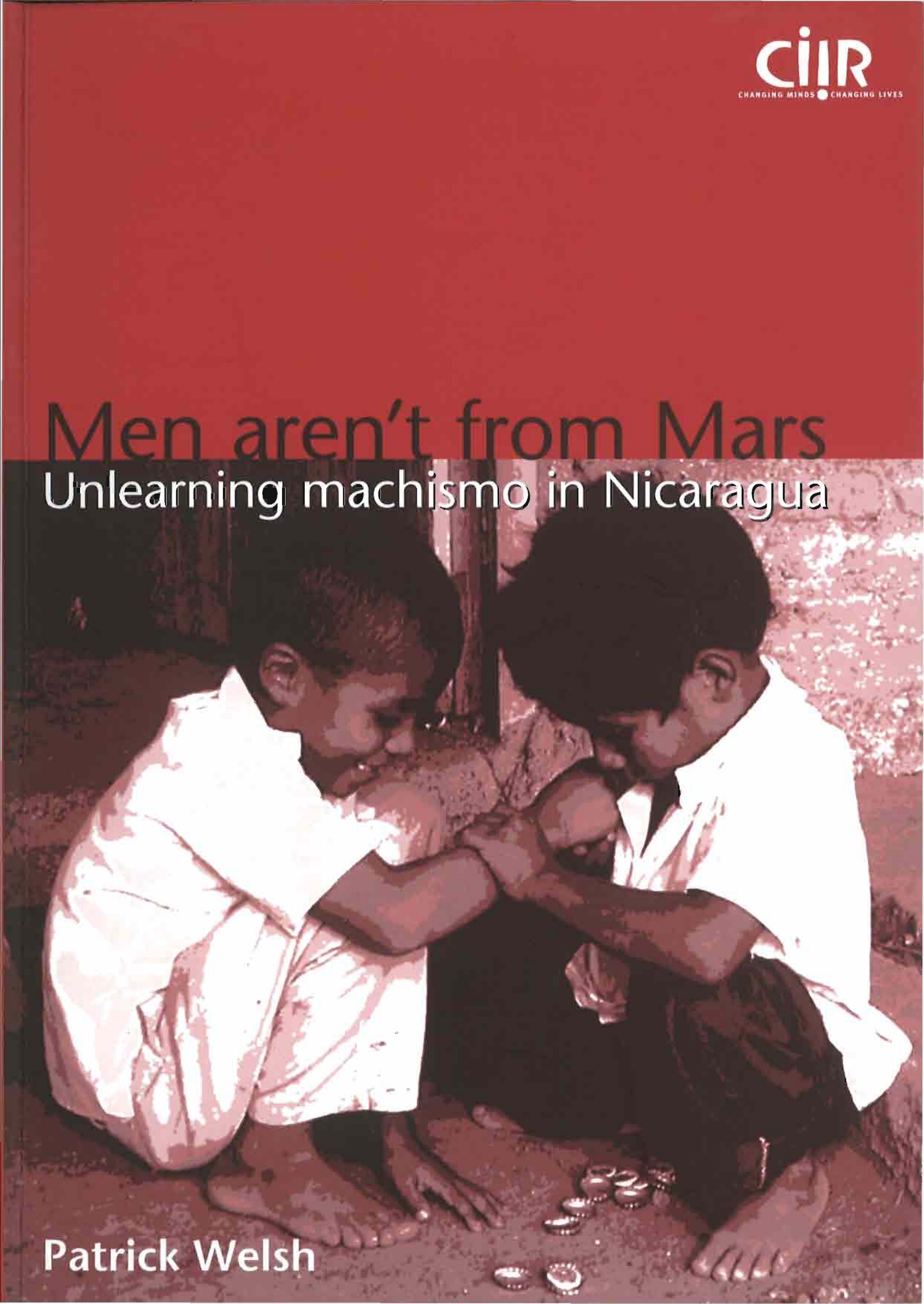


Men aren't from Mars

Unlearning machismo in Nicaragua

Patrick Welsh



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About the author

Born in Northern Ireland and raised in Scotland, Patrick Welsh has been involved in human development issues for 20 years. In the 1980s he taught in Nigeria and worked in popular education in Nicaragua. After a short spell as project officer for Latin America and the Caribbean with CAFOD in the early 1990s, he returned to Nicaragua in 1993. Since then he has been involved, as an ICD development worker in the development of participatory methodologies for gender training and awareness raising with men. He is a founder member of the Nicaraguan Association of Men Against Violence (Asociación de Hombres Contra la Violencia, AHCV).

Photographs

All photographs were taken in El Peñasco, Nicaragua, by Liz Light, a development worker with CIIR/ICD. The exception is the cockfight on page 15, reproduced courtesy of Lucinda Broadbent, from whose film *Macho* it is taken.

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Preface

Work on gender among men is relatively new. In Nicaragua a small number of organisations are seeking to build more just relationships between the genders and to contribute to the transformation of patriarchal society's paradigm of what it means to be a man. Similarly, only a few have accepted the challenge of getting men to question and transform, from their own experiences, the behaviour, values and concepts with which dominant culture defines and determines masculine identities.

The Centre for Communication and Popular Education CANTERA is one of the pioneering organisations in the effort to promote, through educational processes, reflection on the meaning of being male, and the factors determining the formation of masculine identity.

CANTERA's work on masculinity stems from the hypothesis that the behaviour of human beings in general, and in particular of men, is learnt, and can therefore be unlearned through conscious processes of reflection on daily practice, and the effects of this on themselves and on others.

In this document Patrick Welsh provides an in-depth account of the concepts, content and methodologies used by CANTERA in its gender work among men in courses on masculinity between 1993 and 1999. The document places this description in Nicaragua's historic and contemporary context.

The introductory chapter describes how CANTERA arrived at its decision to work on gender among men. It explains how the team's reflection on existing theories of gender helped sensitise the institution's personnel to the importance of going deeply into the power relations between the genders and the need to open spaces where men would be directly involved in reflecting on their gender identity.

Chapter 2 offers a global vision of the contemporary history of Nicaragua, details significant aspects of men's and women's histories in contexts such as the hard years of the counterrevolutionary war, the undoing of social policies during the 1990s, the progressive unemployment caused by neoliberal policies, and the consequences of this for relations between the genders. It recognises the weakness and negative consequences that the lack of a feminist agenda during the revolutionary period had on its attitude to the emancipation of women. It describes women's effort to achieve autonomy through the formation of groups and collectives, from where they began to promote their rights. It synthesises the impact the different gender theories of the 1980s and 1990s had on the women's groups and networks in the country, and how, from GAD (theory of Gender and Development)

women themselves began to question existing power relations. The text witnesses to the negative impact of the economic, political and social crisis on the behaviour of many men, who, according to their own reflections, changed the role society had historically assigned to them, as providers in the home. In the same way, the loss of spaces of power in social and political organisations, provoked an identity crisis in men, which they try to overcome with 'masculine methods' such as alcohol and violence in all its forms. In spite of the negative effects, the situation helped a minority of men to begin to take up new roles in the family, which had usually been considered women's roles. The chapter also refers to the formation of the group Men Against Violence, of Managua.

Chapter 3, taking as a reference point different theories on masculinity, considers cultural stereotypes in a general way and analyses masculine prototypes in Nicaraguan history and culture. It takes us back into the period of the Spanish Conquest in order to reconstruct the historical process leading to the construction of masculine identity dominant in today's society. There is reflection on the images which the different masculine prototypes have in Nicaraguan history and culture. The chapter tells us how CANTERA's courses on masculinity reconstruct the process of learning to be a man, and the role of the different institutions and people in this learning process — the family, the school, the church, the media, etc. All these structures of socialisation play a part in building and consolidating masculinity — the cultural ideals are reinforced and accepted as natural and universal. There are statements made by participants of the course, such as: 'Our mothers brought us up like that, so it is their fault', i.e. the blame falls, according to some men, on their mothers who in many cases take up the role of making their sons into men. The chapter tells of traditions in rural Nicaragua where in many cases, when a son is born, the midwife receives twice what she is given when a girl is born, and in addition she receives a present, a chicken or some other thing, thus emphasising the superiority of the boy over the girl from the moment of birth. This will be accompanied over the years by values and the dominant and strong behaviour expected of boys. The chapter refers to the different forms of violence in which the man is subject and victim at the same time. All forms of violence are simply justified by the ingrained belief in the superiority and power of the man over the woman. An important aspect which emerges in the chapter is that of intra-gendered violence, showing that masculine violence is not limited to violence against women, but happens also between men themselves. This type of violence aims to mark a major or minor level of manliness, and is used especially against those who transgress the norms, values and behaviour

which determine masculine identity in the dominant ideology. Violence is in the very heart of the patriarchal masculine identity. The chapter ends affirming that in Nicaragua there is no hegemonic vision of the model of masculinity; it is determined by the formation, the context, and personal and collective realities.

Chapter 4 describes the themes of the workshops and the methodological process which develops them. It shows how men themselves decided to work on and profoundly question the theme of masculine identity, which not only needs to recognise the practical and strategic needs of women, but goes deeply into the very meaning of being a man. The chapter describes the process by which the male team of CANTERA had to overcome its mistaken conceptions of the significance of gender and feminism, and analyse the relationship between concepts and practices relating to masculinity. It describes the methodology of the workshops, which takes as its starting point the objective as much as the subjective reality of the subjects it is working with, and helps the participants, after a critical reflection, to make commitments to transform personal and collective reality. The techniques and games used are also described. These are used with the primary aim of helping the participants to distance

themselves from reality, in order to read it critically. The techniques and games were a basic educational tool for involving emotions, feelings and values in reflecting on and analysing the different themes. Each workshop finished with the participants individually, and collectively, drawing up proposals for change.

Chapter 5 describes the different mechanisms used to measure the impact, not only on those taking part in the workshops, but in the persons, women and men, with whom the participants relate in their daily lives. It provides an analysis of this evaluation, and the lessons generated by the experience.

The critical analysis and deconstruction of masculine identity, carried out with and by men, provides the bases for the development of egalitarian relationships between the genders, and for influencing the conscious process of transformation of the patriarchal model in our societies. This text invites reflection and, as in the workshops, the reader will be drawn into living out his or her own identity process.

Anabel Torres
CANTERA



1. Introduction



Recent Nicaraguan history has been marked by a series of socio-political upheavals and 'natural' disasters. Wars and dictatorship, revolution and counter-revolution, constant economic instability, earthquakes and *tsunamis* (tidal waves), volcanic eruptions and hurricanes have made Nicaragua at the turn of the millennium one of the poorest and least developed countries in the western hemisphere. Of the 174 countries included in the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) Human Development Index for the year 2000, Nicaragua was number 116. In Latin America and the Caribbean, only Guatemala and Haiti have a lower ranking (UNDP 2000: 17).

Who, then, would have thought that men in Nicaragua would be meeting to discuss the meaning of masculinity and sitting down together to 'unlearn' machismo? Who could have imagined that men would be willing to reflect on the use of power and violence in their relationships with women, children and other men, and begin to discover other dimensions of their being such as tenderness and sensitivity? Who could have conceived of men concerned about gender and committed to gender equity?

The Centre for Popular Education and Communications (CANTERA) is one Nicaraguan non-governmental

organisation (NGO) that has pioneered the promotion of gender awareness-raising and training with men. Since its founding in 1988, women's welfare, human rights and integrated development have been central to its mission and its work with women has had a double emphasis: raising women's awareness of their gender position, and the promotion of empowerment. Both aim to improve the quality of life and relationships for women.

To that end CANTERA has worked to develop training methodologies for popular education. Popular education is based on the theory that society can be transformed by promoting participatory processes that enable people to analyse critically and propose changes. Applied to gender training with women, popular education enables them to come together to reflect on the inequalities and injustices that they experience daily and to propose strategies for change that will improve their lives. Ideas and practices, myths and realities about gender identity and roles are questioned and their historical, social and cultural origins revealed. Women become the catalysts of their own transformation and the protagonists in their own development.

By the early 1990s, it had become increasingly obvious to many women in Nicaragua that if gender equity was to

be achieved men, too, would have to change. Men's adherence to 'machismo' at home, at work and in the community represented a serious obstacle to women's development and empowerment. Simultaneously, gender theory had begun to emphasise the need for in-depth analysis of the power relationships between men and women, and the power wielded by men systematically to dominate and control women in public and private, and thus to secure rights and privileges denied to women. In a workshop in CANTERA on Gender, Gender Theory and Gender Perspective, the Mexican anthropologist Marcela Lagarde pointed out that 'at present, in the highest levels, there is a shift away from a gender perspective that gives exclusive priority to women towards a gender perspective that also incorporates men in a positive way...' (CANTERA 1993: 23). The need to involve men in gender issues was becoming increasingly clear.

