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Derek Comba

*University of Nebraska at Kearney*

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# **Women's Involvement in the Sandinistas and the FARC**

*Derek Comba*

Historically, women have been constantly excluded from combat in war except in times of dire need. Even today women are not allowed in the overwhelming majority of armies from around the world, and the ones that do allow women do not allow them on the front lines. Women have always been seen as not capable of war or as not needing to fight since the men can fight for them. Yet, time and time again it appears that guerrilla, insurgent, and terrorist groups have let women into their ranks. While large numbers of women fought in both the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) and Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia—People's Army (FARC) in order to better their lives, it appears that women in the Sandinistas were generally treated better both within the guerilla movement, and more importantly, in civilian society than were those in the FARC. This difference seems to be related to differences in women's motivation for joining the movement. While women in Nicaragua joined for the sole purpose of improving their position in society and increasing gender and social equality, women in Colombia joined for a wide variety of individual reasons, some of which were positive, like improving their position in society, but most were negative, like avoiding economic and physical hardship, violence, or even being forced to join. Under these circumstances, women were in a far weaker position to complain or fight back when faced with conditions of inequality and oppression within the movement.

Currently there is a lot of information regarding the Sandinistas and what they did for Nicaragua. The Sandinistas have been around for a long time and have always made the public aware of what they did during the height of their popularity. They were very well known internationally and it was also well known what kinds of policies they implemented and improvements they made in Nicaragua. Hence, there is already a good amount of literature written about the Sandinistas considering they did not try to hide anything. The FARC is a different story. The FARC has always tried to keep a low profile beside the many terroristic acts they have committed. They do not share any information with outsiders and members are not allowed to leave the group. Because of this seclusion from the outside world, there is not nearly as much written or known about the FARC as there is about the Sandinistas.

In 1978, a violent revolution broke out in Nicaragua and a new ruling party came to be, the Sandinistas. The Sandinistas ousted the then dictator Anastasio Somoza De Bayle and the whole Somoza family, which had been ruling Nicaragua since 1896. The Sandinistas were already well known and popular throughout Nicaragua well before the revolution having already done so much for the country and the people. Because of this popularity they were easily able to take over due to overwhelming support. They were able to garner this popularity and support due to their policies of including every member of society regardless of race, education, and most importantly wealth. The Sandinistas had always tried to include more women into Nicaraguan life from the first day of their founding. Even after they took power, they continued to include

women in politics, education, health care, and basically every other area they were discriminated in under the Somoza dictatorship. The Sandinistas no longer hold power in Nicaragua but they are still a major political party and still fight tirelessly to better the lives of all.

The FARC is another militant group based in Colombia. The FARC has adopted a different approach than their counterparts, the Sandinistas. Although the Sandinistas did partake in violent activities, such as the revolution, the FARC has frequently involved themselves in violent activities, often being referred to as a guerilla or terrorist group. The FARC was first founded in 1964 and is still very active today. While they have large numbers of participants, the FARC has not been able to gain any real power in Colombia. They have mostly engaged in terrorist actions. They hold no official standing in the government whatsoever but do carry a large following. They are located mainly in the Southeast of Colombia and have around 6,000-8,000 members, the real number being unknown. The FARC is a very closed off organization and does not have much contact with nonmembers. Once you are a member you are a member for life. At their height, they had twice their current numbers, and just like the Sandinistas, females comprise a large amount of those soldiers. It seems, though, that most women are coerced into joining or often forced. The FARC has also done little to further women in regards to civil rights.

When it comes to literature in regards to women in combat and their participation in the military, there is a good amount of information already written on that subject. One author who has researched this subject extensively and published numerous books about it is Cynthia Enloe. Quite possibly her most useful and interesting book is *Maneuvers*, which deals with the militarization of women and how women have been treated in times of war. Another great article is in "Women in Warfare in the Twentieth Century" by Barbara Alpern Engel. This article touches on the important roles women played in World War II, mainly in the Soviet Union. This was one of the first times in history in which "Women played a role unprecedented in modern warfare during the four terrible years that the Soviets fought in World War II."<sup>1</sup> Finally, *War and gender: how gender shapes the war system and vice versa* by Joshua Goldstein, touches on almost everything there is to know about why women have been excluded from war, all the way from historical aspects to the modern day, and even the biology behind it. There are many more articles and books out there that deal with the subject of women in war but these three contain some of the best information.

