

**GLOBAL FEMINISMS
COMPARATIVE CASE STUDIES OF
WOMEN'S ACTIVISM AND SCHOLARSHIP**

SITE: NICARAGUA

**Transcript of Matilde Lindo
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Matilde Lindo, born in 1954, is a feminist leader, teacher, sociologist and activist who focuses on issues of violence and discrimination against women, and racial discrimination within Nicaragua. She was born in Puerto Cabezas, but grew up in the Rosita Mines settlement, both on the Caribbean coast. She is a proud representative of the black population from the region and is one of the most prominent activists representing women from the Atlantic Coast. After joining the women's movement she helped to start a radio program that aimed to raise awareness about violence against women as a violation of women's rights. She has been involved with a number of efforts to end violence against women at the local, state, and international levels. She is currently a leader in the Network of Women Against Violence.

Shelly Grabe is an Assistant Professor in Social Psychology, Feminist Studies, and Latino and Latin American Studies at the University of California, Santa Cruz. Shelly received her degree in clinical psychology with a minor in quantitative statistical methods. After completing her doctorate, she switched course and became a community organizer in Madison, WI involved primarily with CODEPINK and the then Wisconsin Coordinating Council on Nicaragua (WCCN). Through solidarity relationships with the women's social movement in Nicaragua (Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres), Grabe became learned in women of Color and "Third World" feminisms from a grassroots, decolonial perspective. She has since coupled her interest in structural inequities, gender, and globalization with her academic training to work with transnational women's social organizations in Nicaragua and Tanzania. As a scholar-activist, Shelly partners with women's organizations to test new areas of inquiry that can support positive social change for women. She joined the UCSC faculty in 2008 after a Visiting Position in the Department of Gender and Women's Studies at the University of Wisconsin, Madison. In California Shelly has partnered with the Santa Cruz County Women's Commission on efforts to ratify a local draft of the Convention on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW) and the Walnut Avenue Women's Center to support youth outreach surrounding sexuality and violence against girls and women.

Julia Baumgartner holds a degree in Spanish and Sociology from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. She works as coordinator of Farmer Relations and Delegations for Just Coffee Cooperative in Madison, WI and is currently living in Nicaragua coordinating a project with Fundación Entre Mujeres, a feminist organization working for the empowerment of rural women in northern Nicaragua.

Interview with Matilde Lindo



[00:03]

Childhood, Family, Race, Religion, Work, Education, Motherhood

Shelly Grabe: Thank you for agreeing to participate in the Global Feminisms Project, Matilde. So, we're going to spend about an hour and a half talking and I'm going to start by asking you questions about your own personal history and then we'll move towards some of the work you've been doing, and talk a little bit about the work you've been doing more recently. Does that sound ok?

Matilde Lindo: That's okay. Thank you.

Grabe: So, I'd like to start by asking you a little bit about your personal history, about your childhood, the kind of family you grew up in, or your earliest memories, those kinds of things.

Lindo: Well, I will start by saying that my ethnicity is, ah, I'm a black person. You know in Nicaragua, we have this thing with, some of the black people prefer us to be called Creole and some of us say, "No, we're just plain black." Well, I'm just plain black. My father and my mother were people who speak English. My first language is Creole English. That's the language that I knew in my childhood, that we speak in our homes and things like that.

Grabe: And where were you born?

Lindo: I was, I was born in Puerto Cabezas but I actually grew up in Rosita Mines. You know, I don't know if you know, but in Rosita there was a company, a gold mining company, and well, in that settlement, that's where we grew up, me and my brother and my sisters. And there was everything that we needed, you know like almost like encampments or the satellite towns that are made by these companies.

I grew up as a Moravian, um hm. I'm from the Moravian religion and from when I was very small, I don't remember myself not being in a church. Yeah. And I continue being from the Moravian Church.¹ And I am a teacher, that's what I actually studied to be, a teacher. So, in my working experience, I have taught in a primary school and I have been a secondary teacher also. I have three children – three girls. I didn't have any boys. And, I know my children have their children, so, from these, my children's children, I have eight grandchildren.

Grabe: Oh, congratulations!

Lindo: [Laughter.] Thank-you. Five granddaughters and three grandsons. So, that's... And then from, let's see, it was like 1989, I actually started getting involved in women's movement, and all that has to do with women, human rights, and um...

Grabe: Were there experiences you remember from your childhood that helped you get involved in those things?

Lindo: Yeah, you know, I come from a home where it was a general practice that whatever my mother decided, I mean my father couldn't come and change that decision, and whatever he decided...they didn't have that kind of problem. I didn't grow knowing that, you know, that the women didn't have voice. I mean, that in my family, women always have voice, and that voice was heard and had to be obeyed, you know, just as much as the men in the family. So, I come from that sort of family. Then my aunts, and even my uncle, I mean, I come from a family where everybody had rights, really; that's what we would say today. Yeah, so, yeah, so....

Grabe: Were there experiences from your childhood that made you interested in getting involved in political work?

Lindo: Ahm, no not really. Not, not really, not in political work, directly saying, because, in my childhood, I was, I was interested like in learning language, imagine? Yeah! I remember a girl

¹ A protestant denomination started in Moravia/Bohemia in the 14th Century. The group broke from the Catholic Church to provide liturgy in the language of the people, did away with purgatory, and allowed for lay people to partake in communion. The religion has roots in Eastern Orthodoxy.

like, you know, Connie Francis,² and she was sort of like famous around the time and people said, “She sings in seven languages.” “Oooohhhh!” I would just go like, “Oh my gracious!” That is what I’d like to do – speak seven languages! But, along the way, you know, that lasts, because I had my first child when I was just sixteen years old, and it reminds me that at that time, I mean, things wasn’t this easy as it is now, you know, doors are open and things like that, but at that time when you had a child I mean that really changes your whole status, so, ah, so then I had to learn to be a mother, and, you know learn...

Grabe: In what way? What things changed for you?