By 1993 women in CANTERA were challenging the men in the organisation to take gender seriously and to embark on a critical analysis of masculinity. This led in September 1994 to the First National Encounter on Masculinity, organised by CANTERA, in which 41 men from all parts of the country took part. Geared towards men working in community development projects and programmes where gender had become, or was becoming, an increasingly important component, the participants' enthusiasm confirmed that some men, at least, were genuinely concerned with gender, which until that moment had been almost exclusively a women's domain.

The success of the First Encounter and the demands for follow-up spurred CANTERA to develop a training course on masculinity and popular education to enable men to analyse their masculinity critically and propose changes in their values, attitudes and behaviour. Women had adapted popular education methodology to the analysis and transformation of their own gender situation, and men began to do the same, recognising that changes in themselves would help improve the quality of women's lives and reduce levels of violence against women. The result would be greater gender equity. Some men also recognised that relinquishing the traditional model of masculinity would also improve the quality of their own lives and open up new development potential for them.

By the end of 1999, 360 men from all over Nicaragua had taken part in CANTERA's courses on masculinity and popular education, and many of them had gone on to develop and implement training initiatives with other men in workplaces and communities. To test the effectiveness of the methodology and its capacity to instigate change in men, CANTERA has also promoted rigorous processes of evaluation and systematisation. An impact study carried out in 1998 showed positive and

promising results: albeit slowly, men were showing signs of change and this was undoubtedly related to the training they had received and the methodology used.

ICD/CIIR has supported CANTERA's work with men on issues of masculinity since 1994. This paper describes CANTERA's innovative work and its implications for community-based integrated human development. It shares CANTERA's experience in gender awareness-raising and training with men, carried out in Nicaragua from 1994 to 1999. It focuses on the development of the training courses, the changes in men's attitudes, values and behaviour, and the construction and validation of a methodology for gender work with men. The paper also offers a set of proposals for groups interested in starting work on gender and masculinity. The description takes into account Nicaragua's history, culture, and current socio-political context, including the work of the autonomous and diverse women's movement and its attempts to challenge and change gender roles and identities.



2. Nicaragua 1979–99



From revolution to neoliberalism

On 19 July 1979, two days after Nicaragua's president, Anastasio Somoza Debayle, fled the country, one of the longest and cruellest dictatorships in Latin American history came to an end. The Sandinista revolution had triumphed.

The Sandinistas' youthfulness and freshness and their emphasis on land reform, education and public health captured the imagination of a generation and during the 1980s led to the creation of a massive international solidarity movement. Thousands of people from all over the world travelled to Nicaragua to pick coffee, join building brigades, or work in development programmes. Thousands more raised funds or ran educational activities in their churches, trades unions and communities.

In the early 1980s the country experienced a development boom. Health and education levels improved substantially and agricultural production increased. People were taking part in democratic processes at all levels of society. Hope reigned and the future seemed bright.

By the mid 1980s, however, Nicaragua was in crisis. The administration of Ronald Reagan in the United States accused the Sandinistas of being Communists and declared that they were a threat to US national security and to peace and democracy in Central America. The US government and private organisations instigated a low-intensity warfare against Nicaragua, setting up, training and financing counter-revolutionary forces. The atrocities of the 'Contras', as they came to be known, are well documented,¹ as are the devastating human and economic effects of the war on Nicaragua.

In human terms the cost of the Contra war goes far beyond the tens of thousands of dead, tortured, disappeared or disabled. Thousands of Nicaraguan families produced 'héroes y mártires', and experienced extreme emotional and psychological anguish that after the war would manifest itself as post-traumatic stress. Those whose son, daughter, brother or sister had not yet

¹ During the 1990s, human rights organisations such as Witness for Peace monitored the human rights situation, as did development agencies such as OXFAM.

been killed in the war were constantly wondering when their turn would come to grieve. In the midst of this suffering, the economic embargo imposed by the US government throughout the 1980s, pushed people close to desperation. Poverty and unemployment surged. Inflation soared to 33,547.58 per cent in 1988, the highest ever recorded in Latin America (research carried out in 1992, *La Corriente* 1997: 343).

By the dawning of the 1990s, the dramatic improvements in health, education, agricultural reform and production had evaporated. Internal discontent and dissent were growing. Nicaragua was clinging to a revolution in decay, a nation of empty stomachs and stores and overflowing cemeteries. By the end of the 1980s people were tired, desperate and longing for the end of the war. No amount of internal and external solidarity could stave off the military, economic and political might of the United States. A profound desire for peace paved the way for political change.

The elections of February 1990 were won by Violeta Chamorro, representing a coalition of political parties (the Unión Nacional Opositora — UNO) supported by the US government. For some it marked the end of a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship and heralded a new era of peace and democracy. For others, it symbolised the crumbling of Camelot and the opening of the floodgates to neoliberal capitalism. For a few it was a bit of both.

Whatever their ideological differences, the peaceful handover of power by the Sandinista government to Violeta Chamorro in May 1990 fulfilled a dream shared by all Nicaraguans: the end of decades of armed conflict. With the Sandinistas out of government and socialism on the decline in Eastern Europe, the United States no longer saw a need for low-intensity warfare. Contra and Sandinista soldiers could be demobilised and Nicaragua could begin the task of reconstruction.

By mid 1990, however, unprecedented street riots protesting the new government's economic policies led to violent confrontations and several deaths. As the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank moved in to help the Chamorro government design and implement its economic strategies, new lines of confrontation were being drawn, this time socio-economic. Despite losing the elections, the Sandinistas were the largest single political party in the National Assembly and had a committed, active membership. Their goal and war-cry was 'defend the gains of the revolution', neoliberalism the new enemy. It could be argued that the low-intensity warfare of the 1980s had not ended at all; it had simply entered a new phase, which some have named 'low-intensity democracy' (*La Corriente* 1997: 372).

Strictly speaking, neoliberalism already had a foothold in Nicaragua by the late 1980s when the Sandinista government introduced reforms aimed at stopping inflation and reducing the state sector. In the early 1990s, however, the Chamorro government was relentless in implementing neoliberal economic policies. A series of structural adjustment programmes (SAPs) and extended structural adjustment facilities (ESAFs), hailed by the government as the only economic path for Nicaragua, produced unprecedented misery and suffering for the majority of the population. Between 1980 and 1990, the number of people living in poverty rose by 59 per cent, from 1.7 million to 2.7 million (*La Corriente* 1997: 346). According to the Nicaraguan Institute of Statistics and Census (INEC), in 1993, 75.7 per cent of Nicaraguan families were classified as living in poverty and 46.6 per cent in extreme poverty (quoted in UNDP 2000: 80). As unemployment and underemployment rose, so too did levels of violence and civil insecurity. Nicaraguan police statistics show that in 1991, for every 100,000 people living in Nicaragua 191.96 violent crimes were registered. By 1996, the ratio had risen to 405.13 violent crimes for every 100,000 citizens (UNDP 2000: 158).

In 1996 the Sandinistas again lost the national elections, this time to Arnoldo Alemán, former mayor of Managua and leader of the vehemently anti-Sandinista Constitutional Liberal Party (PLC). In the first years of his government the Sandinista Party tried to resist the administration's pursuit of IMF-dictated economic policies that were even more stringent than those of the previous government. The government, for its part, unleashed a campaign to destroy the remnants of Sandinismo and endeavoured to inhibit, control and even eradicate NGOs.

In the past few years, however, political expediency and economic interests have led to an open pact between the PLC and the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN). In January 2000, the National Assembly approved constitutional changes designed to perpetuate the hold on power of the two main parties and eliminate their smaller rivals. The National Directorate of the FSLN has repeatedly stated that its main concern is to win the next general election scheduled for November 2001. Despite internal and external criticisms and schisms, it appears willing to take whatever measures necessary to achieve that goal, including pacts with those who, just a decade earlier, were its sworn enemies.

In the meantime, the gap between rich and poor widens as Nicaragua continues its downward spiral of poverty and misery. According to Nicaraguan feminist writer Sofia Montenegro, the war of the 1980s set the country's economy back by 40 years (*La Corriente* 1997: 345).

Thanks to decades of war followed by 10 years of harsh neoliberal policies, Nicaragua is now officially considered poor enough to be classified as a heavily indebted poor country and in December 2000 achieved 'decision point' status within the HIPC initiative. However, with a total external debt of US\$6,498.6 million (US\$1,316.70 per head of population) and gross domestic product (GDP) of US\$2,267.9 million (US\$459.50 per head of population), Nicaragua's debt is unpayable and many are calling for its immediate cancellation (UNDP 2000: 163).

The extent of poverty and underdevelopment in Nicaragua was laid bare in November 1998 when Hurricane Mitch ripped the country apart. According to the Civil Co-ordinator for Emergency and Reconstruction (CCER), 2,394 people died, 938 disappeared, 287 were injured, and an estimated 865,700 people, in 144,300 families, were directly affected by the disaster, losing houses, crops and land. The total value of destroyed infrastructure (roads, bridges, houses, schools, health clinics, and so on) was estimated at US\$1,403 million, or 65 per cent of Nicaragua's GNP (CCER 1999: 31). Once again, Nicaragua, at least for a time, became the focus of humanitarian aid and solidarity initiatives from all over the world.

Nicaraguan civil society responded quickly to the disaster. A major initiative, supported by ICD, was the establishment of the CCER, which brought together more than 320 NGOs, women's collectives and community organisations from all over the country. Barely two months after the hurricane, the CCER had produced a document, *Turning the Mitch tragedy into an opportunity for the human and sustainable development of Nicaragua: a reconstruction and development proposal*. By May 1999, this had been further elaborated and was presented in an international meeting in Stockholm, between donors (governments, World Bank, IMF, Inter-American Development Bank, and so on) and Central American governments, to agree proposals for the reconstruction of Central America. Since then the CCER has played a major role in ensuring that civil society's voice and wealth of experience in human development are taken into account by governments and international donors in the development and implementation of reconstruction programmes and projects.

An innovative element of the CCER's work has been the carrying out of social audits in the areas where post-Mitch emergency and reconstruction aid was channelled. International and national NGOs, and community-based organisations, were praised for their transparency, efficiency and organisational capacity to get emergency aid quickly to those who needed it most. Since then, the NGO sector has supported hundreds of innovative and

inspiring community-based reconstruction and development initiatives. Government entities, however, did less well in the audits, and international donor organisations (governmental and non-governmental) are increasingly concerned about corruption in government institutions. The Nicaraguan government's reputation and credibility is being questioned by the international community.

Nicaraguan NGOs and community organisations were able to respond rapidly to the disaster because they could capitalise on the experience in participatory community development they had accumulated in the 1980s. In the 1990s their existence represented a challenge to the effects of neoliberal policies and a search for pro-developmental socio-economic alternatives. For many people in Nicaragua, the programmes and projects of civil society organisations are their only access to any possibility of development.

Despite the prevalence of macro-economic policies that exclude, demobilise and impoverish, Nicaraguans' capacity to struggle against all the odds is an undeniable asset. Their tenacious spirit, capacity for critical awareness and zest for life have often seen them through socio-political upheaval and 'natural' disasters, and kept hope alive. However, political, social and economic policies and structures are unlikely to change significantly in the near future. The progressive and innovative human development initiatives of NGOs and community organisations remain small-scale. Thus the socio-political agenda for most Nicaraguans continues to be the search for survival strategies.

The Sandinista revolution and women's development

The women's emancipation movement that blossomed in Europe and the United States in the 20th Century led to changes for some women in Nicaragua, but the triumph of the Sandinista revolution in 1979 heralded a new era for all Nicaraguan women. Many women who had taken part in the insurrection of the 1970s proceeded in the 1980s to take up powerful political positions and become role models for women of all ages and backgrounds. Many others, in their own communities and organisations, began to participate in new ways, contributing to the building of a new society based on principles of justice and equality.

In 1980, less than a year after the overthrow of Somoza, the National Literacy Crusade mobilised thousands of women (and men) into an effort that reduced the illiteracy rate from 51 per cent to 12.9 per cent (Rocha/*Envio* 2000: 20). Being involved in the Crusade, for many women,

meant travelling away from their own communities and families. Hundreds of women from the towns and cities lived and worked for months at a time in isolated rural areas and their vision of their country and of themselves changed dramatically as a result.