Even today women are grossly underrepresented in militaries all over the world. About 23 million soldiers serve in today's standing uniformed armies, of whom 97 percent are male.<sup>2</sup> Even if a woman is allowed to participate in an army, she is often not allowed in combat. Designated combat forces in the world's state armies today include several million soldiers, of

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<sup>1</sup> Engel, Barbara Alpern. "The Womanly Face of War Soviet Women Remember World War II." In *Women and War in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Routledge, 2004.

<sup>2</sup> Goldstein, Joshua S.. *War and gender: how gender shapes the war system and vice versa*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001.

whom 99.9 percent are male.<sup>3</sup> It is obvious that women are universally excluded, they have been since the beginning of warfare. Women have tried to participate in combat but have been consistently denied entry into the front lines. But traditions break down fast during times of war, and history is full of examples where women assumed dramatic new roles that never would have been possible in times of peace.<sup>4</sup> There are many exceptions to women's exclusion from warfare all around the world, mainly in insurgent groups. Left-wing groups are more likely to allow women to fight and take on operational roles as a reflection of societies' expectations of women in general.<sup>5</sup> As a result, many women have joined and been successful in left-wing guerrilla armies, all for various reasons.

When it comes to understanding why women join guerrilla groups, there is not just one single factor that motivates them. While it is true that some women are coerced into joining, that only seems to be a small portion of the women who do join. According to Mia Bloom, there are five main reasons why females resort to acts of terrorism and suicide bombings: revenge, redemption, relationship, respect, and rape.<sup>6</sup> In addition to women joining themselves, the guerrilla groups also seek them out for various reasons. One of the biggest reasons they are sought out is that they are held up as an example to goad males into joining with or increasing their participation in terrorist movements.<sup>7</sup> All of these examples can be applied to women in both the Sandinistas and The FARC.

However many say that women have been and will always be left out of combat and that armies will do anything to keep women out of the ranks. According to Enloe there are several methods militaries have used to get men to join besides recruiting women. Some of these strategies include contracting out military missions to civilian public and private agencies, hiring foreign male mercenaries, and kidnaping boy children.<sup>8</sup> Even when women are part of an army, whether it be of a guerilla group or state army, they are not there to actually help but instead to fill another roll not related to combat. One of these roles is to be there sexually for the soldier. One popular opinion among British officials was that marriage—an institution arranged so that wives would provide material, spiritual, and sexual services to husbands—would make the military's men less indebted, more reliable, and less prone to disease.<sup>9</sup> Although this may have been the case for certain armies this was definitely not the case when it came to women in both the FARC and the Sandinistas.

It has even been said that no one's life was improved thanks to either of these groups. From the first days of the founding of the Sandinistas, women have always been included, being

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<sup>3</sup> Goldstein, War and Gender, 10

<sup>4</sup> Myre, Greg . NPR, "A Brief History of Women in Combat." Last modified 01 25, 2013. Accessed April 8, 2014.

<sup>5</sup> Cragin , Kim, and Sara A. Daly. "Women As Terrorists : Mothers, Recruiters, and Martyrs." Santa Barbara: Praeger Security International, 2009.

<sup>6</sup>Bloom, Mia. "Bombshell: the many faces of women terrorists." London: Hurst, 2011.

<sup>7</sup> Messer, Andrea, and Matt Swayne . "'BOMBHELL' EXPLODES MYTHS OF FEMALE TERRORIST MOTIVATION." States News Service, February 21, 2011.

<sup>8</sup>Enloe, Cynthia H.. "Maneuvers the international politics of militarizing women's lives." Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2000.

<sup>9</sup> Enloe, Maneuvers, 155

seen as a valuable resource since they were one of the most underrepresented groups in all of Nicaragua. As early as 1969, the FSLN tried to organize women in the revolution, but there were problems at the beginning and these early efforts failed.<sup>10</sup> Despite the failure of their initial efforts, the Sandinistas continued to recruit women, and little by little, women started to join. So many women started to join that the international community soon caught wind. Outside observers watched intently in the 1970's as Nicaragua's rebel Sandinista movement became a magnet for discontented women.<sup>11</sup> The Sandinistas became so popular among women that they soon contained more women than any army in the world. By the end of the insurgency, the Sandinista army has been 30 percent female.<sup>12</sup> The genuine inclusion of females into the Sandinistas contributed greatly to their success because Nicaraguans from all over could see that the Sandinistas were truly striving for equality in all facets of life.