Lindo: What happened in the time when I got pregnant, and if you had a baby, you couldn’t go back to school. I was in fourth year at the time.³ So, it was like if my life had ended there. You know, according to society. But, then, I had such a loving family, you know, that my dad said, “No way, your life is not ended here, you’re going to finish high school and you’re going to learn whatever we could afford,” and things like that, because at the time, we didn’t know what was a university. When you said university studies, that sounded like something...so far, and so difficult to reach, because, well, we didn’t have an option, in that sense. What was our option? Go to nursing school. Or, go to teaching school. And then you would go and learn to be a secretary. That was it. So, well, anyway, among these things, since my family kept on, you know, supporting me and everything, I was of course, a single mother...very single, very young, and I decided to go to teaching school there. I said, well, I would really rather do something else, but, well, it was impossible at the time. So then I went to Waspán, which is in the northern part of Nicaragua, very near Honduras on the Rio Coco side, and, ah, well I took out my teaching degree and I started working and then things started changing in the country, you know. We had a Revolution, and when the Revolution started here, now so many other things, and, that, and things like that, which well... And, so, I, ahm, I got a job, I got another job, I was working with the INSS – Instituto de Seguridad Social...⁴

Interpreter: It’s the Institute of Social Security?

Lindo: Mm hm. So, I work with them for a year and then I, I kept on going from there. And then I was working the MIDINRA⁵ that has to do with, ah, the *derechos agrarios*.⁶

Grabe: Ah ha, agrarios, agrarian rights.

Lindo: Mm hmm. And then, those kinds of things. So, you know, I kept like moving...

Grabe: And, you were doing this for work?

² A pop singer in the U.S., who became famous in the 1950’s and ’60’s with songs such as “Who’s Sorry Now,” and an album called “Connie Francis en Español.” She recorded in many languages, unlike most U.S. singers, but she indicated that she was actually only fluent in Italian and Spanish.

³ Through most of Latin America, primary school is 1st-6th year and secondary school is 1st-5th year. At this time, Lindo was in 4th year of secondary school (roughly equivalent to 10th grade in the United States).

⁴ The full name is *Instituto Nicaraguense de Seguridad Social*, or in English: Nicaraguan Social Security Institute.

⁵ MIDINRA stands for “*Ministerio de Desarrollo Agropecuario y Reforma Agraria*” or “Ministry of Agricultural Development and Agrarian Reform.”

⁶ Agrarian rights

Lindo: Yeah, for work. That was my job. And since I was a teacher, well I had to see about the training courses with the farmers and I had to see about all the training courses that had to do with forest fires and those kinds of things. That was in Puerto Cabezas.

[07:24]

Work, Education

Grabe: What made you interested in working for the organizations that were working on agrarian rights?

Lindo: Really, when I went in, we were, I went in working on the things that had to do with forest fires and those kinds of things and, actually, since I was working for the government, I mean, it wasn't an option if I wanted or not. They, they said, you know, "Since you're a teacher and you have these capabilities, well, we need you here," and I went there. But, I really liked it, because, anything that has to do with methodology, that has to do with teaching, any of its area, I'm there. I really like that. Yes.

Grabe: So, in the end, did you go to university to become a teacher?

Lindo: No, I did not. Then, what I did is got a course to go to Cuba. And then I studied social investigation.⁷ So, I was there for a year. And, ahm, I...

Grabe: Es como [That is like] sociology?

Lindo: Yes, yes, yes. So, we really went like in depth sociology, working, you—you know, at how to deal with people, how to understand, and this and that and the next. So I really enjoyed that and that really gave me a lot more of understanding people.

Grabe: Why did you do that in Cuba?

Lindo: Because ahmm...that was in 1976, and from Nicaragua, most of us, most people have an option to go to Cuba to study and since I was working with these agrarian things, well, they sent to me an invitation, and I applied and it was okay and I went there because since it was a thing of getting more education. So, I went and, ahm, and I had that studies, and I did fine.

Grabe: And what was your first job after university?

Lindo: So then, after that university, when I came back, I had a big fight where I was working, and then I decided to go back to teaching. And, then, where I was teaching, the Moravians have several high schools and I went to teach at the Moravian High School.

Grabe: And how did you make the decision to go back to teaching?

⁷ She may mean "research," which is "*investigación*" in Spanish.

Lindo: Ahm, I ahm, okay, I had walked off my job [laughter] and I was looking for another job, and I was, because they didn't want to give me a raise of pay, and they wanted me to do much more work, and they said, "No, you have much more skills, so you're going to do much more work." So, I said, "That's great," and I said, "and what about my salary?" And they said, "Nooooo, we need to see if you can really do it," and I said, "No, I don't need to show you people anything." We would want this, or are we aren't doing anything. And I decided that I didn't used to make some political issue with my job, you know, I was like clear on that. I'm working for the Nicaraguan government but I am not part of the Sandinistas' party. So, and then I tried to kind of mix those things and I said, no I'm out of here, I don't want to do that with my life, you know. I've never left Nicaragua, never, ever, in my 57 years, but, ahm, I kinda like put limits and say, 'Okay, I'm here and ahm...' we fully negotiate me being here, and this is my point and if this work is not good enough, well, I'm out of here. Yeah, so that's what happened, and I was out of here, yeah.

Grabe: So you were out of there, and went back to teaching?

Lindo: Mm hmm. And I went back to teaching for a year and a half and then they looked for me and they said I was going to work at what they called the *Casa de Gobierno* at that time. So, they hired me as an *analista*⁸ and it was to see about the social issues that were happening in, there, at the, in the RAAN.⁹

[11:28]

Work, Activism, Media, Education

Grabe: And where were you living at the time?

Lindo: In Port, in Puerto Cabezas, yeah. I lived there, and, ahm...And, so then, I went, and I accepted that job and it was pretty okay, you know, seeing what, all the social issues, you know, education, healthcare, social security, and things like that. So, then I got that experience, that working experience, and after 1990 when the Sandinistas lost the election,¹⁰ I kept working like for a couple months and then, then the women needs to be on board. You know, I have a friend, her name is Raquel Dixon,¹¹ right now, actually she is a deputy in the National Assembly. And, she, you know, was looking for women and she said, "Strong women, we need strong women here because, we're about to lose our space." Because the men from the Sandinistas party were like wanted to take over the House and they have much more important things to do. So then we got her together and, oh, with like six women and we would meet like every Wednesday, religiously, that meeting. What we said, don't ask me. I don't, [laughter] I don't remember why this meeting was so important, but anyway, the thing was that, you know, as women, we need to make our voice be heard, we need to know, to know and to understand and to defend ways that we have human rights because we are human people. And I was like, "Oohhhh, I've never heard

⁸ Analyst.