Opportunities in education also opened up for women, especially in the big towns and cities. Towards the end of the 1980s, it was estimated that 80 per cent of university students in Nicaragua were women. For the first time, large numbers of women were studying, not only areas traditionally dominated by women (arts and humanities) but also engineering, agronomy, economics and administration. As a result, women began to work as engineers, doctors and agronomists. As in every war, the role of women in Nicaragua altered dramatically during the Sandinista revolution.

However, it was not the promotion of health, education and land reform — pillars of Sandinismo — that brought the most significant changes for women, but the Contra war. In rural areas, although women maintained the reproductive roles traditionally assigned to them, many also began to take on other tasks. Because so many men had been drafted into the army, women took on responsibilities commonly associated with men. Women's participation in farming co-operatives, for example, widely promoted by the Sandinista revolution, led to the learning of new skills and the development of leadership qualities which many women were able to develop further in the 1990s.

Throughout the war years, thousands of women and men dedicated themselves to the defence and development of the revolution, often ignoring or minimising their own personal needs. Women not only continued to look after their families, but also participated voluntarily in activities aimed at improving health and education within the community: community kindergartens, parent-teacher associations, communal committees, the Sandinista Defence Committees. Productive projects flourished as women organised everything from sewing co-operatives to pig-farming collectives. Many women, too, served in the armed forces, although in the early days of the revolution this traditionally male territory was reclaimed as 'army chiefs — under the leadership of Humberto Ortega — decided that women would only occupy administrative posts' (Belli 2001: 342), thus reducing and minimising women's participation in the Army. In the Sandinista Police Force and the Ministry of the Interior, however, things were different and large numbers of women signed up, many of them rising to important leadership positions.

For thousands of women, participation in the revolution led to the relegation of their own practical needs and

strategic interests, in gender terms. The war and the deteriorating socio-economic situation put pressure on women to dedicate their energies to the collective need for survival. Consequently, although certain roles and responsibilities changed for women as a result of the revolution and new opportunities opened up, a specific feminist agenda, based on gender analysis, was unable to flourish in its own right. In her book *Sandinista's Daughters Revisited: Feminism in Nicaragua* Margaret Randall says: 'Women's issues and the needs of the Revolution were too often placed in opposition to each other.' (Randall 1994: 28, quoted in a review by Dennis Korteuer). The message to women was clear: once the war was over they could start working on their own specific problems and needs; until then, they should focus on the war effort.

Margaret Randall argues that the failure of the revolution to develop a feminist agenda contributed to its ultimate loss of power at the polls in 1990. In her interview with poet Gioconda Belli, the latter declares: 'I feel that we lost the revolution to a form of political machismo.' (Randall 1994: 188) An important reason for this was the patriarchal character of Sandinista institutions and men's domination of power structures at all levels. Even where women were present, male values and perspectives continued to permeate Nicaraguan society. Although improvements in the quality of women's lives were included in the Sandinistas' agenda for social transformation, gender equity was not. The Sandinista government felt it was facing an external, objective problem (the war, the Contras, the Central Intelligence Agency) and its resolution had to be given utmost priority. Women's issues and feminism, interpreted by many (especially men) as an alien, predominantly 'First World' concept would have to wait. Hence the Sandinista women's organisation, AMNLAE (Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenses 'Luisa Amanda Espinoza'), 'proved incapable of doing the one thing uniquely within its province — that is going to battle around women's gender specific issues —[and] it became less and less important to women's lives.' (Randall 1994: 30)

By the late 1980s the promotion of a feminist agenda within the Sandinista Revolution had produced moderate but important results, for example the inclusion of equality in the Constitution, the recognition of common law unions and of single mothers with their children as legitimate families. However, many feminist activists and sympathisers within the FSLN remained unhappy with the restrictions on their development and as a result began to set up groups and collectives in different parts of Nicaragua that meant, in some cases, breaking away from AMNLAE. Mostly supportive of the Sandinista Revolution, they laid the foundations for an autonomous women's movement. Immediately after the 1990 elections, many

women's NGOs and collectives were consolidated and new ones were founded. They began to develop programmes and strategies focussed on women's gender interests and needs. According to Sofia Montenegro, 'the women's movement, after the FSLN electoral defeat was one of the first to acquire autonomy and (since then) has been setting itself up as an emergent political force.' (*La Corriente* 1997: 36)

This coincided with advances in gender theory internationally which began to question the 'Women in Development' (WID) focus that had been widely adopted during the 1980s, not only in Nicaragua but in many developing countries. Aimed at improving women's condition and quality of life by promoting their participation in productive activities (for example, setting up vegetable gardens), the WID approach often increased the workloads of women and failed to address issues vital to their gender consciousness and empowerment.

By the early 1990s the 'Gender and Development' (GAD) approach, which insists on the analysis and transformation of power in gender relations, was being widely used by women's NGOs, groups and collectives in Nicaragua and in some national and international development agencies. GAD differs from WID in that it focuses not only on the material and economic development of women, but also on raising their consciousness about gender in society. It calls for women's empowerment and autonomy: qualitative improvements in their capacity to make decisions about their own lives and their participation in all spheres of life. It demands equal opportunities for women, and access to and control of resources.

In a meeting with ICD development workers and counterpart organisations in 1993, Dora María Tellez, former Sandinista health minister, said that even if neoliberalism destroys all the social gains of the revolution, it will not find it easy to reverse the capacity for critical analysis that thousands of people, including thousands of women, had gained through participating in the revolution. With the emergence of a range of autonomous women's organisations in the 1990s that focus on raising women's gender consciousness, empowerment and autonomy, that would appear to be the case.

One of the most important expressions of autonomous women's organisation in the 1990s is the National Network of Women against Violence (NNWV), an umbrella organisation that brings together hundreds of organisations and collectives from all parts of Nicaragua. Since it was set up in 1992 it has had significant impact not only in raising public awareness on gender and intrafamily violence, but also in political and strategic terms. In 1996,

owing mainly to the efforts of the NNWV, the National Assembly passed legislation whose primary aim was to reduce and eliminate intrafamily violence. Known as 'Law 230', it is preventative rather than punitive, although it defines sentences for specific offences. The law protects not only women who are subject to violence by their husbands or partners, but all family members who suffer violence at the hands of another person within the family. The law also acknowledges the psychological dimension of violence: psychological injury is legally recognised as an offence (NNWV 1996: 7). In 1996, the Ministry of Health recognised intrafamily violence as a public health issue, thus accepting, in theory, responsibility for creating strategies, programmes and services to reduce it. However, since then the continued implementation of neoliberal policies and the resultant deterioration of public health services have hindered practical advances in this area.

The growth of the NNWV and other networks as well as the mushrooming of women's groups all over the country², and their emphasis on gender-based and intrafamily violence reflects the recognition of violence as a major social and public health problem, especially for women. A study carried out by NNWV with the University of León in northern Nicaragua, and supported by the University of Umeå in Sweden, found that 60 per cent of women interviewed reported that they had suffered physical, psychological or sexual violence at some point in their life (Ellsberg *et al* 1998: 45). Three-quarters of these women had been subjected to violence at the hands of their husbands or common law partners, making this the most common type of violence reported by women (Ellsberg *et al* 1998: 45). Further research carried out by FIDEG, a Nicaraguan NGO, and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) in 1997 among women in Managua, revealed that 70 per cent of the women included in the study had experienced physical violence at some point in their lives, one-third of them in the previous year (Morrison 1997, quoted by Clavel *et al* 1999).

Violence, however, is not the only issue that women's organisations work on. They also focus on other practical and strategic needs of women: health, education, technical training, employment, credit, human rights, reproductive rights, sexuality, political participation, awareness-raising, and so on. In 1996, during the elections, women from diverse organisations and ideological backgrounds formed the National Women's Coalition and drew up a 'minimal agenda' demanding that women's human rights be guaranteed. These were understood as 'civil, political, social, economic and cultural rights, exercised individually and collectively, with special emphasis on the rights of

² The distribution list of the feminist magazine *La Boletina* indicates that there are about 1000 groups working on gender issues in Nicaragua.

women in ethnic groups' (*La Corriente* 1997: 368). During the election campaigns in 1996, only the traditional Left took the 'minimal agenda' seriously and the electoral victory of the PLC, even more conservative than the previous government, came as a major blow to the women's movement.

Not all women, and few men, share the vision and values of such autonomous women's organisations as the NNWV. Nicaragua in the 1990s has witnessed an orchestrated endeavour, spearheaded by extreme conservative elements in the Catholic Church, to return to 'traditional Catholic values'. Despite the non-religious nature of the State, enshrined in the Constitution, Cardinal Obando y Bravo and the Nicaraguan Bishops wield significant political power that has enabled them to promote pre-Vatican II morality, ethics and theology in the Ministry of Education and other state and non-governmental institutions. Despite this, however, and the internal differences and difficulties that women's organisations face, their vision, strength, diversity and organisational capacity should not be underestimated.

The end of the war and the crisis in male gender identity in the 1990s

After the shock of electoral defeat for the Sandinistas in 1990, Violeta Chamorro symbolised new hope and the possibility of future prosperity for Nicaragua. 'Peace' was joyfully celebrated by women and men of all political persuasions. But Chamorro's electoral promises of peace and prosperity failed to materialise, and the hopes and dreams of thousands of war veterans quickly dissipated. Her government had inherited a country in tatters. In the late 1980s the Sandinista government had been forced to cut the state sector, fuelling massive under- and unemployment. The economic embargo and the war had reduced agricultural production to a minimum and people were experiencing 'a dramatic reduction in their buying power, an accelerated decrease in basic health and education services, increasing overcrowding and a generalised process of social decomposition' (*La Corriente* 1997 346). In 1990 Nicaragua was bankrupt and broken. Since then, for most of the population, economic conditions have deteriorated even further.

One of the main problems throughout the 1990s was a shortage of jobs. The UNDP report on Human Development in Nicaragua for the year 2000 states that 'in the 1990s lack of employment was one of the major problems faced by the Nicaraguan population' (UNDP 2000: 72). It points out that women were particularly affected. In 1996, the Central Bank statistics put total unemployment at 51.1 per cent (CENIDH 1999: 26). Two years later the new government, using a different method of calculation, stated that

unemployment had fallen to 24.1 per cent and by 1999 to 10.1 per cent (CENIDH 1999: 27). However, research by the Institute for Nicaraguan Studies in September 1999 puts unemployment at 11 per cent and underemployment at 41 per cent (CENIDH 1999: 27).

During the 1990s the labour market experienced major shifts from the formal to the informal sector. In 1985 47.9 per cent of the economically active population were employed in the formal sector, falling to 32 per cent in 1995 and 29.2 per cent in 1999 (UNDP 2000: 71). Most job opportunities for women were in the ever-increasing informal sector, selling water or setting up a stall in the market or in their own homes, increasing their already heavy workload. By 1999, three out of every four economically active women were working in the informal sector, where income is notoriously unpredictable. In 1999, 93 per cent of women working in the informal sector were not in full-time employment (UNDP 2000: 78).

As the 1990s wore on, sweatshops began to appear. Most of their employees were women. Despite the miserable salaries and conditions, for hundreds of women they provided an opportunity for formal sector employment. In general, however, unemployed and underemployed men considered this women's work, and beneath them. Their vision of themselves, their employment expectations and quite often their pride, led many of men to stay at home while increasing numbers of women scrambled to scrape a living, working long hours and taking home pitiful earnings.

By the end of the 1990s women accounted for 35.8 per cent of the economically active population, up from 29.5 per cent in 1995 and 20.2 per cent in 1983 (UNDP 2000: 70). Logically, the proportion of economically active males must have fallen. However, although both men and women participate in the formal and informal labour markets, the UNDP report on Human Development in Nicaragua for the year 2000 states that 'unemployment is above all a male problem, underemployment an essentially female one' (UNDP 2000: 72).