In addition to being able to join, women were actually allowed to participate in combat and received proper training for it at the camps. Participation was open to anyone, and not solely Nicaraguans. An anonymous Honduran woman who joined noted that "A woman in the camp was not really unusual, there were a lot of Nicaraguan women who worked in the camps and were given military training."<sup>13</sup> This was something that was unheard of, instructing a woman how to fight. But once again the Sandinistas did not stop there. On December 24, 1974, a Sandinista commando unit of thirteen guerrilla fighters, three of whom were women, took hostage the guests of a diplomatic party held by the American ambassador.<sup>14</sup> This was one of the Sandinistas first well known and more important acts of violence because it made their organization known to Nicaragua and the world. The fact that they chose women to help them further demonstrated that they were serious when it came to including women in their struggle.

The Sandinistas did not take power in Nicaragua until 1979 but by this time women were almost as important in the movement as men. The Sandinistas waged war against the Somoza Dictatorship in order to control Nicaragua. Both men and women played an active role in this overthrow and both held very important positions. By the time of the Somoza dictatorship had been ousted, several women had risen to the rank of Commander.<sup>15</sup> It was apparent that women played a very important role in the Sandinista army. While it was unusual for women to play such an important and powerful role in a national army, it was not all that unusual in other guerrilla groups.

Just like the Sandinistas, the FARC has always actively sought out women for its insurgency. The FARC shares a similar history with the Sandinistas when it comes to women

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<sup>10</sup>Bolaños, Lorde, Dr. Mayra, Monterrey, Glenda, Pineda, Amanda. Nicaragua a New Kind of Revolution. Compiled by Zwerling, Philip, and Connie Martin . Nicaragua a New Kind of Revolution. Westport: Lawrence Hill and Company, Publishers, Inc. , 1985.

<sup>11</sup> Enloe, Maneuvers, 251

<sup>12</sup>Collinson, Helen. Women and the Revolution in Nicaragua. Atlantic Highlands: N.J. Zed Books, 154-61

<sup>13</sup>Eich, Dieter, and Carlos Rincon. The Contras Interviews With Anti-Sandinistas. 1st ed. San Francisco : Synthesis Publications, 1984. Print.

<sup>14</sup>Isbester, Katherine. Still Fighting The Nicaraguan Women's Movement, 1977-2000. Pittsburgh : University of Pittsburgh Press, 2001.

<sup>15</sup> Isbester, Still Fighting, 21

and recruitment. Since its founding, the FARC has constantly been recruiting women and relying on their support. Women are key to the insurgency because they are estimated to make up between 30 and 35 percent of it.<sup>16</sup> This is an extremely high amount of women who participate in combat, so much so that the FARC cannot operate without them. If women were to desert en masse, it would be disastrous for the FARC.<sup>17</sup> In the FARC's short history, women have been able to establish themselves as an integral parts of the armed conflict, although their participation may not be as genuine as it was in the Sandinista's.

The FARC has even gone as far as exploiting the many troubles young Colombian girls face in order to recruit them. The FARC is believed to have a gender-specific recruitment technique that relies on seducing young girls to motivate them to join their ranks.<sup>18</sup> The FARC has been able to acknowledge that many women were not specifically looking to improve their economic situation in Colombia at all but instead to run away from pre-existing problems and hopefully find a place where they could feel safe. According to Kimberly Theidon "individuals who join the FARC did not do so for economic reasons, while individuals who joined the paramilitaries, such as the Sandinistas, did acknowledge it was for economic benefits."<sup>19</sup> The FARC has been excellent at persuading women to join because they are more than aware of the most common reasons that women are compelled to join. The FARC has even gone as far as forgoing traditional recruiting techniques and has often forced women into joining

Throughout its history, the FARC has been able to attract many women and these women have been able to work their way through the ranks. Yet, while women have reached the rank of commanders, they have failed to reach the top.<sup>20</sup> Despite the fact that women have not reached the top levels of command, the majority still believe they are equal to men whether or not they are in rank. According to official FARC policy, women in the organization are free and cannot be discriminated against, and women and men have the same rights and duties; this official policy was confirmed in interviews with the FARC commanders, such as with Liliana López, alias Olga Lucia Marín,<sup>21</sup> but interestingly enough, it is not written anywhere in official FARC documents. This alleged policy of equality within the organization has seemed to give women that extra boost to be strong leaders and has even won some notoriety.

