In your opinion; what are the reasons to why the law hasn’t been changed yet?

• What implications has the penalisation had for; your organisation, the movement, the relationship between state and society?

• What has happened since? Are there new actors in the movement? Who are the active ones (age, class etc.)?

• Have you changed your strategies? How do you lobby for political change?

• Who are your allies in civic society/National Assembly? (Are they the same as before?)

• Who are working against you in civic society/National Assembly? (Are they the same as before?)

• How would you say that your relationship with the state/FSLN is? Do you work with or against state? Has this changed?

• What are your views on your chances to influence politics? Have the these changed?

• How will you proceed with your work? Who do you target (the people/politicians/church)? Are these the same as before?

• What are your thoughts about the future for women and the struggle for the right to abortion in Nicaragua?
• It is a slow process, you meet and have met great resistance, what keeps you going?

• Is there anything else that you would like to add?

2. Other women’s organisations

Interview questions

• What is your name and position within the organisation?

• For how long have you worked with women’s rights? In the same organisation?

• What issues does your organisation work with?

• Which are the most central issues within the women’s movement? Have these changed since the reform 2006?

• What are your thoughts about the organisations lobbying for the right to abortion?

• Who are the central actors? Organisations/women?

• What are their demands? Several?

• Have the demands changed after 2006?

• Have they changed their way of activism? Or would you say that their strategies are the same as before?

• Would you say that they are more or less visible? Do they promote the same issues?

• Is there anything else that you would like to add?
Appendix II: Presentation of organisations

**Asociación Mary Barreda**
Aleida María González Hernández and Rosa María Espinoza work at the Association Mary Barreda in León. Mary Barreda was founded in 1989 and works with prevention of sexual exploitation and supports victims of sexual violence and commercial sexual exploitation. Asociación Mary Barreda is one of the 130 organisations within the Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV). 187

**Campaña 28 de septiembre**
Patricia Orozco is one of the coordinators of Campaña 28 de Septiembre - Día por la Despenalización del Aborto en América Latina y el Caribe (the September 28 Campaign - the day for the decriminalisation of abortion in Latin America and the Caribbean). The campaign was regional for over twenty years before being taken on by SRHR activists all over the world in 2011. The aim is to build an international movement to promote universal access to safe, legal abortion as a women’s health and human rights issue. The September 28 Campaign is one of the 130 organisations within the Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV). 188

**Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (CDD)**
Magaly Quintana is the leader for Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholics for the Right to Choose) which was created in 2006 within the context of the criminalisation of therapeutic abortion. The CDD recognises the church as diverse and not only consisting of the conservative hierarchy. When the Catholic hierarchy started its anti-abortion campaign in the early 2000s a large group of Catholic women recognised the necessity of presenting an alternative, Catholic, voice in the ideological struggle for the right to therapeutic abortion. Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir is one of the 130 organisations within the Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV). 189

**Colectivo de Mujeres 8 de Marzo**
Luz Marina Torrez is the founder and director of Colectivo de Mujeres 8 de Marzo (March 8th Women’s Collective), a women’s organisation located in Managua and Matagalpa. The collective offers health service and legal help for women who have been exposed to violence. The aim of the organisation is furthermore to promote active participation and organisation of women and teenagers, and to raise awareness about issues related to sexual and reproductive rights and gender violence. 190

The March 8th Women’s Collective is part of the Feminist Movement (MF) and the Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV).

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187 Interviews with Aleida María González Hernández and Rosa María Espinoza, Association Mary Barreda
188 Interview with Patricia Orozco, coordinator, the September 28 Campaign
189 Interview with Magaly Quintana, leader, CDD
190 Interview with Luz Marina Torrez, founder and director of the March 8th Women’s Collective
Grupo Estratégico por la Despenalización del Aborto Terapéutico (GEDAT)

Rosario Flores works as a lawyer within the GEDAT (the Strategic Group for Decriminalisation of Therapeutic Abortion). The group was created in 2006 and consists of individuals and organisations who work with issues related to sexual and reproductive rights, advocating for the restoration of therapeutic abortion. The group is a central actor, mainly consisting of women, and is therefore included in the study of the women’s movement’s struggle for the right to abortion. However, the group declares itself as separate and independent from the networks of women’s organisations.191

Grupo Venancia

Ruth Marina Matamoros is a grass-root activist within the "Grupo Venancia". Grupo Venancia is a feminist education collective based in Matagalpa in the north of Nicaragua, founded in 1991. The aim of the collective is to empower women and the women's movement. Grupo Venancia is one of the 130 organisations within the Women’s Network Against Violence (RMCV).192

Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (MAM)

Azahalea Solis, Marlen Chow and Yamilet Mejía are active within the MAM (the Autonomous Women’s Movement) which was founded in 1992 and is a social and political movement that demands equality, freedom and solidarity. The movement works on an international, national and local level for the establishment of rule of law and a democratic system in Nicaragua.

Movimiento Feminista (MF)

Sara Henriquez, Gabriela Ruiz and Luz Marina Matamoros are active within the MF (the Feminist Movement). The Feminist Movement was founded in 2006 by a group of women from MAM due to disagreements within the movement. The MF works for social, economic and political justice for men and women and consists of feminist organisations and groups based in different parts of the country.

Mujeral en Acción

Sara Henriquez is a grass-root activist within Mujeral en Acción, organised within the Feminist Movement (MF). Mujeral en Acción, located in León, is a space for feminist women aimed at promoting the human rights of women, preventing gender violence and providing support for women victims of violence.193

Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia (RMCV)

Reyna Isabel Rodriguez is the coordinator of the Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia (Women’s Network Against violence) which was founded in 1992. The network consists of 130 different groups from all over Nicaragua organised in order to promote campaigns on gendered violence.194

191 Interview with Rosario Flores, lawyer, GEDAT
192 Interview with Ruth Marina Matamoros, grass-root activist, Grupo Venancia
193 Interview with Sara Henriquez, Mujeral en Acción, MF
194 Interview with Reyna Isabel Rodriguez, coordinator, RMCV