Men in crisis in a society in ruins³

For most men, full-time paid employment is intrinsically linked to a sense of maleness and, as in most countries, men in Nicaragua are taught that their role as husband and father, at least in theory, means earning a salary to meet the basic needs of the family. In reality, however, many men never fulfil this obligation, and the common

³ The ideas in the remainder of this section, and in section 3, 'The development of machismo in Nicaragua' are based on the personal experiences, analysis and debates of Nicaraguan men who took part in CANTERA's workshops on masculinity between 1994 and 1999.

practise of fathering children with different women reduces expectations (in both women and men) that men will voluntarily take responsibility as providers for their families. Despite this, in 1990 thousands of Nicaraguan men (mostly young), having hung up their arms, expected to find employment, establish themselves as husbands (common-law or otherwise) and fathers and settle into a 'normal' family existence. The reality could not have been more different. With no jobs available, they were unable to earn a salary, and their status, role and sense of importance and usefulness within the family and in society began to erode. Many men faced a sense of failure and alienation. Unable to meet one of society's basic expectations, Nicaraguan men at the beginning of the 1990s were at the threshold of a major crisis, caused mainly by changes in markets that the transition from Sandinismo to neoliberalism provoked.

Unemployment, however, was not the sole cause of men's crisis. During the 1980s men in Nicaragua had experienced a sense of belonging and self-importance. As members of the armed forces, the FSLN or other organisations, men wielded power — military, political, social, interpersonal — and revelled in it. Although it functioned in a top-down model, the exercise of power had as its ultimate aim the establishment of a just society (at least in theory) and men were the self-proclaimed protagonists of that endeavour. A popular Nicaraguan song of that era called men 'Warriors of Love', sacrificing themselves and using their power to save Nicaragua from capitalist imperialism and create a new society. But this romantic adventure came to an abrupt end in 1990. As many men saw their power diminish, disappointment and disillusionment replaced it. Moreover, despite a military victory over the Contras, a new government had been installed that set about dismantling all the gains they had fought for and had seen their friends die for in battle. Unemployment and poverty mocked the dream of social justice they had fought for and neoliberal economic policies offered little chance of prosperity. By the mid 1990s, disillusionment was turning to anger and cynicism.

Many men found themselves forced to emigrate (legally or illegally) in search of work and new opportunities in Costa Rica or the United States, where hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans currently reside.⁴ Those who stayed behind had few internal resources and external networks to help them cope with the crisis. The dictates of traditional masculinity inhibited many men from publicly or privately recognising the extent of their sense of loss, futility and anger. To do so would be to admit weakness and defeat and thus invite criticism and ostracism. Ill-equipped to cope with emotional problems, thousands of men turned to typically male methods of

dealing with crisis: increased alcohol consumption and violence.

For a minority of men, however, dealing with the crisis of the early 1990s meant opening themselves up to the possibility of new roles and responsibilities in the family, commonly associated with women. Out of necessity a few men began to take on domestic chores while their partners or mothers sought paid work. For many of these men, this required a reappraisal of attitudes and values associated with traditional male and female identities and roles, and the beginning of a redefinition of their understanding of masculinity.

Men Against Violence

As in the case of women, the revolution had equipped many Nicaraguan men with a capacity for critical analysis. Some began to link the assumption of domestic chores and other issues related to gender equity (equal opportunities, gender violence, reproductive rights, and so on) to human rights, social justice and integrated human development. In 1993 a group of men linked to Nicaraguan feminist NGOs and progressive women's collectives began to meet regularly to reflect on masculinity and related issues, and family violence in particular. This led to the formation of the Men Against Violence Group in Managua (MAVG) in December 1993. The MAVG had two main aims: to offer a space where men could meet to reflect on violence and masculinity in their own lives and relationships, and to organise activities geared at challenging other men to reflect on their masculinity and eliminate violence from their lives.

Some women looked on suspiciously, doubting that men could change. Many, however, welcomed the gesture and urged more men to get involved, recognising that if women were to advance further, power relations between women and men (and among men) would have to change. The birth of the MAVG marks the beginning of an organised attempt by men in Nicaragua to face the crisis in masculinity, reduce gender-based violence and contribute to gender equity.

⁴ The Nicaraguan population in Costa Rica is around 450,000 and cash remittances from the estimated 150,000 Nicaraguans living in the United States are Nicaragua's primary source of income.

3. The development of machismo in Nicaragua



Machismo, indigenous cultures and the Spanish invaders

Machismo: a universal phenomenon

Peter Sternberg⁵ points out that the contemporary usage of the word 'machismo' stems from the work of North American anthropologists in Mexico in the 1940s and 1950s.⁶ Their research depicts a racist view of Mexican men as violent, uncaring and willing to go to any length to protect their honour, a stereotypical image that has been further propagated by Hollywood (and Mexican) movies. In modern-day Nicaragua, however, the word 'machismo', is used to describe a socio-cultural model of masculinity that, passed on from generation to generation, dictates the attitudes, values and behaviour that men should adopt to be considered men and to feel that they are men. It encompasses not only the way that men relate to women but also to other men and to children in both the domestic and public spheres of life. It is, in effect, an ideology built upon the erroneous

supposition that men, as the result of a natural phenomenon, are physically, intellectually and sexually superior to women, a concept that is instilled into both women and men from an early age. Consequently, men enjoy rights and privileges and have access to opportunities in society that are denied to women and a system of gender inequity is promoted and perpetuated. To accuse someone of being 'machista' in Nicaragua bears negative connotations and is indicative of the success that women have had in the past 20 years in revealing the oppressive nature of patriarchal society.

⁵ Peter Sternberg is an ICD/CIIR development worker with CISAS, a Nicaraguan NGO that promotes community health, where he is supporting the development of a proposal to involve men in issues of reproductive health in Nicaragua. He is also undertaking a PhD at the University of Leeds. Many of the historic references and interpretations in this section have come out of correspondence and discussions with Peter and I am greatly indebted to him for his insights and for sharing information from his own research.

⁶ See Mirande A (1997) *Hombres and Machos – Masculinity in Latino Culture*, Westner, Boulder Colorado.

'Machismo', the product of centuries of cultural history, is, therefore, a relatively modern term and it has changed and developed as society itself has evolved. It would be erroneous and simplistic to perpetuate the idea that in Latin America and the Caribbean machismo began with the arrival of the Spanish invaders more than 500 years ago. The cultivation and preservation of male power and dominance in society, however well 'developed', is a universal phenomenon that transcends historical and cultural barriers.

Male and female identities in Nahuatl and Chorotega societies

At the time of the conquest of Central America by Spanish invaders, two of the largest and most influential indigenous groups that populated the area now known as Nicaragua were the Chorotega and the Nahuatl peoples. In Nahuatl society women were considered men's property and had few rights, the economy depended on war and conquest and government was top-down and dictatorial. The Chorotega people, in contrast, had developed a society ruled by a council of elders, depended on farming and gathering for their subsistence and Chorotega women enjoyed greater rights than their Nahuatl counterparts. Pablo Antonio Cuadra⁷, an expert on Nicaraguan culture and identity, argues that: 'Chorotega women were valued members of their communities and played an important part in the economic, religious and political activities of the tribe'. While little historical information exists on the actual position of women in Chorotega society, and given that Cuadra's interpretation may be idealised, this does imply that certain differences did exist between women at the time of the conquest. Gender, then as now, is not the only social category that determined women's and men's roles, responsibilities and quotas of power in indigenous societies, and it would be fair to deduce that differences did in fact exist between men and between women based on other factors such as ethnicity, class and age. Indeed, in relation to Nahuatl culture it has been argued (Levi and Montenegro 1993⁸) that while rural women were still subordinate to men they enjoyed greater freedoms than their sisters in the cities and towns and wider participation in the political, social and religious lives of their communities.

Mestizo culture

In the analysis of the Spanish conquest of Nicaragua in her book *Sexual Culture in Nicaragua*, Sofia Montenegro explains that the constitution of a *mestizo* or mixed indigenous and Spanish culture begins with the Spaniards 'occupation of the land, the birth of a new ethnic group through the rape of indigenous women, the derogation of autochthonous languages and the imposition of another language, religion and new social order' (Montenegro

2000: 30). In the early years of the conquest, Montenegro claims the existence of 'two republics'. On one hand there was the 'Spanish republic', governed and protected by the state, and on the other there was the 'indigenous republic' which obeyed and worked for the Spanish republic, maintaining some continuity with indigenous traditions and lifestyles. Within a short period of time, however, a third social group, those born of mostly illegitimate unions between Spaniards and indigenous people, had appeared. This group differed from the 'indigenous republic' in three main ways: its members did not settle in communities, did not co-own land and property and indeed rarely owned land at all for farming. This gave this new *mestizo* or *ladino* population the advantage that they were exempt from the tithes and taxes that the indigenous peoples had to pay to the Crown. In effect, as Montenegro points out, 'this third group found itself outside the legal order that had been established starting from the 16th Century' (Montenegro 2000: 31). This situation, together with their refusal to be identified with the *mulato* population (people born of black and white parents) led to the eventual absorption of the *mestizo* population into the 'Spanish republic'. Indeed, indigenous women who had given birth to children by Spanish fathers, whether through rape or by consent, were invariably rejected by their communities and their only option was to seek the recognition of the father, ensuring at least that the children would be brought up as *mestizos*, and enjoy the benefits this entailed.

Montenegro argues, however, that this process has had far-reaching consequences for Nicaraguan culture and that the effects are still to be found today: 'For the child this meant the non-identification with his/her mother and her culture and the identification with the father's. The result of this psychic operation can still be appreciated even today in the unblemished machismo that exists in our society: in the violent humiliation of women and in the equally violent affirmation of the father. Machista behaviour reproduces, through time, the arbitrary power of the conqueror and his indifference towards his offspring; scorn towards women and resentment towards mothers.' (Montenegro 2000: 32)

The influence of the Catholic Church

The violent appropriation of indigenous women by Spanish conquerors led not only to the birth of a *mestizo* culture but also, in time, to the assimilation within that

⁷ Cuadra bases his analysis on the *Historia General y Natural de las Indias* written by Spanish traveller Ovieda y Valdez at the time of the conquest.

⁸ Levi, L. and Montenegro, S (1993) 'Allucinación de familia: aportes para la deconstrucción de la familia patriarcal', *Xilott*, No. 11, 6 June, 1993, pp 25-33.

culture of the idea that women who mother *mestizo* children are, to quote Peter Sternberg, 'holy, as givers of life and corrupt for their sin of allowing themselves to be impregnated by conquerors'. This dichotomy of women as 'mother-saint' and 'sinner-whore', a concept reinforced by the Catholic Church since the time of the conquest, still permeates both Nicaraguan men's and women's vision of womanhood today. Indeed, the most important cultural-religious festival in Nicaragua is the feast of the Immaculate Conception (the remembrance of Mary being conceived without the stain of original sin on her soul) and the exuberance with which it is celebrated overshadows both Christmas and Easter. The significance given to this feast demands cleanliness, purity and virginity as the essential qualities desirable in all women. The constant pressure exerted on women to emulate the Virgin Mary as the prototype of feminine wholeness and integrity is indicative of the control that patriarchal society wields over women's sexuality and is one of the main pillars of machismo in Nicaragua.

Unravelling stereotypes

As part of an effort to unravel cultural stereotypes and discover the historic roots and contemporary character of machismo in Nicaragua, participants in the masculinity courses run by CANTERA are often invited to reflect on the images they have of the four different male 'prototypes' in Nicaraguan history and culture: indigenous men, Spaniards, Africans and Englishmen.⁹ When asked to draw these images, most men have little difficulty in representing indigenous men and Spaniards. Information about Africans and Englishmen, however, is scant and derived from primary school textbooks that depict Africans as slaves and barbarians and Englishmen as pirates or as Dickensian gentlemen with top hats and tail coats.

The expression of these stereotypes paves the way for a deeper analysis of indigenous societies in Central America before the arrival of Christopher Columbus. It is interesting to note, however, that in this analysis the participants rarely make direct references to the Nahuatl and the Chorotega peoples and the often heated debate never completely escapes from stereotypes and historical inaccuracies. General agreement is usually arrived at, however, that in pre-Columbian indigenous societies roles and responsibilities of both men and women were clearly defined, and, as in modern society, related to biological conditions and functions. Women's biological reproductive function ensures perpetuity for the family or tribe; it leads to the assignation of the home as the 'natural' domain of women and the development of their social role in nurturing and bringing up the children (motherhood). According to the images and information

held by some men, this often included planting, harvesting and processing grains and vegetables in their *patios* and preparing food. Men, on the other hand, free from the responsibility of bearing and raising children, were permitted greater freedom of movement. They could develop skills as hunters and gatherers and, in times of war with neighbouring tribes, as warriors.