⁹ Región Autónoma Atlántico Norte, English: Northern Atlantic Autonomous Region.

¹⁰ In 1990, the FSLN (led by Daniel Ortega) lost the presidential election to a coalition led by the UNO party (National Opposition Union) and Doña Violeta Chamorro became president until 1997.

¹¹ The first black person to be elected to Nicaragua's National Assembly.

that said in this...I like it! I like it!" [Laughter] And I continue on with the group and eventually, you know, things started to be a little tough and you were like, ahm, politically attacked, can you say? And, you know, they were like, I mean, it's not important for women to be together, for a woman to have better raise, to be organized and those kinds of things.

Grabe: And were you organizing on the coast still at this time?

Lindo: Yeah, yeah, the coast, in Puerto Cabezas. So, so, then, it was like, because of this, I joined the women's movement, the legal rights women's movement, and [unintelligible] and I left my job to dedicate full time to this. Because I found out that it was, there are so many things that have to be done around women's rights and I learned about violence against women and one of the first big things that we did in those days was we started a radio program, you know, a radio show, and we would get on the radio show and just start telling people, "Women should not be living violence. There is possibility of another kind of relationship." And of course, people were laughing at us and saying, "Oohhh, oh my gracious, you want to change the world. Don't they know that this is the world?" And, I remember I had some men friends, and they would say things like, "Matilde, you sound real good, you have nice voice. What are you going to do, are you going to tell everyone [unintelligible] for women, or what?" And, I was like, "No-oo, but well, you know about this, and you learn about this, and now, well, we kept calm. Besides the radio show, we started having workshops. So, we were in a learning process and teaching other women about this. And we kept growing and then we had the support of Oxfam¹² from England, and they really supported us in the first years in 1990, 1992, those years, they supported us that we could be strengthened, institutionally strengthened, and we worked a lot with women in the communities, in the indigenous communities. Mm hmm.

Grabe: What strategies did you use at that time to work with women?

Lindo: Ah, at that time, what was our strategy? We didn't even know the word 'strategy'! [Laughter] But, what we, well the first thing we learned was that we had to become brave people. Because if we weren't brave, we wasn't going to reach anyway. And the next strategy was alliance. You know, we really met women from this other part of the country and we worked a lot in alliance with women, you know, with women who are here, and at that time, in the early '90's—

Grabe: From the western part?

Lindo: From western – Managua, mm hmm. At that time, there was a big revolution among women here, because the women were breaking off from AMNLAE.¹³ AMNLAE is the government movement, I think you have heard about AMNLAE. So, then, I mean, it was like, we were just, in the right pattern at the right time in the right place, so we really work in alliance

¹² An international confederation seeking and working toward solutions to poverty and injustice throughout the world.

¹³ Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza, English: Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan Women. This was the original Sandinista women's movement. Due to its close links to the FSLN, feminist issues such as abortion and women's rights were pushed aside to organize around FSLN issues. (Bayard de Volo, Lorraine. *Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs: Gender Identity and Politics in Nicaragua, 1979-1999*. The Johns Hopkins University Press, Baltimore. 2001. pp 22).

and that made us strong. That made us strong, at the time. Yet, we learned that we needed to keep our autonomous conscience active because we're just so different, we're naturally from different culture, we see the world through different eyes, and so, we—we—we had to learn to hear what our colleagues were saying, try to understand it, and then, at the time, to work with that, in our grassroots labor, where we would kind of like, change things around and actually put it in our context. So that was like the main strategy, you know, learning about things and saying, "Okay, we could do that here," and there were things that we said, "Look, definitely, we're out, I mean, this doesn't fit in the way of our lifestyle."

[17:30]

Activism, Politics, Intersectionality

Grabe: Okay. I know you're one of the most well known spokespeople for issues on the Atlantic Coast and organizing on the Atlantic Coast. Can you talk a little bit about what some of the issues were for women on the Atlantic Coast that were unique there and why they might be different than what women in Managua were working on?

Lindo: Well, one of things is that we were working on and we continue working on, somehow, somewhere, is that we need to strengthen, we need to get strengthened as people. When I says people, I am meaning that we are different historically, you know, the Atlantic Coast have, it wasn't even Nicaragua, I mean, until 1894, when it started on that move, so we continue being very different, and, ah, we got our autonomy law, I don't know if you know about our autonomy law?

Okay, and we believe that our autonomy law has to do with our life, men and women. So then, things that we do from the women's movement, we consider men also. Meanwhile, our colleagues are, their main thing is, you know, I—I don't want to say working against men because it's not really like that, but I mean, men are like a target, you know, that men must learn relationship, men must change their violent way, behavior and things like that. Meanwhile, we have much more because we need our men to understand that we could grow together, you know, because we all live discrimination and that's a point that we have, that we, *geopoliticamente*,¹⁴ I mean because of where we from, who we are, or we're not Spaniard speaking, Spanish is not our first language, and things like that. So, I mean, these are issues that we consider also when we're talking about empowerment and development and those kinds of things, so, we have...like the people as people present all the time.

Grabe: Mm hmm. And how did you make the decision to do, to move from the organizing that you were doing on the Atlantic Coast and move to the organization here in Managua?

Lindo: Mm hmm. Well, of course that has to do with personalities, right? And, ah, there was a time, when...I needed to grow, I needed to grow, and I felt the need of like sharing things from a different point of view, from a different level of doing things, because you see, when I was on the Atlantic Coast, I would mainly do grassroots level issues. And I really wanted to go on to the political, you know, the political issues like, you know, for example, like, like right now, what

¹⁴ Geo-politically.

work we're doing here in the Network Against Violence¹⁵ is, we're dealing with the National Assembly because there is a law that is being put, that is about violence against women. So I mean we're like right down in that and I am like one of the main persons from the National Network who is like, you, you know, right there and looking at the lines. You, you know, just last week, we were reviewing again what the deputies are saying and we're finding out that some of the main things that aren't being left out, like are, like they've stopped saying in the law, "violence against women." They're saying, you know we're against violence. Then, what they are putting in is like, "violence against children," "violence against youth," and this and that, and of course they are trying to say that women are violent. You know we already caught them so, so they know. I mean, we have to get really smart and say, "Okay, politically, how should we go around this? What are the words? Where do we put these words, and how do we go and do lobbying and that, and that?" So I'm really interested in doing this kind of thing at this point of my life, and it really doesn't have a lot of, um, opportunities on the Atlantic Coast to do these kinds of things because the organizations are like, you know, in between, in between level of not really there. And, when I was there, I tried to do these things and so, but then, I was very lonely at it. In fact, there weren't like much women saying, "Oh, yes, that's true, and here I come along with you, okay, let's go along." No, I started feeling lonely in that point. And, ah—

Grabe: And when was that? Do you remember what years those were?