Women in the FARC have become so powerful that some are now a menacing threat to Colombia. Elda Neyis Mosquera, alias "Karina," had an \$800,000 bounty on her head by the

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<sup>16</sup> Drost, Nadja. "To win the war, Colombia needs female fighters to lay down their arms." *Global Post*, , sec. Americas, 06 01, 2011.

<sup>17</sup> Drost, To Win the War

<sup>18</sup> Méndez, Andrea. "Militarized Gender Performativity: Women and Demobilization in Colombia's FARC and AUC" PhD diss., Queen's University, 2012.

<sup>19</sup> Theidon, Kimberly. "Transitional Subjects? The Disarmament, Demobilization and Reintegration of Former Combatants in Colombia." *International Journal Of Transitional Justice*, 2007, pg. 66.

<sup>20</sup> Kunz, Rahel, and Ann-Kristin Sjorberg. "Empowered or Oppressed? Female Combatants in the Colombian Guerrilla: The Case of the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia - FARC." working paper, 2009.

<sup>21</sup> Kunz, Empowered or Oppressed, 18

time of her capture.<sup>22</sup> These high priced bounties have been going on since the FARC's founding and FARC women have been known to be just as menacing and intimidating as men. In the eyes of the Colombian government it is just as important to pursue women as it is men. They have garnered this reputation thanks to the brutal publicized acts that they have committed. For example, while "Karina" was at large, she commanded 350 soldiers and was wanted on charges of extortion, kidnapping, and involvement in a string of massacres.<sup>23</sup> "Karina" was a very powerful and threatening figure in the FARC but, interestingly enough, there were even more powerful women in the FARC.

Even though the FARC is based in Colombia one of the FARC's most famous woman members was not even a Colombian at all. Perhaps the FARC's most famous woman member is Tanja Nimeijer, a Dutch national who joined the Marxist insurgency after becoming disenchanted with capitalism during her travels in Colombia.<sup>24</sup> The FARC's ideology when it came to women in their ranks was so far reaching that they were able to recruit non Colombians. Many people took notice of Nimeijer's participation and looked to her as an example. Nimeijer's story has fascinated observers worldwide, and she has used her celebrity to promote the FARC's doctrine of social justice and class equality.<sup>25</sup> All of these examples show that it is an undeniable fact that women have and still do have important roles in the ranks of the FARC.

All of these stories of women and success in the FARC seem to paint a picture of equality and a better life, but many FARC women would soon come to find out that their great new life was nothing but a mirage. Even the FARC's most famous female soldier, Nimeijer, soon started to have her doubts. In 2007, a raid uncovered her personal diaries, revealing deep reservations and frustrations with the guerrillas' leadership. Nimeijer's grievances included the prevalence of sexist machista attitudes among her fellow soldiers.<sup>26</sup> It seems that in the FARC might not be the egalitarian society many had imagined. Saddest of all is the fact that FARC women have not been able to retain these important positions of power when they return to civilian life, as did the Sandinista women.

When it comes to participation of women, both the Sandinistas and the FARC have demonstrated time and time again that women are necessary and important to their success. However, women have not been treated the same way in both the groups. It seems that the reasons women are recruited determine how she will be treated both in the group and in society following the conflict. Quite often, recruiting women to fight has not been seen as a step towards equality but for far more utilitarian purposes. For instance, some organizations recruit women for the simple reason that manpower is needed, and others use women as a means to shame men into

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<sup>22</sup>Combs, Cameron. "Colombia's FARC Rebels Say They Support Women, But the Truth is Much More Sinister." PolicyMic.

<sup>23</sup> Combs, Colombia's FARC

<sup>24</sup> Combs, Colombia's FARC

<sup>25</sup> Combs, Colombia's FARC

<sup>26</sup> Combs, Colombia's FARC

participating.<sup>27</sup> If this is the case, then women often stay in the same lowly roles that they always have. But if women are recruited as an underrepresented group ready for social change, then it seems that they are able to accomplish that change regardless of the roles they played in their guerilla groups. Worst and most telling of all is if women are forced in joining and fighting, as in the case of the FARC, then they will most likely be treated even worse than they were before joining.