Images of male superiority

Despite their lack of objective knowledge of Nahuatl and Chorotega cultures, the Nicaraguan men who have taken part in CANTERA's training courses on masculinity, preserve images of their indigenous forefathers as providers for and protectors of their families and communities, physically stronger than women and generally superior. Some men insist that indigenous men refrained from using violence in their relationships with women and that the arrival of the Spanish destroyed a harmonious indigenous society. Others refute this as unfounded idealism. Indeed, it probably says more about their aspirations for the future of gender relations than about any historical precedent. After intense debate, the participants invariably conclude that power relationships between men and women existed in indigenous cultures as they do in modern ones, based on the premise that men are naturally stronger, more intelligent than and superior to women.

Some men in their analysis of the genocide and fierce humiliation suffered by indigenous peoples at the hands of the Spanish, while recognising the devastating consequences for women, also argue that this experience ingrained itself in men's minds and subconscious as a profound sense of powerlessness, failure and weakness. They suggest that this may have affected the subsequent development of men's vision of their world and especially their perceptions and concepts of male and female identity and roles. It could be argued that gender violence, as a cultural, historical phenomenon in Nicaragua, is in part the collective externalisation of men's subconscious shame at their inability to defend themselves, their culture and 'their' women. The systematic subordination of women, often expressed in misogyny, enables men to express a sense of primal guilt and anger (at themselves and at women), and to prove that they are not weak and thus reclaim a lost sense of secure, dominant, powerful masculinity fragmented by the Spanish conquest.

Machismo in Nicaragua and other parts of Latin America does not begin with the Spanish conquest; but its

⁹ The Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua was a British colony and the first language of most of the Creole population is English.

development as an oppressive ideology that has dictated gender relations throughout the past five centuries has been greatly influenced by the experiences of women and men during that period. The traditional models of femininity and masculinity prevalent in indigenous societies were reinforced by Spanish norms and values, and by a staunchly misogynist Catholic Church. Furthermore, the internalisation of feelings of guilt, shame, betrayal, anger and powerlessness experienced by women and men (to different degrees and for different reasons) deepened the divisions that already existed between them. The historical convergence of these phenomena laid the foundations for the establishment of the inequalities and injustices that characterise the gender relations that permeate contemporary Nicaraguan *mestizo* culture.

Machismo in today's Nicaragua

Gender theory holds that the assignation of male and female gender identities in a given society at a particular time are directly related to the physical, anatomical and sexual attributes that differentiate men and women. Based on these attributes, historical, socio-cultural paradigms are created that dictate how women and men should be, what they should do, and how and what they should think and feel.

When a male child is born in Nicaragua he is identifiable only by his external sexual organs (his biological sex). From the moment of his birth, however, or even before if the mother has access to an ultrasound scan, a socialisation process begins that will attempt to assign to him the attitudes, values and behaviour demanded of men in society (his gender identity). In general, his arrival in the world will be greeted with joy and celebration. In many rural parts of Nicaragua, a midwife is paid the equivalent of US\$5 and given a chicken if a male child is born, but receives only US\$2.50, and no chicken, if the child is a girl (CANTERA 1994: 6) — a more than symbolic manifestation of the social value placed on being male.

The family is key in gender socialisation processes. On the birth of a male child, all family members will automatically know the 'proper' way to bring him up. No one will dress him in pink or give him dolls to play with, and as he grows he will be encouraged to take part in boisterous energetic games which develop physical strength and the ability to endure pain. Tears, fears and weakness are prohibited and punished with accusations of being a *cochón* — a sissy or poofter. Big boys don't cry, girls are inferior and any expression of qualities or behaviour considered feminine is frowned on and sneered at. As in many societies, ingrained homophobic attitudes serve as a powerful control mechanism not only to steer

young boys towards heterosexuality, but also to instil macho value systems and behaviour patterns.

By a very early age, therefore, young boys have begun to integrate into their own individual identity the social prescriptions for masculinity. This enables them to feel that they are men and guarantees that others, men and women, will treat them as men. This early moulding of attitudes, values and behaviour enables their insertion into a world that revolves around the strategic needs and interest of men. To facilitate this, concepts related to femininity are also hammered into young boys' value systems and ways of thinking. They begin to internalise a view of women that is diametrically opposed to their view of themselves. They internalise ideas about women's weakness and general physical and intellectual inferiority. Women are perceived by men (and indeed by themselves) as second-class beings whose main function in life is to attend to men's physical, emotional and sexual needs.

Because of the gender roles socially assigned to women, mothers, grandmothers and older sisters play a central role in passing on gender-based attitudes, values and behaviour to their daughters and sons. Many men in Nicaragua, when they begin to reflect on their masculinity, say: 'Our mothers brought us up, so it's their fault'. Gender stereotypes are so ingrained that many women inculcate in their sons the attitudes, values and conduct that society considers appropriate for men. They are of course not the only ones who do so. They are constantly reinforced by other people and social institutions, such as the church and the education system. All members of the family (fathers, when they are present, brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles, cousins and grandparents) collude unquestioningly in the 'correct' bringing up of male children. Nothing is gained by casting blame, and machismo can only be changed when seen in its socio-historical perspective and when men take their share of responsibility for its eradication.

Within families, machismo is expressed in a gendered division of work in which women are responsible for reproductive tasks (childbearing and -raising, domestic chores, and so on) and men for productive tasks (paid work). This division has far-reaching implications for men's and women's individual and collective development, because it determines social mobility and subsequent access to opportunities and resources. The allocation of reproductive tasks to women greatly inhibits their access to education and paid employment, and limits their political and social participation.

The concept of power is of particular importance in perpetuating gender inequities. In social systems based on

gender differences, power is a male attribute. Men quickly learn that they not only have to possess power, they must also use it. Power includes the ability to conquer and dominate. It leads to the control and manipulation of those who are considered inferior, and promises rewards. Men are expected to manifest this type of power in their relationships with women in all spheres of life, and its successful use guarantees rights and privileges within the family unit and in society. To ensure men's freedom of movement, individual and professional development and the rewards associated with these (money, prestige, social status), women must be subordinated.

However, this type of power can lead to the use of violence, especially in conjugal relationships. Physical strength is seen as a positive male value to be nurtured by men and in men. Its private application, as physical violence and as a means to control women, is a common practice that many men internalise as their right and duty. Both men and women have been taught to regard the woman in marriage or common-law unions as the man's property. This confers on the man the right to do as he pleases with her and the duty to keep her under control. In the study by NNWV cited earlier, 39 per cent of the women interviewed reported that their husband, partner or boyfriend had used physical violence against them on at least one occasion. Among women who were or had been in a conjugal relationship, the proportion was 52 per cent (Ellsberg *et al* 1998: 45).

Violence as a manifestation of male power is not limited to the physical sphere. The sense of superiority instilled into men often leads to systematic psychological abuse of women by their partners, for example verbal abuse that constantly humiliates and denigrates, and the use of threatening and violent language. It is also expressed in the constant control and monitoring of women's spaces and mobility and sometimes even in the denial of permission to leave the house. In many cases physical and psychological violence go hand-in-hand and are a permanent feature of conjugal relationships.

Nor is violence by men against women confined to couples. Even within the family other violent dynamics are common, for example, fathers who use psychological and physical violence against their daughters and brothers who do so against their sisters.

Sexual violence is also a product of male power, and it is generally acknowledged that most acts of sexual violence against women in Nicaragua are committed in the women's own home by family members or friends of the family. National police statistics in 1998 showed a 100 per cent increase in sexual crimes reported in police

stations between 1996 and 1997. The number of rapes registered increased by 124 per cent (Clavel *et al* 1999) which may be more indicative of women's increased willingness to report rape than of increased incidence of rape. In an unpublished study carried out in 1998, 27 per cent of women stated that they had been sexually abused as children, as did 20 per cent of men.

Women of all ages are subject to harassment and acts of violence by men in other areas of everyday life: at work, in public transport, in markets and shopping centres and on the streets. The idea that men have a right to use violence, and that this is natural male behaviour, is so ingrained in the minds of many men and women in Nicaragua that in conjugal relationships where violence is absent, people wonder: does he really love her? Violence, especially in its 'milder' forms is seen as an expression of love and affection, especially when it is the result of jealousy. It is a popular belief that a jealous man who hits his partner does so because he loves her so much he is afraid of losing her to another man.

Intrageneric violence

Male violence is not limited to violence against women. Intrageneric violence, or violence used by men against other men, is also related to the social assignation and individual assimilation of power as a positive male attribute. For many men, the use of physical violence becomes a 'normal' way of settling differences (pub brawls and street fights), often with knives and guns. Importance is put on the ability to fight, to defend oneself, to endure pain and when necessary to beat the living daylights out of adversaries. It is a way of achieving status and gaining and perpetuating power within male circles.

Physical and psychological violence is also systematically used against men (individuals and groups) who do not conform to masculine norms. Gays are the obvious target for this type of violence, as are other men who fail to fulfil the norms of traditional masculinity. It is witnessed among children in the isolation, ridicule and bullying of boys who are quiet and reserved, or who lack physical strength. Many men carry this over into their youth and adulthood. Brute force, not dialogue, is the way to settle differences.

On a macro level this is transferred to the propagation of war as a legitimate means to conquer and dominate others, to protect interests and to defend oneself. Few women have been responsible for starting wars¹⁰ and the Armed Forces in almost every country in the world are dominated by men, especially at the highest levels. In wars, as was the case in Nicaragua in the 1980s, it is

usually men who are conscripted or who voluntarily take up arms and therefore men who are the immediate and direct casualties. It is one reason why in many countries in the world men have a lower life expectancy than women. In Nicaragua in 1989, women accounted for 52 per cent of the Nicaraguan population because so many men had been killed as a result of the Contra war.

Not all the factors that contribute to men dying earlier than women are as dramatic as war. Social habits associated with maleness also influence men's life expectancy and the quality of their life and health. A recent study carried out in Mexico, *Masculinity as a Risk Factor*, revealed that the three most common causes of death in men¹¹ are car accidents, homicide (men killing other men) and cirrhosis of the liver, the latter most probably related to the consumption of alcohol (De Keijzer 1996: 11). Although other influences are also at work, the hypothesis put forward in the study is that traditional masculinity is a major contributory factor in a large proportion of these deaths. The study also revealed that in the State of Veracruz in 1993, four times more men than women died in car accidents. While no information is offered in relation to the percentage of men and women drivers in the State of Veracruz, the author of the study suggests that socially learned characteristics associated with masculinity (for example aggression and competitiveness), influence the way that men drive and lead to recklessness and irresponsibility on the roads and ultimately to male deaths.

Further analysis of the statistics revealed a relation between the consumption of alcohol and deaths in accidents¹² and homicide, concluding that the abuse of alcohol contributed to premature male deaths and was therefore a major risk factor for men (De Keijzer 1996: 10). Given that the ability to hold one's drink is an attribute that men are encouraged to develop and that other values associated with car accidents and homicide are also linked to maleness, there seems to be a link between traditional masculinity and men's life expectancy and general health.

The study also found that, although more than two-thirds of attempted suicides were women, 75 per cent of successful suicides were men (De Keijzer 1996: 11). According to police statistics for Nicaragua in 1996, 84 per cent of successful suicides were men (CANTERA 1996: 26). This may be related to social and economic crisis, but it is also linked to the methods men choose to end their lives. Women usually take an overdose of tablets and in many cases their suicide attempt is a cry for help. Many men hang or shoot themselves. To cry for help would be to admit weakness and goes against masculine values that predominate even in the moment of taking one's own life.

The internalisation of traditional masculine values, attitudes and behaviour takes its toll not only of men's life expectancy but also of their mental and physical health the quality of their lives. Expressing one's feelings or sharing personal or emotional problems is behaviour associated with femininity, so most men reject it. The result is an inability to develop a healthy spiritual dimension. The maxim that 'big boys don't cry' and the constant pressure on men to keep a stiff upper lip has profound emotional effects on men, many of whom go through their lives unable to show affection in a meaningful way. This is common not only in relationships with women and children, but in particular with other men, where the physical display of affection is anathema, except at a baseball match or after a good many beers. The repression of feelings and emotions not only isolates men and generates loneliness, it also leads to physical and mental illness. The high level of heart disease in men is related not only to heavy smoking (historically associated with males, but nowadays increasingly adopted by women) and a high-fat, high-cholesterol diet, but also to stress brought about by the socially acquired inability to express and process feelings.