Lindo: Yes! I remember it was from 1995 when we had the World Conference of Women in Beijing.¹⁶ So, I was involved in everything that had to do with Beijing.

Grabe: Yeah?

Lindo: Yep! I was in the local organization, the local commission, the national commission, the Central American commission, and then the regional commission that had to do with all of Latin America and Caribbean and I really loved the experience, I mean—

Grabe: Can you tell us about that experience?

Lindo: Yes, I could tell you some things. [Laughter] At that point, as black women, we realized that we needed to have our things too, you know, and we formed what is called the Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Women's Network.¹⁷ That didn't go so good, but, well, we did it, and it's somewhere there...resting, but it might wake up sometime.

But, anyway, the thing is that at this point, it was, like, you know, we had to be studying the documents. We had to really learn what was happening, and, I remember, we were getting these bulletins.

¹⁵ This organization has been active in pushing for policy and cultural changes to reduce domestic violence in Nicaragua. Triumphs have included passing laws that outlaw domestic violence, women's empowerment workshops, and women's police stations that permit women to be comfortable reporting abuse.

¹⁶ The Fourth World Conference on Women was held in Beijing in 1995. The Beijing Platform for Action was created to promote women's empowerment worldwide.

¹⁷ This network was formed in 1992 to promote the interests of African descent women in Latin American and the Caribbean.

Grabe: From the UN, you know?

Lindo: From the UN, from the women from South America, from all over, and we would get a bulletin that would say, “You know, religious men, they’re trying to take this and this and this rights away from women.” And I would say, “Oops, that can’t be. I know about that, and I know about religion, come, let’s see what this is about,” and we would make some kind of proposal. And, so, you know, proposal was going back and forth and—and even with the UN and we would meet in one of the countries, most of the time it was Guatemala. Or, we go to Guatemala and meet with these women from the UN.

[24:21]

Grabe: And did you elect women to go to Beijing, of the Network?

Lindo: Pardon?

Grabe: Did you elect any women to go to the Beijing meeting?

Lindo: If I did?

Grabe: You said were organizing and involved in planning around Beijing.

Lindo: I was involved there, yeah.

Grabe: Did any women get chosen to attend the Beijing conference?

Lindo: Nicaragua had one of the biggest delegations from Latin America.

Grabe: Yeah!

Lindo: It was more than sixty women that went from here.

Grabe: Wow!

Lindo: Yeah.

Grabe: Okay.

Lindo: Yeah, we were there. [Laughter.]

[24:47]

Politics, Activism

Lindo: Yes we did. And, ahm, we even made friends with the government at the time. Yeah, because you know before Beijing, it was El Cairo¹⁸ – that’s work about the reproductive rights and what not. And there it was horrible what the government did. The government said, from Nicaragua, that we would not have sexual education, because that would be, what is the word now, can’t remember the word, Spanish or English, we would be, like, transgressing. You know, cultural rights because we have this different kind of culture. No. The government never really cared about the word “culture.” ‘Til all of a sudden when it came to women rights, and especially over sexual and reproductive rights – ooooh! – it was like, “Noooo! That can’t be!” And, so, you, you know, I mean, Nicaragua really went badly, they really met with the *Vaticano*¹⁹ and did their things in Cairo, so we learned a lesson there. And we said, “No, no, no. We gotta prepare ourselves.” So we went to work, here in Nicaragua, and we made sure that whosoever went to Beijing first, that it could not be a man. Because who was going to Cairo was the Minister of Education. So then, beside that it would not be a man, but a woman, then we decided that we would tell her what to do and say, so we started having, you know, meetings here and there, and and it was accepted and, ah, we actually like sat here in the country and said, “Okay, what things are not negotiable?” And then we kind of like, you know, had our points and and the government naturally said, “Look, these definitely we are not going to touch because we are not going to reach any agreement with you people because our point of view, so, and so, so.” So, we went...with an agenda where we had things in common. So, you know, it was like:

“The girl child.”

“Okay, sure. We have no problem with the girl child.”

“Okay.”

“Sexual and reproductive health – we have problem there.”

“Yeah, okay, we have problem there.”

Where is, where could we meet and where, you know, everybody would split off. So, we did that kind of job here in the country, and then we did it in other countries also.

Grabe: Okay.

Lindo: Yeah. We did it in Honduras, and we did it, the same thing, in Costa Rica. So of course, we actually know, you know, with the Costa Ricans... It was Central America, and then we were kind of like touching the government and saying, “You know, women in our countries, and maybe you don’t know about this, but, we’d like to tell you that women are dying because they are getting pregnant too young and then...” Those kind of things. “Are we accepting that women continue dying when...in the name of being mothers? Aren’t they...” You know, those kinds of issue.

¹⁸ The 1994 International Conference on Population and Development met in Cairo and created four goals: universal education, reduction of child and infant mortality, reduction of maternal mortality, and access to reproductive and sexual health services including family planning.

¹⁹ Vatican

So, it went better. It went well, really, in Beijing. And, ah, what we, what we finally had happen towards Beijing was that somebody from the women's movement went along with the official delegation. So, it wasn't only like we were saying—we got somebody there.

Grabe: Mm hmm.

Lindo: Yeah. So, it was good. I mean it was a nice experience, and, ah, things like that, so...that experience is there. And, ahm, while I like it, one of the things that I lived personally is like, you know, my dream is that we, on the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua and in the rest of Central American countries also, we could kind of, like, reach there as women, you know, empower women. I mean not just women who will get a place in the government and, you know, she got a place, and she's well obedient. Ah, yes, so, if we could just, you know, reach where we could have really strong women, strong character and enough knowledge, because knowledge is important too—to start doing things, you know, from a women's point of view, from our cultures.

Grabe: Mm hmm.

Lindo: Yeah.

