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In *LGBTQ Politics in Nicaragua: Revolution, Dictatorship, and Social Movements,* political scientist Karen Kampwirth explores the social and political transformations of the LGBTQ community in Nicaragua before, during, and after the Sandinista revolution (1979-90). Building on a rich historiography spanning across different disciplines, Kampwirth argues that the political and social changes gained by the LGBTQ community in the 2010s were the result of long-term social and political developments. The administration of Daniel Ortega and Rosario Murillo (specifically between 2007 and 2017) incorporated positive LGBTQ policies to provide legitimacy to their regime and signal a modern image to the international community. Most significantly, *LGBTQ Politics in Nicaragua* is a book about exactly that: politics. This book addresses a gap in the historiography by incorporating LGBTQ people within the conversation of Nicaraguan politics.

In the introduction, Kampwirth clearly lays out the argument, terminology, historiography, methodology, sources, and structure of the piece. While she does use historically contingent terms to describe historical scenes, she uses LGBTQ (lesbian, gay, bisexual, trans, queer) as shorthand for discussing the sexual diverse community. Conceptualizing LGBTQ allows Kampwirth to incorporate the histories of individuals who did not come out until later in life or remained silenced but were very much a part of the movement.

The book's first chapter considers the contradictory and uneven treatment toward gay and lesbian people in Nicaragua before and during the revolution. Chapter 2 analyzes a handful of examples of gay and lesbian figures during the Sandinista revolution who shaped LGBTQ grassroots organizing after the war. She introduces the main founders of the Initial Group, the first group of gay and lesbian Sandinistas, and their unequal treatment by the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN). The FSLN viewed the Initial Group as dangerous to the revolution because they could not control it, forcibly disbanding the group in 1987 and punishing its leaders. Chapter 3 explores the
drastic change in LGBTQ policies immediately after the revolution (1990-2006). In 1992, the Women’s Commission of the National Assembly created Article 204, which penalized sodomy and banned abortion for any reason. Gay and lesbian activism at this time transitioned from HIV/AIDS education to LGBTQ rights advocacy.

Chapter 4 represents the core of evidence for Kampwirth’s argument, asking how and why Ortega’s 2006 FSLN party redefined itself against the Sandinistas of the revolution. The renewed party was portrayed as Christian, enacted anti-feminist legislation, and also strategically allied with LGBTQ groups. Labeling this period the “LGBTQ boom” (2007-17), Kampwirth breaks down this section year by year, cataloging the numerous LGBTQ organizations, their founders, and a brief history of each group. Ortega’s new FSLN outlawed therapeutic abortion (a tenet of Nicaraguan feminist activism) but restored civil liberties to the LGBTQ community. The fifth chapter examines the reasons for the LGBTQ boom: President Ortega ratified a new penal code and rebranded the relationship between FSLN and LGBTQ communities, more NGO funding was available for LGBTQ groups, and Zoilamérica Ortega Murillo emerged as a highly visible advocate. The stepdaughter of Ortega, Zoilamérica fell out with her parents after publicly announcing her continual sexual assault by Ortega. This tense family dynamic drove Ortega’s efforts to repress Zoilamérica’s LGBTQ-supporting organization, Centro de Estudios Internacionales (CEI), and instead build alliances with other LGBTQ groups. Kampwirth argues that the Ortega regime turned away from the autonomous feminist movement in the mid-2000s as part of the “pink tide” and the feminist support of Zoilamérica. Ortega saw his former FSLN comrades focus on autonomous feminism as a sign of disloyalty to the party. The seemingly contradictory moves by Ortega (ban on abortion alongside ending anti-sodomy laws) were actually complementary as they undermined the feminists: taking away bodily autonomy (key feminist interest) and separating them from “their natural allies in the LGBTQ community” (p. 176).

The book’s conclusion opens with a broader discussion of global comparative politics and recent backlash of LGBTQ rights and visibility. Kampwirth retells how the Ortega-Murillo regime consolidated power since resuming the presidency in 2006 through using clientelism, supporting the Catholic Church, and allying with LGBTQ groups to gain legitimacy and weaken feminist alliances. The epilogue examines the 2018 protests over social security reforms and considers why the Ortega-Murillo regime violently put down protestors, targeting LGBTQ people in particular. Despite the disheartening moment in Nicaragua, Kampwirth attempts to end on a more hopeful note, stating, “those memories have not been erased, and a new, even stronger, version of the movement will return one of these days, as it always does” (p. 290).

To be certain, Kampwirth is not the first to write about LGBTQ communities in Nicaragua. While scholars of sexuality, feminism, and gay and lesbian rights in Latin America and the United States inform her work, she directly engages with Emily Hobson’s Lavender and Red: Liberation and Solidarity in the Gay and Lesbian Left (2016), which examines transnational socialist and gay and lesbian activism between the Bay Area and Nicaragua. Kampwirth offers a new way to understand politics in Nicaragua, one that does not erase or ignore the role of LGBTQ people. Importantly, Kampwirth acknowledges that one limitation of her work is the overrepresentation of Managua, a trend often seen in Nicaraguan scholarship. The same can be said of urban centric scholarship of LGBTQ communities elsewhere in the world.

In two years of fieldwork between 1988 and 2017, Kampwirth conducted over 120 interviews and attended historically significant LGBTQ events. Her sources also include news articles, activist websites, and digital correspondence. LGBTQ Politics in Nicaragua makes two important meth-
odological moves. The first considers the role of collaboration. This work is half of a cooperative project with historian Victoria González-Rivera covering over five hundred years of LGBTQ history. The second move is that of translation and citational politics. Writing first for a Nicaraguan and Latin American audience illustrates an important consideration in researching Latin America: who is the intended audience? For Kampwirth and González-Rivera, it is important to write about Nicaragua for Nicaraguans. The English translation is clearly written for a North American audience. One example can be seen in her comparison of the process of coming out in the US versus a culture of “sexual silence” in Nicaragua (p. 23). Nevertheless, Kampwirth masterfully blends scholarship from Latin America and the US, a sight not often seen so organically. The first version of this book originated as a longer piece coedited with González-Rivera, titled Diversidad Sexual en el Pacífico y Centro de Nicaragua: 500 Años de Historia (2021).

This meticulously researched piece is not without imperfections. An implicit argument throughout the text is the significance of the Initial Group, its members, and their interactions with Sandinista politics. Members of the Initial Group, after being forcibly disbanded by the FSLN during the revolution, later formed other autonomous LGBTQ organizations in the postwar period. Clarification of the significance of this group earlier in the book would have strengthened the overarching argument that LGBTQ political changes were the result of long-term processes.

Ultimately, Kampwirth weaves together the words and stories of LGBTQ people into a broad narrative of LGBTQ experience in late twentieth- and early twenty-first-century Nicaragua. She highlights the role of international travel and solidarity in shaping LGBTQ people and their relations with the revolution, while consistently providing the much-needed perspective of Nicaraguan LGBTQ peoples.

Overall, this book is a necessary read for scholars of the relationship between LGBTQ communities and politics, the Latin American “pink tide,” oral histories, and Central America. Kampwirth’s thorough analysis of post-2006 Nicaragua clarifies the current political moment in the country, and a sociopolitical understanding of the Sandinista party is important now more than ever.
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