In effect, the degree to which each man assimilates the attitudes, values and behaviour associated with traditional masculinity has a direct effect on the quality and length of his life. The mandate to be 'macho' severely limits the possibility of developing tenderness and sensitivity, qualities necessary for human beings to be human. Hence male socialisation is a demoralising and dehumanising process that atrophies men's individual and collective development and their capacity for qualitative human relationships. For many it leads directly to physical illness, mental disorder and premature death.

Power and sexuality

The maintenance of male power and privilege in society is directly related to the control of women's sexuality, which requires the allocation of reproductive tasks to women. The use and threat of sexual violence are a mechanism for the control of women. Although in general sex and sexuality, even for men, are shrouded in myths and taboos, the expectations of men's sexuality are remarkably clear. From an early age, young men are taught that sexual prowess is the measure of masculinity. The concept of women as sexual objects is constantly

¹⁰ In one workshop in 1999, one man half jokingly proposed that the only women ever responsible for starting a war was Margaret Thatcher in Las Malvinas, a claim that no one at that moment was able to refute.

¹¹ This does not include 'natural' causes such as cancer and degenerative illnesses related to ageing.

¹² Consumption of alcohol is a factor in 60 per cent of traffic accidents reported to the police.

reinforced by male relatives and friends and by mass media representations of women.

Many men in Nicaragua, when given the opportunity, tell horror stories about their sexual initiation. Some, at 11 or 12 years old, were taken by fathers or cousins to brothels to 'enjoy' their first taste of sex (CANTERA 1996: 16). The experience is a traumatic one, marred by hidden fears, and without any knowledge of sex or sexuality. Stereotypes about women as objects to be used for sexual pleasure are reinforced, as is the almost exclusively genital character of male sexuality. As a result men grow up equating sex with penetration and the quantity of sexual conquests takes precedence over the quality of sexual relations. Men subsequently boast about and often exaggerate these conquests in conversations with other men; it is important to let them know the extent of one's sexual success.

Male attitudes towards sex and the pressure on them constantly to prove their virility poses a risk of spreading of HIV and AIDS. 'Real men' must demonstrate their sexual power by having numerous sexual partners. Combined with scanty sex education and the propagation of myths about condom use — 'they reduce sensitivity and pleasure' — the way that men in general exercise their sexuality is a cause for major concern. Many men who are in established heterosexual, conjugal relationships frequently have unprotected sex with other women and men (bisexual practices are common in Nicaragua but rarely acknowledged). The HIV infection rate among heterosexual women is increasing rapidly. Half of the adolescents living with HIV at present are women (UNDP 2000: 43).

According to Ministry of Health figures, between 1987 and September 1999 a total of 467 people in Nicaragua tested HIV positive (UNDP 2000: 42). Of these, 227 now have AIDS and 130 have died of AIDS-related illnesses. Given that the Ministry of Health barely has the resources to attend to people with AIDS-related illnesses, it is generally recognised that these figures reflect deficiencies in record keeping and, therefore, do not represent the full extent of HIV-AIDS in Nicaragua. Although it is generally recognised that infection rates are lower than in other countries in Central America, it is accepted that conditions are ripe for an explosion of HIV/AIDS. Poverty levels are increasing, abuse of drugs (including alcohol) is proliferating, prostitution has risen alarmingly, especially among young women, the government lacks coherent education and prevention policies and irresponsible, risk-ridden sexual habits are widespread. According to the Ministry of Health, although most women are aware of the risk of AIDS and its consequences, only 2 per cent insist on their partner using a condom (UNDP 2000: 43).

The reluctance of Nicaraguan men to use condoms or to develop a more responsible approach to sex and sexuality is symptomatic of the androcentric nature of traditional masculinity. Sexual pleasure is a male right and privilege that is negated by the use of condoms or self-imposed restrictions. Women's sexual and emotional needs are barely recognised and knowledge about women's bodies and sexuality is limited. Indeed, the almost exclusively genital understanding of sex also means that most men never discover the erotic potential of their own bodies and the diversity of human sexuality. Even if love is present in relationships, the expression of feelings, emotions and affection is taboo to male sexuality. As has been said many times in Nicaragua, 'women give sex to receive love and men give love to receive sex'. In everyday life this maxim is borne out in the way many men, of all ages, try to guarantee sex by sweet-talking, or even emotional blackmail: 'if you really loved me...'. For adolescent and young women this pressure often leads to premature and unwanted pregnancies as through sexual relations, for them an act of love, they aspire to preserve the attention and 'love' of their suitors. In 1999, 45 per cent of adolescent women in Nicaragua were already mothers, or were pregnant or had been pregnant at least once (UNDP 2000: 36). For many young men, this represents another feather in their cap, a new conquest to boast of. This is indicative of men's attitudes to sex and women, to their own sense of responsibility and to their own children. As in other areas of life, in the exercise of their sexuality men are granted privileges denied to women and are freed from any sense of responsibility. Birth control, childbearing and child-rearing are female tasks and men are expected to contribute at most economically to the children's welfare, and many fail to fulfil even this task. Men's sexual adventures are praised by others and boost male egos and social standing. Women, on the other hand, are expected to be pure and chaste before marriage and faithful within it.

Learning male identity

It would be ridiculous to assume that every Nicaraguan man colludes unconditionally with the hegemonic model of masculinity described above. The socialisation of each individual determines the degree to which he assimilates the attitudes and values of traditional masculinity and the expected behaviour. Although society undoubtedly attempts to assign a homogeneous identity to all men, the particular family context, social context and individual life experiences of men lead to the existence of different male identities in the same society. In other words, categories such as class, race, religion, geographical location and family unit type influence the attitudes, values and behaviour that any one man takes on. These varying manifestations of masculinity depend greatly on

how individuals and groups of men interpret the standards prescribed by society as typically male and how they internalise them.

However, although different expressions of masculinity may co-exist and no two men are ever the same, few manage substantially to escape the framework of traditional masculinity that emphasises the possession and use of power as a prerequisite for all men.

The model of masculinity that permeates Nicaraguan culture is a specific manifestation of a global paradigm that predominates in many societies and whose expression is determined by each one's history and its social and cultural context. Nicaraguan society is complex and rapidly changing, heavily influenced by modernisation and globalisation, of mass communications in particular. Men and women of all

ages have access to different models of masculinity and femininity, at least on their television sets. However, ingrained social norms that define male and female identities and gender roles cannot be altered overnight. Men and women are under constant pressure to reproduce in their own lives and in those of their children the attitudes, values and behaviour that traditional society expects. Moreover, the predominance of conservative right-wing ideology, and its propagation by ecclesiastical and political leaders calling for a 'return to traditional family values', are a major obstacle to social change and the altering of gender roles. Changes in the ways that men perceive themselves and women, in their attitudes, values and behaviour in all spheres of life, will not be achieved easily or quickly. They demand processes that challenge not only the ethos and structural framework of masculinity but also those of society itself.



4. CANTERA's work on masculinity and popular education



Gender and popular education

Women and popular education

Popular education, used to enable people to take responsibility for their own development and improving their own health and education, enjoyed considerable success in Nicaragua in the 1980s. During the 1990s some NGOs and community-based organisations began to use popular education methodologies in their programmes. CANTERA's work with women, begun in 1989, is an innovative application of popular education. Until then popular education had been limited to a predominantly Marxist analysis of society, and the need for objective changes in oppressive structures to achieve social justice. It was primarily concerned with questioning social and political power relations and generating proposals to facilitate social justice. Gender relations, however, were excluded from the equation and the power relationships between men and women were not generally or systematically subjected to critical analysis.

The fusion of popular education with gender analysis among women, while still concerned with the

transformation of oppressive structures, began to include the analysis of women's experiences and aspirations. As well as reflecting on the external world, women began to analyse themselves, using a popular education methodology. Their own complex and subjective reality became the centre of their reflections and analysis. The result of these processes was the articulation of concrete proposals to improve their own lives: attitudes, values, roles, responsibilities, opportunities, rights and duties, public and political participation.

A recent study, *Exploring Our Changes*, carried out by MUSAVIA (Proyecto Mujer, Salud y Violencia¹³), revealed that awareness-raising and training with women that used popular education methodology to analyse gender inequalities led to changes at two main levels: consciousness-raising and empowerment. The first has to do with concepts, ideas and principles. The second deals with decision-making and bringing about change. Compared with women who have had no access to education on gender, women who have taken part in

¹³ A Central America-wide programme supported by the European Union, UNFPA and a number of European NGOs.

gender training in general demonstrated a greater capacity to make decisions on their own development and life, and within the family, a higher level of self-esteem and a greater ability to defend their rights. They showed a greater understanding of the causes of violence, were more inclined to reject violence (as recipients or perpetrators) and showed efforts to bring up their children without resorting to violence (D'Angelo 1999).

Popular education and masculinity

In 1993 discussions in CANTERA about the meaning of gender and its relationship to popular education opened up debate on masculinity. CANTERA's popular education with women and theoretical advances made it clear that improvement in women's quality of life depends on changes in perceptions, concepts, values and behaviour, not only in women, but also in men. Moreover, the women who had taken part in the courses often said that the greatest obstacle in their change processes was the intransigence of men. How could gender power relations be modified if half of the population was not even willing to enter the gender debate?

Thus came the challenge. Women in CANTERA stated their position:

- Social justice, the ultimate goal of popular education, cannot be achieved without gender justice.
- Gender justice can be achieved only if both men and women work towards it, changing their ways of thinking, being and relating: women towards greater empowerment, men towards less machismo.
- The promotion of popular education and its declared goal of social justice falls short if it focuses only on objective reality and social and political structures.
- Men committed to and working in popular education fall short if they are not equally committed to gender justice.

CANTERA's work on gender and masculinity responds primarily to women's practical and strategic gender needs and was seen as a necessary step in consolidating and deepening women's processes of change. It was developed, from the beginning, within a pro-feminist framework that would itself develop over the years. The idea that men would also benefit from changes in hegemonic masculinity, although present from the beginning, grew as the process gathered momentum. By the end of 1993 CANTERA had started work on masculinity and popular education and a few men in the technical team had begun to look at gender from a different perspective.

CANTERA's programme, 1993–99

Getting started

Recognising resistance, fears and contradictions

To start work on masculinity and popular education, men in CANTERA not only had to take on board the arguments of their female colleagues, but also to come to terms with their own misconceptions, prejudices and fears about gender and feminism. The turning point, perhaps, was the recognition that gender theory does not propose 'turning the tables', a common myth perpetuated by many men to demean feminism and justify their own resistance to change. In fact, far from proposing the inversion of roles and power relations, gender theory calls for equity between men and women: in educational and employment opportunities, in access to and control of resources, in public and political participation, in family structures, to mention a few. To achieve this balance, however, men too must change. They must cease to use power to guarantee privileges for themselves at the cost of women's subordination and exclusion.

A small group of men in CANTERA recognised contradictions between what they were saying and what they were doing. On the one hand, they declared women's rights were essential to social justice. On the other, they continued to reap the benefits of a thoroughly machista social system. Popular education proposes a dialectical relationship between theory and practice, on a personal as well as on a professional level. On realising this, men in CANTERA were able to take important steps towards their own personal and professional involvement in gender issues.

Deepening the gender debate

Within CANTERA the shift in men's view of gender issues was greatly influenced by Marcela Lagarde, a Mexican anthropologist and expert on gender and development who held a two-day workshop on gender in CANTERA in mid 1993. Her visit to CANTERA facilitated the breaking down of intellectual and emotional resistance and proved to be a catalyst for work on masculinity.

It was another year, however, before work actually began. The women insisted that there should be an educational activity on gender and masculinity for men and by January 1994, such an event was included in the calendar of educational activities, to be organised by men for men. It was decided to bring together men from other organisations and from different parts of the country. In mid 1993 the Men Against Violence Group (MAVG) had

emerged in Managua and debates on gender and how to get men involved in gender issues were going on in other NGOs. It was decided to raise the profile of the event. For men in CANTERA, it was also a convenient way to avoid being the focus of the activity and subjecting themselves to levels of reflection, analysis and intimacy that they were not ready for or felt they did not need. Organising a national encounter among men was less of a threat, and also opened up the possibility of drawing in a greater number of men.

The First National Encounter on Masculinity, 1994

Planning the encounter

The First National Encounter on Masculinity took place in September 1994 and was attended by 41 men from all parts of Nicaragua. It was a one-day workshop, planned by the men in CANTERA's Rural Team: Freddy Morales (RIP), Ramón González and Patrick Welsh, ICD development worker and with input from women in CANTERA.