[29:09]

Personal Narrative, Work, Activism, Family

Grabe: You've worked with a lot of organizations and a lot of issues throughout your career. Is there something that stands out for you that is the thing that you're most proud of in your career?

Lindo: Oooh...

Grabe: One of your own accomplishments?

Lindo: One of my own accomplishments. [Light laughter] Well, one of my accomplishments here in the Women's Movement is that we recognize that women's issues have a lot of different manifestations, and that, culturally I mean, it is important to understand what is going on, so it is not a thing that is like black and white or just red and blue, you know. It is an issue that is much more profound because it has to do with women's daily lives and since it has to do with women's daily lives, that means it has to do with the way I see my life, the way I live my life and things like that, which doesn't mean that there is an excuse for women to live violence. I mean, the basic thing is women, there is no excuse, absolutely none, that women should be living violence. But then from that statement to how could we go around, ahm, eradicating, struggling against violence and really being successful in it. I mean that's a challenge. That's a big, big challenge because we need to understand women much more.

Grabe: And, how did you, how did that come to be an important topic for you. You said you were from a family where women’s voices were really respected.

Lindo: Because, because when I went into society, precisely that was part of my problem. I really assumed that the world was much more different. But, yeah, I remember being a teacher, when I was a teacher, and maybe I would have a problem with a student, I was just so sure, but extremely sure, it didn’t even occur to me that it would not be, that that child had gone home and told his or her parents. So, I was kind of like, “Oh my goodness gracious, I’m sure I have some explaining to do.” And then when I found out that there was no communication with that child and their parent and that was a shock to me. I always remember it, you know, because I would meet with these people, more than anywhere in the church, and I would be like expecting them to come up and say...and what happened? You know, “Why did you have this problem and that problem...” and then I know they don’t know, that wasn’t happening, and I was like, “What is happening here? My gracious and that...” And I started investigating. You know, and then it was like, “No, I know nothing about that. My son or my daughter didn’t share that with me.” And I was like, “Ooohh!” I couldn’t imagine that something happens there you didn’t want to share it with your parents. You know, and that the parents aren’t very interested in this. So, that was like one of the first things that I became conscious of. And then from there I started noticing people more, and I said “Oh my gracious, it doesn’t share everything in the family, but how could that be?”

And then I remembered when I was working at, ahm, with these agrarian people, one of the woman that was around, she’s a sociologist, a Mexican, and somehow we got talking, and I say, “You know, I’m so surprised at this.” She said, “No, you are the one that is very different from everybody else!” And she was like, “You know you are from a Protestant Church and your mind is so open and it’s...” I said, “No, but I think everybody is like that.” She said, “Well, guess what? No, no, no, no, no. No! No! No! It’s not like that”

So then, I kept learning, you know, I kept learning that the world wasn’t the way it was in my life, in my small world, so from there, I kept learning. Then, when I learned and heard about violence of women and those kind of...I start seeing it in the society, and it was like shocking. It was like shocking, you know, like a man saying to a woman that “And shut your mouth up.” I mean, I mean, “What are you talking about there? You are just so silly or this,” because I didn’t hear that in my family. And then my mom was still alive and I would say, “Mom, you know about this?” “Yes,” she said, “but I made a bargain with your father, when we started living together.” I said, “Really?” She said, “Yes, I told him, the day you ever curse me and tell me one of those foul words, I’m out of here.” She said, “And he knew that was for sure.” So he never did. I said, Ooohh, so women could make bargains. Greeaat! [Laughter] So, well, then I started talking with my mom a lot. You know, and she said, “No, child. That is not like that. No, the world is not the way we thought. The world is much different. And evil walks the world,” she said, “and violence is one of those evils.” Okay. So, I learned, violence is an evil thing. Yeah.

[34:56]

Race, Religion, Feminism, Intersectionality

Grabe: And once you started working, working with these organizations, what was your experience like as a woman? Did you feel you experienced discrimination, or were there difficulties for you?

Lindo: Of course! Of course and I remember, you know, because I used to like fighting. In Creole language, we used to fight us some. And, I remember I would always present myself and say, 'I am black and then woman!' Hhheee! They wanted to dead. Ooohh, they wanted, they wanted to just die, and said, "That's not possible you have to be a woman and then black," and I said, "Uh uh. *Es más* I am black, Christian, then woman!" [Sound like a hand slamming down.] That was for years, years. And I mean, and then, and I kept saying it because I really made it a hobby after work. You know? More than a political thing. Because like a hobby, I really liked to see that people get mad and things, and my colleagues, my feminist colleagues, so, and, eventually, we came around and, ah, actually kind of, dealing with the subject.

You know, I was just invited, when it was, in the month of March, to give a talk, on a big assembly that a group of women had. And they wanted me to talk about discrimination. How it is, discrimination...black...and, something gender, I don't remember. Well, anyway, one of the things that I spoke about was my experience and of course my experience I had lived with a lot of the women that were there. And I said, I mean, because you don't have most black women that are feminists in this country. We are very, very, very, very few, I mean. And I said that is one of the reasons, because you girls haven't been able to actually look to us, look at our culture and respect it. I mean, it's not even understand it, I mean, you just need to respect and say, you know, this is something different from what I've learned and the way I have been, and so there is something different in the world and we—you need to accept...and respect the difference. I'm not saying that you need to understand it because I don't need to come here and start explaining my difference...because that's a lack of respect. And, you know, and, ah, everybody was like, "Hahh! Really?" "Yeah," I said, "Yes, because normally when we talk about discrimination, it's a list of complaints." Because I'm black, they look at me bad. Because I'm black, you'll stick me in the back. And then those kinds of thing. And I said, "You know, no, we need to change that, I mean, we need, we really need to go for a change, we need to really have a different insight of this thing so we need to grow, and if we need to grow, we need to sit around the same table and say, you know what? This and this and this and that." So, we have to learn to make our voice be heard.

So, that's a point and now to reach to the point where they are actually inviting me to say these things. It's like, "Ooohh! I've come a long way, baby!" [Laughter] Yeah! I was all excited, to tell you the truth. I was very, very excited. But, of course, I went back in all those years for me, the '90's, and so, when I said, "I'm black, and I'm not woman before being black." And so I know, know you're saying, "Tell me why you're black before being woman?" I mean, "Trusting, please!" They would've paid me for it, this speech... Yes. [Laughter] So—

[38:45]

Feminism, Religion

Grabe: You've used this term 'feminism.' Can you tell me what that means to you or how you understand or define feminism?