Under the Somoza dictatorship, Nicaraguan women lived terrible lives and had little freedom. Until the 1960s, the roles available to Nicaraguan women were typical for a poor Latin American nation: poor women both worked outside the home and raised their children-- frequently with heart rendering suffering.<sup>28</sup> This harsh way of life was typical for women whether they lived in the city or the countryside. Estabana Manjarreth Montoya, who was born in 1922 to a poor peasant family, grew up in a one-room house made of sticks and mud. She, her nine brothers and sisters and her father were all illiterate.<sup>29</sup> These awful living conditions are what lead many women to join the Sandinistas, and the Sandinistas to recruit them. The Sandinistas knew that if they made a genuine effort to recruit women, that it would improve their military efforts but would also help the country as a whole, and women saw the Sandinistas as a way to garner more equality and power within Nicaragua.

Seeing that conditions were only getting worse before the Sandinistas took over in 1979, women flocked to join knowing they could make a difference for once. During this time, women were active in the neighborhoods organizing demonstrations, meetings, and petitions for the release of political prisoners who were being tortured and murdered in Somoza's jails.<sup>30</sup> They crusaded for better lives in almost every aspect of life prior to taking arms. It became obvious that an organization of women was necessary to unite this work and, in 1977, Association of Nicaraguan Women Confronting the Nation's Problems (AMPRONOC) was founded.<sup>31</sup> The Sandinistas knew that they had to include everyone oppressed under the Somoza dictatorship, including women from every walk of life. AMPRONOC united bourgeois and peasant women in many Nicaraguan towns and cities to struggle together.<sup>32</sup> This total inclusion of women helped the Sandinistas in the long run and is what made women important after the revolution.

Even after the war, the Sandinistas kept their word and continued to support women. In an attempt to attract legitimacy and support, the Sandinistas targeted marginally represented groups; women made up one such group.<sup>33</sup> One way the Sandinistas made sure that women were fairly represented was to put it into law. Article 30 declared all persons equal before the law and

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<sup>27</sup> Goldman, Samantha. "START: National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism, Leading Terrorism Expert Discusses Mobilization of Women into Terrorist Networks." Last modified 01 30, 2012. Accessed April 8.

<sup>28</sup> Isbester, Still Fighting, 23

<sup>29</sup> Isbester, Still Fighting, 25

<sup>30</sup> Bolaños, Nicaragua, 90

<sup>31</sup> Bolaños, Nicaragua, 90

<sup>32</sup> Bolaños, Nicaragua, 90

<sup>33</sup> Isbester, Still Fighting, 45

barred discrimination on the basis of birth, race, color, sex, religion, language, opinions, origins, economic status, or any other social condition.<sup>34</sup> Unfortunately, women in other guerrilla groups were not treated as well and were not able to make strides for women's rights outside of their respective guerrilla groups.

This is just the case in the FARC, where women have simply been joining for all the wrong reasons. Unlike in the Sandinistas, FARC women have not been joining to better their lives or to gain equality. Most of the time women join the FARC so they can run away from something. Some fear that the FARC's recruitment of women — particularly young girls — is on the rise because they are an easy target for a rebel group desperate to replace members lost to desertion and combat.<sup>35</sup> This lack of male soldiers may also be what allows for women to take up those powerful positions in leadership. Women have also been used by FARC as a means of shaming men into participating,<sup>36</sup> the FARC knows that men might be more apt to join if they see more women joining. In addition to FARC members recruiting women for underhanded reasons, women have also been misguided when it comes to joining, thinking that it is for the better.

The vast majority of women who join these guerrilla groups like the FARC, do so for reasons that are specific to women. Gender-specific motivations for joining an armed group can also include sexual abuse suffered at home, or workloads and household tasks that force girls to take responsibilities they are not prepared to handle.<sup>37</sup> Many FARC women experienced sexual violence and, as a result, flocked to the FARC for support and safety. In the FARC, women entered under the impression that they would find a safe haven from whatever they experienced at home and be treated with more respect, if not equal. While they did find support to a certain degree, they were still discriminated against for being women.

To the FARC, the conflicts were no place for children. FARC women who had children, whether before or after they joined the struggle, had to find care for them.<sup>38</sup> Women were not given any special treatments for being female because, according to FARC ideology, "guerrillas are like angels, they have no gender."<sup>39</sup> This ideology, minus the forced abandonment of their children, may sound like men and women are treated exactly the same even despite biological differences. Women were expected to do the same amount of physical work as men no matter the difference in size or strength. Despite the fact that women are treated the same when it comes to running the organization, this is not the case when it comes to finding ways to get women to join.