CANTERA's approach to workshops

All CANTERA's courses and workshops are highly structured. Care is taken to define precise, feasible objectives, and to ensure that topics are dealt with in a logical fashion and in relation to defined objectives. Appropriate educational methods and techniques are designed so that these objectives can be met, a time scale is proposed and responsibilities delegated to different members of the facilitating team. This ensures that a 'horizontal logic' — a relationship between the topic being dealt with, objectives, methods and techniques — is achieved, that enough time is allocated, and that each member of the team knows what his/her responsibilities are.

Emphasis is also put on a 'vertical logic' — a chronological one — taking care that topics are dealt with in a way that allows one to lead into and build on the other. A golden rule of CANTERA's approach to popular education is that each educational activity should end with the collective articulation of a proposal for change that must be practical and achievable. This approach was applied strictly in planning the encounter on masculinity.

Questions abounded. Why would men come? Would they come? What type of men would take part? What would their expectations be? Which issues would be the most

important to cover? Which could feasibly be dealt with in one day? What kind of fears and resistances would men have? What would be the best methodology? More questions than answers. The planning sessions became a kind of laboratory on masculinity as ideas were exchanged, premises and prejudices questioned and theories challenged.

Deciding the content

It was decided to focus the workshop on two main issues:

- the social construction of masculinity (male values, attitudes, behaviour, concepts, perceptions, and so on: where they come from and how they are instilled in men), and
- the consequences of machismo for women, children and men (effects on mental and physical health, opportunities in life and human development).

A proposal to bring in an external expert on gender and masculinity (a woman) was unanimously rejected. Experience showed that many men who had taken part in academic talks and seminars on gender issues (usually given by women), mainly out of curiosity and good will, ended up feeling alienated and even angry. Often they came away feeling that they had been personally blamed for women's sufferings at the hands (and fists) of all men since time began. This reinforced their resistance to discussion of gender. The idea of bringing in a male expert on masculinity was also debated and finally rejected. CANTERA's technical team was convinced of the need to adopt and adapt popular education methodology, just as had been done with women over the years. The main fear associated with bringing in a male expert on gender and masculinity was that the focus would have been exclusively intellectual and hence a typically rational male exercise. Popular education methodology, on the other hand, opened up the opportunity to facilitate individual and collective processes of critical reflection that would include a more subjective analysis of masculinity.

It was decided that the encounter would be run by the three-man CANTERA team and no women would be present. It was thought that the presence of women would limit the discussion and inhibit the men. Besides, the women in CANTERA had enough to do without taking on the task of changing men. Men's involvement in gender issues, from the beginning, required them to take responsibility for their own processes of reflection and change.

Men's life experiences as a starting point

A key objective was to generate proposals for concrete change. The aim was to get men to look at themselves, their values and relationships, and to recognise contradictions and injustice, to be able to take responsibility and initiate changes. The starting point would not be the theory, but men's own life experiences, concepts, perceptions and practices. The analysis needed to focus not only on the intellect but also on men's fears, feelings, dreams and aspirations.

The first encounter would have to enable men to reflect on their upbringing, and the people and institutions that influenced them. The methodology would have to ease men into frames of mind that would facilitate intimate sharing.

Identifying the characteristics of masculinity

The first exercise in the workshop (after introductions and presentations) was to identify typical male and female characteristics and group them into categories: physical/biological, socio-cultural and psychological. Six groups were formed, three of which defined characteristics and symbols associated with femininity, while the other three focused on male characteristics and symbols. Some men did drawings to illustrate what they had discussed in the groups. In the first category, physical strength and height, muscles, moustaches and beards, and deep voices were identified as 'masculine', motherhood, large breasts and big hips as 'feminine'. These definitions were later discussed, as some men did not agree that these characteristics were necessarily attributable to nature. They argued, for example, that not all men have deep voices and beards and that many women have small hips and breasts. There was unanimous agreement, however, that the fundamental physical/biological differences between men and women were their reproductive organs. In other words, it was possible to define 'sex' as a biological category.

Differences between men and women

Among the socio-cultural characteristics identified as 'feminine' were the use of dresses, skirts and tight-fitting trousers; earrings and necklaces; long hair and make-up. Pastel colours like pink and yellow were associated with women, as was the custom of speaking softly. Women were seen as cornerstones of the family, mothers and wives, responsible for the home and for bringing up the children. They dance, go to the market, raise chickens, tend to the garden and like art. Men, on the other hand, dress in dark shirts and trousers, have short hair, do not wear earrings, but if they do, only in one ear. Within the

family they are the bosses, make decisions, are the legal representatives and provide for the family through paid work. Men are free to come and go as they please and enjoy greater sexual freedom than women. As children they play with cars, balls and toy guns; when they grow older, boxing and baseball are their favourite sports. Men are resolute and indispensable.

Many of the psychological attributes associated with men were expressed in relation to those associated with women: less emotional (men don't cry), less able to put up with infidelity, more intelligent (good academic results matter) and rational, superior and independent. Other characteristics seen as typically male were competitiveness, aggression, courage and bravery, recklessness and fearlessness. Men were also perceived as capable, audacious leaders, able to take advantage of opportunities in life. But they were also described as liars and cheats, dangerous and lazy.

Women were described as delicate, soft, juicy, appetising, sexy, loving, friendly, and full of tenderness and sweetness. They are sensitive, express their feelings, cry when they need to, express love, are spontaneous and have a spirit of self-sacrifice. They are creative and some, too, are strong.

One *campesino* summed up the stereotypical view of women in the drawing of a guitar, accompanied by the following text:

The guitar symbolises women because they have certain similarities, for example their waist and hips. To make her play all you have to do is touch her. You have fun with her and every time you hold her you feel all choked up with emotion and you don't want to put her down. You look after her and you don't want anybody to mistreat her. Whenever you want to, you look for ways to make her play. She's sensitive and tickley in the middle and that's were you really like to develop your own abilities. But if you find a better model, you trade her in, physically speaking, that is, given that in other aspects she is incomparable. Women are the best thing that Nature has given us. (CANTERA 1994: 10)

It would be difficult to find a more honest expression of the way women in a macho society like Nicaragua are perceived as second class citizens, whose primary function is the satisfaction of men's emotional, physical and sexual needs. They are thought of as men's property, objects owned, used and discarded at a whim. Men enjoy rights and privileges denied to women and wield power over them to ensure that those rights and privileges are maintained.

Inverted roles

The identification of the differences that men saw between themselves and women laid the foundation for a further exercise aimed at enabling the participants to discover where such ideas came from and to assess to what degree they reflected reality. A video entitled *Marta and Raymond*, that inverts gender roles, enabled men to witness the mechanisms that subordinate women, the abuse and violence that women endure on a daily basis and the limitations put on their development. Seeing Raymond, a man, in a typical women's role, humiliated by Marta, caused reactions varying from disbelief to fear to shame.

Return to 'normality'

The video was stopped at the point where Marta, in a drunken stupor, is beating up a pregnant Raymond. The participants were asked to propose possible endings. Some thought that Raymond, at the end of his tether, would leave Marta and 'go home to daddy' or take refuge with friends. Others suggested that family and societal pressure would keep them together and that Raymond would have to accept the abuse and the violence as part of his lot, for the sake of the children and family unity. A few imagined that Raymond would fight back and put Marta in her place and one or two thought that the situation would get better: Marta would change her ways and they would grow old together, happy-ever-after, fairy story style.

The video actually ends with Raymond waking up from a nightmare, and realising that things are back to 'normal'. He wakes Marta to cook breakfast and get the children ready for school. His relief was mirrored by sighs that many participants in the workshop tried to smother.

Masculinity: socially assigned and individually assimilated

By this stage in the workshop, men had begun to unravel the consequences for women of the unequal power relations between the genders. They were being eased into reflecting on their feelings about these injustices and analysing to what degree they were reproducing them in their own relationships. They were discovering that male gender identity is socially assigned and individually assumed.

A trip back in time: the role of the family

The next exercise consisted of a trip back in time. Small groups were formed and the participants were asked to remember what they had learned as infants, children and adolescents about what it means to be a man. To avoid

repetition the questions given to each group were slightly different, but all were designed to facilitate reflection on the role of the family, school, the Church, mass media and other social institutions in the inculcation of attitudes, values and behaviour considered appropriate for men. It was no coincidence that many of the characteristics that had been discussed earlier figured in these group discussions. Mothers and fathers, older brothers and sisters, aunts, uncles and grandparents transmitted images of men as intelligent, rational beings, fearless, strong and courageous. 'Real men' are hard drinkers, smoke a lot, practise physical sports and are sexually active from an early age, preferably with a number of different women. Homosexuality is anathema, heterosexuality obligatory. Physical strength and the use of violence are also hammered into young boys as necessary attributes of their masculinity. The family, then, is revealed as the fundamental conduit of male values passing from one generation to the next.

The old school yard

As men remembered their school days, especially primary school, links were made between the norms established in the classroom and playground and what had been learned at home. Many men remembered that boys and girls were seated apart and that the education system to a large degree reinforced the myth of male superiority. It granted privileges and rights to boys that were denied to girls. Many of the men acknowledged that in their own families even to the present day priority is given to educating male children.

The role of religion and mass media

The examination of religion again highlighted the power and privileges granted to men and the doctrine of male superiority instilled not only in them but also in women. Only men could become priests and were worthy to intercede directly with God; only boys could serve at the altar. Representation of masculinity in the mass media constantly reinforced male stereotypes and for many of the men in the workshop had decisively influenced their own individual perception of themselves, their own gender identity.

Masculinity and its consequences for men

The penultimate exercise in the workshop was to list the consequences of 'masculinity' for men. The advantages were quickly identified. They included the possession of power — over women and children, and also to make decisions about their own lives — access to education and paid employment, public recognition and leadership, freedom and independence. Among the disadvantages

were: the repression of feelings and emotions; isolation and loneliness; severe problems with interpersonal communication; lack of flexibility and creativity in difficult circumstances; mental and physical ailments (stress, heart disease, and so on) resulting from the 'male lifestyle'; violence as a male attribute; and resistance to change.

It appeared, then, that traditional, hegemonic masculinity had a direct impact, not only on the lives of women, but also on men's own potential for development and the quality of their lives and relationships. Inherent in men's socialisation was a series of prohibitions that prevented men from developing characteristics associated with women: sensitivity, tenderness, the expression of feelings, and so on. Masculinity dehumanised men, and the use and abuse of power and violence impoverished their lives.

Sex, gender and socially constructed male identities

To most men in the workshop it had now become apparent that male values, attitudes and behaviour were a result of social conditioning and not natural attributes. The men now understood the relationship between the two categories, sex and gender, in a very practical way. It was clear to many of them that gender identity is built on the physiological and anatomical differences between men and women. Its construction begins with the identification of a new-born child's biological sex, which triggers differentiated socialisation processes that prescribe one way of being, thinking, feeling, loving, living and dying for men and another for women. Masculinity is a collection of ideas, values, attitudes, social roles and behaviour patterns that men begin to learn from the time they are born. But if so, they can also be unlearned. It was an important discovery.

If the quality of women's and men's lives and their relationships were to improve, the changes needed in typical male values, attitudes and behaviour had to be defined. In evaluating the workshop, it was recognised that there had not been enough time to define precise mechanisms to implement change. Every man present now faced the challenge of instigating his own transformation. Many felt that the content and focus of the encounter had opened up new possibilities for that.

Course on masculinity and popular education developed by CANTERA, 1995–99

The success of the First Encounter on Masculinity and the enthusiasm expressed by the participants convinced CANTERA to follow it up. In 1995, therefore, CANTERA

piloted the first course on masculinity and popular education. The course has been run every year since then and by the end of 1999, 360 men from all over Nicaragua had taken part. Participants had also travelled from Honduras, El Salvador, Guatemala, Costa Rica and Panama.

Participants

The courses were aimed at the same type of men as those who took part in the first encounter on masculinity in 1994:

- employees of national and local NGOs working in community development initiatives (agronomists, administrators, sociologists, psychologists, educators and so on);
- employees of government agencies (for example the Institute for Technical Training, the Ministry of Health) interested in the issues;
- young men involved with NGO work or organised at a local level around development issues (environment, culture, community education, work with young people and children, community health, and so on);
- men from rural areas (*campesinos* and outreach workers), working in agricultural projects and/or integrated rural development programmes (food production, clean water programmes, alternative eco-friendly agriculture, and so on).