Lindo: Well, to me feminism means, ahm, *corriente de pensamiento* – a way of thinking – it, ah, gives you different kind of criteria...to face the world. And I actually see feminism very close to Christianity. Me. Because I take feminism, not, not as a dogma, you know, I will never take it as a dogma. And I don't take Christianity as a dogma either. So, so, it's like taking the best things, all of this, and saying, "You know, I mean, this helps me to create a way of living." So—

Grabe: And what are some of those criteria that you would use to define them?

Lindo: Ahm, some of those criteria that I use to define feminism is, in first place, a relationship of respect...among people. You know, between men and women and between women also. You, you know, so that's the first very powerful thing for me that when I learn... and then the next thing is that you could learn to be this way. It's not a natural and normal thing. You know, it just doesn't come, it just doesn't... born with it. It's like, it has to do with your lifestyle, it has to do with your life experience, etcetera, etcetera. And it's something that could be used basically with anybody. I don't think that the criteria...that feminist criteria are only for women. Since for me, it is a way of living – it is for men also. So we could, you know, like use the same criteria to deal with whoever and whatsoever because it has to do also with the generational gap. So, my grandchildren really love me, sincerely, believe me. They love me because I feel like I understand them so well. But it's because I learned that, you, you know, when I said, oops, from this criteria, I could listen well and hear what you have to say and then, then, you know, I compromise²⁰ you to hear what I have to say, so, we get into a decent conversation. So, ah....

Grabe: So, you consider yourself a feminist?

Lindo: Ah, yup, yeah, yup, because of those things.

[41:13]

Work & Research, Activism

Grabe: I'm going to shift gears a little bit and ask you if you see a relationship between scholarship and academic work and activism related to women's issues?

Lindo: Sorry? I didn't get that.

Grabe: Do you see a relationship between scholarship or work that's—research that might be produced, academic work that might come out of the university and the work that women's organizations are doing in Nicaragua, do you see any connection between those two things?

Lindo: Yes, I do! I do. I do see the connection because, because you see, our lives have to do with way of thinking and our lives have to do with sharing these way of thinking. And, it's not a

²⁰ Most likely a false cognate, compromise is translated to English as commitment or promise.

common person, you know, like an everyday woman like me who could really go in depth and interpret certain things. Because even if I am thinking something, a lot of time I don't have the capability of interpreting what I am thinking and the way I am acting. So it is just like, well, we need, we need a doctor! Because if I'm feeling sick and my heart is not going well, I mean, the cardiologist is the person to say, you know...the heart. So, in this case, it would be like, like the scholars who would say, you know, what's not really going well between men and women, or from a woman point of view, so these works that they do, especially things that have to do with research and investigation, those kinds of things, are, I think they're real necessary, they are really needed, for us to really understand the matter, because relationship doesn't just stop right there. I mean, it's an ongoing thing, and it's an in-depth thing. So, we really need to have grassroot and scholars. Yeah, I'm convinced of that. Yep. Yep.

Grabe: And with the other organizations, can you talk a little bit about how you are working with other organizations in Nicaragua, through the Network of Violence Against Women?

Lindo: When you say other organization you mean?

Grabe: Do you work together with other women's groups?

Lindo: What happen, well, maybe I should briefly explain to you how the Network works. The Network, we're like a space where we get together, and we're like about 90 organizations and women who are there because of their individuality.²¹ You know, for example, like me, for years, I've been here, but I don't represent an organization. I'm here on my own. So, we get together and we make national assemblies, and there we kind of like take out the *lineas gruesas*,²² you know the big things, okay, what we're going to do, we're going to dedicate this year to the law – that is the new law that has been passed, and then we do—we come in the office, and we kind of like plan everything. What that mean? Okay, that means that we, that the group have to be in the National Assembly. Okay, who in the room could be on this group, well, we need a lawyer and we need who are sociologists, okay? And then, we kind of like, make a list, send it out, you know, then they say, okay, this is approved. Or, ahm, I propose that I can be on the list and things like that, that's the way we work. But, like, so work directly from the Network with a, with a specific organization, we doesn't do it like that. There is a political issue that we does, and we do it with everybody. Mm hmm.

[44:59]

Activism

Grabe: Okay. And what are some of the current issues that women are working on right now, and are you working on issues that are issues that women from the Atlantic Coast are working on, or are you working on issues now more central to Managua?

²¹ Women may join the Network through an organization or as an individual, very similar to membership type.

²² Broad strokes

Lindo: We're working on mostly like more general issues. So it's like, what I have like committed myself to, as like, anything that is happening has to be happening on the Atlantic Coast also. So, with this life, like you know, we have, I don't know how this is, how to say this in English, *derechos consuetudinarios*²³ that has to do with the indigenous way of claiming justice, of handling things that has to do with justice. I mean, they have their own judges in their community, and I made sure that this was, that this being respected by the law. So then, I got together with our deputy and I said, "Look here now, you know, I mean, you know that this law that you people are handling, ta, ta, ta." And then I went to the Atlantic Coast, of where the Network got money, I went to the Atlantic Coast. I sat with a group of women, and we discussed this and they say, "Look, to make this work, this is our proposal, ta, ta, ta, ta." And then, I came and I work it out and so. But, I wasn't full time here yet. So, now that I am full time, I've just started week before last, the first of June. And I am like, "Ahhh, my gracious!" Because, you know, I mean, it's a big stress because I have to respond to all the national issues. Because I am the person to coordinate all that has to do with political actions. So, that is not going too nicely.

[Laughter.]

Because, I am going to Bluefields²⁴ day after tomorrow, precisely, to work with a 2-days workshop and it's about, that has to do, ahm, and there is another one that is just for Latin America, so I'm going to work with them with that. And what they are saying here at the office is: "No, no, Matilde, we need you here," and I say, "Yes, and I need me there, and that's enough work all around and so..." Well, I know it's going to become an issue. I know. But, I know there is much more sense, *son más sensibles*,²⁵ you know, they are really sensitive to the issue now than they were year before, so I have alliance, yeah, right there on the coordinating commission and, so...

Grabe: And what are some of the issues that women on the Atlantic Coast are organizing around right, right now? What are the current problems that women are addressing?