In addition to the many women who join to escape their home life, there are also women who are forced to join or are even kidnapped. According to one young lady, Tatiana Sinisterra,

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<sup>34</sup> Isbester, *Still Fighting*, 23

<sup>35</sup> Drost, *To Win the War*

<sup>36</sup> Goldman, *START*

<sup>37</sup> Méndez, *Militarized Gender Performativity*

<sup>38</sup> Cook, Bernard A. "Women and Political Violence in Colombia ." In *Women and war a historical encyclopedia from antiquity to the present*. Santa Barbara, Calif.: ABC-CLIO, 2006.

<sup>39</sup> Cook, *Women and Political Violence*, 127

she had no choice when it came to joining. One night, when she was returning from a party on a bus, men stopped the bus and ordered her and her three colleagues to come with them. Sinisterra originally had no intentions of joining the FARC but was instead forced to join. According to Sinisterra, "We got into the truck and that was the beginning of the FARC."<sup>40</sup> Stories like this one are very common all around Colombia; it is one of the only ways they can fill ranks. For decades, the FARC has recruited thousands of child soldiers, and many of them are girls.<sup>41</sup> Once in the FARC, these women and young girls are often exploited within the ranks. In all reality, there are very few opportunities to a FARC woman to improve her life after joining.

One of the only options left for a woman who joins FARC is to leave. This can be punishable by death if she is caught trying to escape but, if successful, there are a few programs in Colombia to help her readjust to civilian life. One program that is available to women is called *Mujer a Mujer* — Woman to Woman — which persuades female fighters to leave the rebel group.<sup>42</sup> This organization is not affiliated with the Colombian government and therefore unfortunately has not carried much weight. There are signs of hope in ongoing peace talks taking place in Havana, Cuba, between the FARC (Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia) and the Colombian government, but "women are noticeably absent from the peace process: neither the issues crucial to them nor their claims or proposals for peace are being listened to."<sup>43</sup> The lack of female participation goes back to how the FARC treats women and how Colombian society ostracizes women who join.

It is obvious that Sandinista women were treated much better than FARC women and joined wanting to make a real difference, unlike the FARC women. But they do have one thing in common when it comes to how they were treated. It seems that there was sexual abuse towards women in both the Sandinistas and the FARC. In both the Sandinistas and the FARC, some women were used solely as girlfriends, wives, or concubines to their male counterparts. This practice was not so wide spread in the Sandinistas as it was in the FARC. According to Sinisterra, a member of the FARC, "young female rebels enter into relationships, by varying degree of will, with senior commanders to receive preferential treatment and lighter workloads. It's like prostitution without money."<sup>44</sup> While this does sound like they have some say in their relationships, it can get very dangerous for those women. According to one FARC woman named Laura, "If two men fight over a woman or if she is causing trouble, and if the trouble she is causing is considered serious, they just kill her to solve the problem."<sup>45</sup> Although sexual violence was present in both groups, it was much more of a practice in the FARC.

The FARC and the Sandinistas are just two examples of the dozens of left-wing paramilitary groups from around the world that have allowed women to fight alongside of men.

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<sup>40</sup> Drost, *To Win the War*

<sup>41</sup> Combs, *Colombia's FARC*

<sup>42</sup> Drost, *To Win the War*

<sup>43</sup> Lully . "No habrá paz sin las mujeres Colombia." Accessed April 24, 2014.

<sup>44</sup> Drost, *To Win the War*

<sup>45</sup> Laura (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 3, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia. Laura (combatant, the FARC), interview and translation by author, August 3, 2010, Bogotá, Colombia.

All over the world, guerrilla and paramilitary groups have allowed women into their ranks and have even allowed them to participate in combat. It seems that all guerrilla and paramilitary groups are more egalitarian than traditional national standing armies, some even being headed and founded by women, such as the Japanese Red Army. While there are many groups that have included women every single one has a story different than those of the Sandinistas and the FARC.

While these two groups are extremely unique, both can be used as examples of what might happen to women if they join a group like the FARC or the Sandinistas. By comparing women's roles in the Sandinistas to those of the FARC, we can see three things. When a woman decides to join, she must join with the intent of helping her fellow women and country, obtaining more freedoms and rights, as in the Sandinistas, and not to escape problems as in the FARC. She must not be abused sexually or physically while she is in the group fighting, as in the case of the FARC, but she must instead be treated honestly and with the same rights as men, as in the Sandinistas. Finally she must be an integral part of life in her respective country outside of her paramilitary group, as in the Sandinistas, and not left out of positions of power or importance, as in the FARC.

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