Lindo: Ahm... I wouldn't know, I—I don't think it is like real specific issue because, ah, before one of the specific issue was with like, around the autonomy law, and to really make that a goal, but... The whole autonomy system is not working, so, so that kind of like, dropped back, I mean, it's, it's just not working. I mean, one of the main reasons why it is not working is because the National Parties are who's really ruling there, so then, I mean, what is the difference with the rest of the country, it's the same way that they deal with politics and everywhere, so women are like, does not have a specific thing, you know. And, it's not easy for the women on the Atlantic Coast to get together.

Grabe: Why?

Lindo: I don't know. I really need to deal with that, because I have been like, you know, when my mother got sick, and when she died, I sort of like, you know, I'm not there, I wasn't

²³ Customary rights.

²⁴ Bluefields is the capital of the Región Autónoma del Atlántico Sur (R.A.A.S.) Autonomous Region of the South Atlantic, one of two autonomous regions in Nicaragua.

²⁵ They are more sensitive.

anywhere, I was just at home. And when I came back, I found so much change, you know? That things that we had advanced with. I was just kind of like...came rolling back and that's one of it. And one of the things that I have observed, just observed, is that since the organization needs to get economic help, financial support, and then the financial support everyday is like less, then harder to get, and things like that. So—so—so you know, everybody is kind of like, "I need to get it" and, ahm, it's not leaving space for women to actually say, you know, really the issue, are political issues, or it has to do with violence or women's economic situation, whatever. It's more like, ah, very dependent, so...I mean, if you go there tomorrow and say, "You know something, I think that what women should be, ah, dealing with is..." What? Learning to cook! I mean, you have the women learning to cook, and so that rebelliousness, that we used to have before. And it's like, "No, but you didn't ask me what I wanted, so, please sit, let us talk." I mean, that's not there anymore, I've found. And the, what really happened, leaders that were there are not there anymore either. Yeah. Yeah. So... We're going to other space, and the younger women are different in that sense. They really take care of themselves, you know.

[50:53]

Activism

Grabe: Can you tell me a little bit about the role of the women's movement and maybe the organization you are working for now in creating changes for women's empowerment and health? Are there specific things that the movement or that the organizations have done that create changes for women's health?

Lindo: Well, I'm working here with the National Network Against Violence. And, ah, so, and beside that, we have decided that what we does from here has to do with political incidence. So, we work like, I told you about the law and we're like trying to be updated in other things that are happening in the public world, in the political world. And then the next thing, what we try, what we're trying to do right now, is that we should not get contaminated, you know?

Grabe: Mm hmm.

Lindo: Contaminated by what is happening in this social and political world because we are in electoral campaign and things like that. And, in the past, that has really divided us, because, because of the different parties. And so this year, what we have done is in May we got together, you know, whole 75 of us and started to say, okay, what will be the rules for us to go by this year that, you know, that we could stick together and pass this wave. And, with this—

Grabe: If the law was passed, would that be sufficient for women to address health?

Lindo: Ooo, no!

Grabe: What's the role of the women's organizations then?

Lindo: The role of the women's organization is to keep the violence subject on board. On board and to keep saying things that we have already learned that this is not natural that...and, and all

of the causes to women, and to their family, and in their environment. You know, because we are, we are learning that violence against women really has to do a lot with the production in the country, has to do a lot with the economy in the country, and it has to do so much with her health! Oooff! That, I mean, her mental health, her physical health. So we're—we're like updated, you know, all these, these investigations.²⁶ You know, some of them are like worldwide, and you know, so then we bring it and we make it an issue of our learning process. And, then, what we does is like, this year for example, we have gotten funding from a Swedish organization that we're going to go, working in the different territories. You know, when we talk about the territories, like, the two territories on the Atlantic Coast. And we're going to go by Leon and Chinandega and so, well, we have like seven territories in the country. And then we are going to work around strengthening women leadership, precisely what I'm talking about, so, we are going about that, you know, you know, because that women from their local environment could start talking out. So our thing is that the leaders will become strong leaders and that they could actually approach the subject wherever and whenever in their own environment. So that's one of the things that we're doing right now. So it's like, all of our process is towards that, the strengthening women leadership, that we may be able to really deal with struggling against violence.

Grabe: You've brought up economic situations a couple of times and I know you've been outspoken about globalization and the neoliberal policies and how they affect people on the Atlantic Coast, but could you talk a little bit about how those neoliberal policies impact women in particular?

Lindo: Yes, ahm, because look, as long as women doesn't learn, as long as we don't learn how to deal with public affairs, I mean, we'll continue being domestic workers. So if they are living in the farm, there are the women who knows how to do the planting and the reaping and whatever. I mean they are not there discussing, and therefore, they are not handling the resources, you know. And then, when we get start talking about these macroeconomic things, you know, we doesn't even have a market, a local market in Puerto Cabezas where in—where we produce enough locally, to maintain that market, but yet they are talking about exportations. So they know we are going to start talking a little exporting our goods, how we can get to where enough goods to the market for a daily living. So, I mean, so, this is a problem that really affect the whole society, but particularly it affects women because, especially in the indigenous community, women are who, are there doing in the farming. See what I mean? So, if women doesn't learn about these issue, I mean, we just continue seeing it like part of our domestic work, and there isn't no growth...for us. Of course, this has to do with the whole global policy, but, when we talk about women, it's like, you know, women are even being drawn farther from really becoming a subject, a political subject, and not being a political object. Yeah.

[56:57]

Activism

²⁶ Research.

Grabe: You've mentioned this already, but can you say a little bit more about the role of networking with women's organizations outside of Nicaragua, and how have you made use of women's organizations regionally or internationally?

Lindo: I didn't get that.

Grabe: You've met with women's organizations throughout Central America, yeah?

Lindo: Mm hmm.

Grabe: Yeah? And outside as well, you've done some work with Beijing. Can you talk about the role of working with these international groups, and addressing women's issues in Nicaragua?

Lindo: Well, ahm, let me see. I have years of not doing that because after Beijing, and Beijing Plus 5²⁷ and that, I just kind of like retracing, you know, I'm just fed up of so much words, and there's so much less deeds comes out of those words. But, anyway, working with these international groups and things is like being able to share things. And, remember when you spoke about the scholars and academic things that strengthen the grassroots level and grassroots level strengthen also these investigation. Well, I think that working with international organizational things is something like that, because it's like learning globally how to deal with what you have locally. And, in terms of women rights, you know, it's not like everybody going to reach to the UN or to the Commission²⁸ or to the IIDH, the *Interamericano de Derechos Humanos*.²⁹

So well, anyway, but, we work with these groups in a way that...we could strengthen each other. You know, like, just now, we're working with, ah, an international mission, that's their name, International Mission, and they are working around this – the death of women, that is growing just so fast, and at a very alarming thing, the fem.... Yes! Femicide or *femicidio*. So, we have linked up as National Network Against Violence, we have linked up with international things. And, I mean, they keep us posted like, you know, this is happening in the world, and this research has shown us that this, and this, and this, or whatever. One of the frightening thing about this for example, the femicide, is that a lot of women are being killed because they have decided to leave a violent relationship, so then it's like, pssuh. I mean, how are we going to deal with that? We can't stop saying that, I mean, "Say no to violence." But does saying "No" to violence mean your life? It's like, "Excuse me!" I mean, so we're kind of like, you know, stuck there, and of course this is something we would have to do, not have to, but it would be much more fruitful to deal with other organizations who are not here.

Because I remember for coming in 1995 when I went to the United States after I came back from China that was one of the things that women were saying. I was in Burlington and Washington,

²⁷ A review done five years after the Beijing conference to evaluate progress.

²⁸ The Inter-American Commission for Human Rights, part of the Organization of American States.

²⁹ Inter-American Institute of Human Rights, created in 1980 through an agreement signed between the Inter-American Court of Human Rights and Costa Rica, using a multi-disciplinary approach to research and teach about human rights.

and when I sat with the women they were like, “You know, women are dying here because they are saying like ‘no’.” And I’m like, “But, how?” Well, they are dying here also so, so I understand it better. And we were like, “Yeah, and what to do?” And then we were talking about rehab – you know, that when these men goes to jail, they will pass through a public relation process and this and that, but it’s not really working. It’s not really working. Maybe one out of a thousand comes out and say, “You know, I mean, I actually did wrong.” So, you know, those kinds of issues. We really need to work together, I mean, with anybody and everybody who is working on that subject. So, so, those kind of things. So, it’s not like we have a relationship where it’s like anything and everything. You know, the international relationship are specific things that we, that we deals with. So, so...

[01:01:17]

Activism, Class

Grabe: Were you one of the sixty women from Nicaragua that went to the Beijing conference?

Lindo: Yes!

Grabe: Oooh! I wasn’t sure when you said that.

Lindo: Yeah.

Grabe: Okay.

Lindo: I was at the Beijing conference. And, then I went to your country³⁰ and then I spoke about the Beijing conference, and then they were mad at a lot of the women because the women that spoke before me was like, “Oooh, China..., so dirty, so terrible.” I was like, “I didn’t see that.” [Laughter] I didn’t see what you saw – sorry! [Laughter] I did not.... [Laughter] Because of course, there were all these, ahm, it was at a university, and they were a lot of Oriental people from all over, Korean and so. So they are like, eager to hear what happen. And I remember there was just this one specific woman. She was very rude and nasty about it. And she was like, “Because, in China, you know, forced to a big event like this, we had, like older women, who made these great bands, and they were with the, the *platillo*³¹ and things like this. The women in China took out their pots and pans from the kitchen and were on the street.” Ahhh, I said, “I didn’t see that. They looked so well. Did you see how they were dressed and the way they created music? And the way they moved around music – oooh! – that was just so wonderful.” [Laughter.] So....well, but, I mean, that does happen of course, United States and China, two *potencias*.³² And Nicaragua – doesn’t even know where it is, so – [Laughter] I didn’t know how to end up proudly. [Laughter] And I did say, of course, as they were literate women, they were just so, “Ahhhh!” And then I start talking about other things that we did, you know. The Iraq women were there or one thing that...because it was like they’re saying, “But, noooo, we want

³⁰ The United States.

³¹ Cymbals, percussion instrument.

³² Powers.

you to talk about the war.” But, no, we were like, “Noooo, we’re not here for that. I’m sorry. Not here.” So, but, ahm, it was good.

Grabe: You’ve used this language about human rights. Is that something that the movement uses a lot when—

Lindo: Oh, yes, yes! What happen is we deal with violence against women as a lack of human rights. That is, that’s the way we deal with it from our Network.

Grabe: Why not a public health problem?

Lindo: Because public health problem is a problem of human rights. So when we talk about human rights, we’re talking about economic problem, because now we’re dealing with violence, like physical violence, psychological violence, economic violence, patrimonial violence. I don’t know if it’s patrimonial you say in English. *Pero, violencia patrimonial.*³³ That’s the way in Spanish. That has to do with the financial and economy from the whole school.

Grabe: Hmm. Okay.

Lindo: Yeah. So that we call in Spanish, ‘*violencia patrimonial.*’ So, so, you know, they are, we are kind of like seeing that violence is a thing that is like a cancer. It’s spreading. And it’s not even true really that, ah, I mean, if you have a high academic level, you doesn’t live violence. I mean, that’s, that’s even more frightening because it’s like, nobody could really escape this blame thing. So, we need to get a bit together, you know. So, ahm...

Grabe: When did the movement start using this language of human rights, do you remember? ‘Cause it wasn’t always so?

Lindo: Really?

Grabe: Was it?

Lindo: It was always so. No, eh?

Grabe: No? Is that, it was always?

Lindo: Yes, it was always, because when I came in this National Network, already Vienna³⁴ had passed, and those were like the basic, you know, the base work of the violence against women. Yeah.

Grabe: Okay, okay. Well, are there any other topics that I didn’t ask you about that you’d really like to tell us about?

Lindo: [Laughter] Ahhh, no, I think we got like most of it there.

³³ Hereditary violence.

³⁴ The World Conference on Human Rights held in Vienna in 1993.

Grabe: Okay. Well, I really appreciate your time, and I thank you again for being willing to be part of the Global Feminisms Project.

Lindo: Okay. Thank you very much.

Grabe: Thank you.

Lindo: Yeah, ah, I just spoke, you know, because I know you're going to work on that.
[Laughter] So I just said freely.

Grabe: Yeah. [Laughter] That's the way, that's the best, yes—

[End.]