Publicity

The courses were widely publicised through:

- paid advertisements in national newspapers;
- circulation of a leaflet giving information on the course (structure, objectives, dates, cost, and so on);
- invitations by letter and fax (and later by email);
- word of mouth.

By 1996 it was no longer necessary to place advertisements in newspapers.

Special emphasis was put on civil society networks in Nicaragua and on other organisations with a potential interest.

Course structure and content

The structure and content for the first course were based on two main elements: the encounter that had taken place in September the previous year and the course for women that CANTERA had been running since 1989. It seemed appropriate that the issues that women were debating (social construction of gender, violence, power,

sexuality, interpersonal communication) should also be looked at by men, but from their own perspective. One of the main purposes of working on gender with men was, after all, to help improve women's quality of life. To achieve this, it was widely recognised that violence against women would have to be eliminated or substantially reduced. Therefore, the analysis of violence in all its aspects and dimensions would have to be a major part of gender work with men.

To arrive at an understanding of male violence and its causes and consequences, it would first be necessary to enable men to comprehend the social nature of their values and behaviour. Male violence is the result of concepts of power inculcated in men as part of their gender socialisation, which demand that they control and dominate. Men's gender socialisation, then, and not violence and power, would be the starting point for reflection and analysis. This would lay the foundations for a deeper understanding of violence and its relationship to gender and thus pave the way for proposals to reduce violence.

The women's gender course run by CANTERA consisted of three workshops spaced through the calendar year to allow participants to put into practice the changes proposed at each workshop. The same would apply to men. It was recognised that men and women needed separate spaces to work through the issues from their own perspective, but that it was important also to facilitate a mixed forum for discussion and drawing up agendas for change. Both courses in 1995 consisted of three workshops, in March, June and September, and culminating in the mixed one-day encounter, 'Forging Just Relationships' in November. This model is still in use today.

The planning of the course on masculinity and popular education began, in 1995, with the definition of the main areas to be covered in each workshop and in the mixed encounter, and the definition of each one's general objective. Together these would form the main objectives of the course. Although planning was the responsibility of the three-man team, women could contribute ideas. Preparation and implementation of the mixed encounter were the joint responsibility of all the CANTERA staff involved in running both gender courses.

Current course objectives and structure

The course has been modified each year on the basis of evaluations. By 1999 the course consisted of four workshops, each one lasting three and a half days, including the mixed workshop which had initially been a one-day encounter. By 1999 the objectives were defined as follows:

Workshop 1. Male identities

Objective: Taking men's own reality and gender condition as a starting point, reflect upon the social construction of male identities, 'male superiority' and methods men use to exercise power

Workshop 2. Gender, power and violence

Objective: Based on the analysis of the roots of men's violence, its effects on them, their families and society and its relation to the current socio-economic crisis in Nicaragua, articulate proposals to reduce intrafamily violence

Workshop 3. Unlearning machismo: The methodology of gender work with men

Objective: Articulate methodological proposals and guidelines for gender work with men in order to contribute to and consolidate their processes of transformation

Workshop 4. Forging just relationships

Objective: Offer a space for men and women to come together to share the reflections and lessons learned throughout the year and to deepen their analysis of issues of common interest such as: gender identities, power, violence, methodology, sexuality, communication and gender equity.

Development of the workshops

Although the structure of the course and the main objectives have varied little, each year new discoveries have been made and new methods and techniques invented or old ones modified. Strict emphasis has been put on the systematic improvement of the methodology, learning from past mistakes and successes.

In the first year of the course, more time was probably spent planning each workshop than on running it. In general, however, for each day of training a day had to be dedicated to planning.

The workshops

The descriptions below are an attempt to show the general internal logic of each workshop and give examples of some of the methods and techniques that have been used over the years.

Workshop 1: Male identities

Motivations and expectations

The first workshop in the masculinity and popular education course focuses on the social construction of male identities. For many of the men who take part it is their first formal contact with the issue of gender and masculinity. Many are apprehensive. Individual motivations taking part in the course vary. Some men turn up out of a personal desire to change, because they recognise the negative effects of machismo. Others are employed by organisations and have been sent (sometimes, initially, against their will) to get some gender training. All are curious to some degree.

It is important therefore to allow men to express their expectations of the workshop and of the course as a whole. A simple exercise is to write their expectations on a slip of paper, to be synthesised by the co-ordinating team.

Breaking the ice

The ice can be quickly broken with an introductory exercise that requires active participation, permits personal introductions and develops the first major theme of the workshop. One such exercise is to divide the men into four or five groups of six to eight men. Each group receives a collection of materials: old newspapers, plastic bags, pieces of wire, balloons, masking tape, magic markers, crepe paper, twigs and branches, sheets of paper, cardboard of different colours, and so on. After a brief round of personal introductions in the group, the participants have to construct a male figure with the materials they have been given, incorporating all the characteristics they can think of as typically masculine. The groups are told that at the end of the exercise the facilitating team will decide which is the best model, based on three criteria: height, stability and physical beauty. The result is often a ferocious contest and a graphic representation of each group's vision of stereotypical male characteristics. This generates enough information to start a debate on where these characteristics come from and to analyse the levels of co-operation and competition shown during the exercise.

Male identity and discrimination

Much of the ground covered in this workshop is similar to that of the first encounter on masculinity in 1994. It entails analysis of and reflection on the mechanisms that society uses to inculcate values, attitudes and behaviour that are considered masculine. Quite often the techniques developed are also used at this point to facilitate analysis of the role of the family, the education system, the Church and mass media in inculcating these attitudes, values, and behaviour, and the systemic relation between these social institutions.

This first workshop also aims to get men to examine the discriminatory practices they have developed and that they use on a daily basis. The analysis is not limited to gender discrimination, however, as it is important to unravel the relationship between this and other types of discrimination such as racial, intergenerational and sexual. The exercise described below is often used in this workshop to enable men to look at their own prejudices and stereotypes and recognise the discrimination they use against other people.

Rebuilding the world

There is room for six people in an atomic shelter. Within a few moments a powerful bomb will explode and before that happens six people must be safely inside. However, there are ten candidates for inclusion in the shelter. Your task is to choose the six who in your opinion should be allowed in. These six people will be responsible for rebuilding the world after the bomb.

Study carefully the characteristics of the 10 candidates and choose the six that you think should be allowed into the shelter, explaining why.

1. Police officer with a gun
2. 16-year-old mentally retarded girl
3. Olympic athlete, 19 years old, homosexual
4. Female jazz singer, 21 years old
5. Black female protestant pastor, 50 years old
6. *Campesina*, pregnant for the first time
7. Philosopher, 70-year-old grandfather
8. Biochemist (male) 35 years old, in a wheelchair
9. Chinese communist (male), specialist in medical sciences
10. 'Retired' prostitute, 40-year-old woman

The exercise has several phases. First the participants make their individual selection. Then they form small groups which must agree on the six people who will be allowed into the shelter. In the plenary session that follows, each group reports the selection they have made and the criteria used. Meanwhile, the co-ordinators note on a whiteboard the number of times that each candidate is selected, so that at the end of the exercise they can calculate which six people have been chosen. Time is set aside to discuss the issues that emerge.

The exercise is designed to force participants to act on their own prejudices and stereotypes and external forces that make some people more 'dispensable' than others. In general, women candidates are usually chosen because of their reproductive role (pregnant *campesina* and jazz singer) while men are chosen for their intelligence and scientific knowledge (biochemist and Chinese communist). Most groups look for a balance between

practical usefulness (skills, capacity to work, and so on) and universal human values (culture, spirituality). Most reject the armed police officer, almost always assuming that this person is a man. Invariably, the black protestant pastor is rejected, '*not because she's black*' but because of her age and the Olympic athlete, young and strong and therefore highly valued, is selected '*despite the fact that he is homosexual*'. Analysis of the language used often reveals previously unrecognised values that lead to discrimination.

For some groups it is important to take three men and three women, for others four women and two men (studs) are sufficient. However, in selecting the people to reconstruct the world, many groups fall into the trap of selecting men and women on the basis of existing gender roles, identities, expectations and prohibitions. Women are seen first and foremost as child-bearers, house-keepers and guarantors of love, affection and sex for men. Men are seen as the intelligent, creative protagonists of a new world, where strength and intelligence are needed for reconstruction. Although some men argue that they could not choose women for their intelligence and scientific knowledge because there are none on the list, others insist that a person's knowledge, intelligence, value and usefulness should not be measured only by academic education. The *campesina* has knowledge that may well be of more use than that of the biochemist, who could use his scientific knowledge to create another bomb and blow the world up again. There is no correct solution, but the presentation of these 10 stereotypical characters enables men to recognise and question their own discriminatory practices.

The circle of discrimination

The exercise above is immediately followed by a second called 'The circle of discrimination'. In silence, men form a circle and listen to a list of possible motives for discrimination (being fat, poor, black, skinny, young, old, foreign, protestant, son of a single mother and so on). On recalling moments in their lives when they have been discriminated against, for example for being fat, they are invited to walk slowly into the centre of the circle. If two or more meet in the middle, they look at each other before turning around to look at the rest of the group in the outer circle. They then return to their places in the circle. The possible motives for discrimination are endless and their inclusion by the co-ordinator depends partly on the composition of the group. However, once the co-ordinator runs out of ideas, the men are invited to remember moments of discrimination in their own lives and to state the motive. Other members of the group who have also experienced that type of discrimination walk into the circle. The exercise ends when no one has anything else to say.

The exercise complements the previous one, which if carried out on its own risks making men feel they are 'the baddies'. Guilt immobilises and it is important to enable men to take responsibility for their own actions and not brood on their sense of shame. The 'circle of discrimination' enables men to see the unjust and discriminatory character of society and understand the sense of superiority that certain groups feel about themselves, and the rejection and hate that this generates towards people and groups considered inferior or threatening. It also leads to the recognition that discrimination works on different levels. It can, for example, manifest itself in everyday occurrences that permeate cultural practices. It can also become institutionalised in laws, constitutions and social institutions deliberately designed to exclude some members of society.

When 'The circle of discrimination' is carried out in a group where both men and women are present, it is quite common for both to recall similar types of discrimination. Both men and women can experience discrimination for the colour of their skin or for being fat. However, when the co-ordinator invites 'all those who have been discriminated against for being women', the middle of the circle is invariably invaded. Few women stay in the outer ring. When the same invitation is extended to men, few if any walk into the centre of the circle. The lesson is graphic and striking: women are doubly discriminated against because of their gender.

Discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation

A source of discrimination that is of particular, and sometimes morbid, interest to participants in the first workshop is sexual orientation. If men are to change, the recognition and processing of homophobia is essential. Many men who start to reflect on their own masculinity harbour fears that if they begin to change they will be accused of being homosexual. Others have internalised prejudices against homosexuals based on ignorance, stereotypes and often fear that lead them to participate in systematic discrimination against and degradation of homosexuals. This is a common 'sport' of many heterosexual men in Nicaragua. Many men, of course, experience both dimensions of homophobia. Although male sexuality will be dealt with in greater depth later on in the course, this is a good moment to discuss some of the questions about homosexuality. Is it an illness? Is it curable? Is it passed on genetically? Can you catch it? Is it a sin? Is it a sexual deviation? What causes homosexuality? What do I do if my son turns out to be gay?

The analysis of feature films has proved to be an effective way to get men to debate this issue respectfully and seriously. Films such as *Philadelphia*, *Strawberry and*

Chocolate, In and Out, The Object of My Affection enable men to approach the issue of homosexuality while keeping a safe, unthreatening distance. *Philadelphia* also permits reflection on discrimination against people living with HIV/AIDS, gay and straight. *Strawberry and Chocolate* has a political and cultural backdrop familiar to Nicaraguans and portrays the development of a friendship between two Cubans of differing political ideologies and sexual preferences, breaking down stereotypes and offering new possibilities of friendship between men.

Discussion about sexual preferences demands that the co-ordinating team be in solidarity with gays, lesbians and bisexuals and that they have previously worked on their own homophobic feelings and tendencies. It also requires preparation of questions to stimulate debate and challenge participants' ingrained prejudices. Participants are eased into expressing their feelings and relating the content of the films to the Nicaraguan context. Discriminatory practices against homosexuals are identified, questioned and ultimately condemned by many participants. As ignorance, prejudice and fear are replaced with facts, the seeds of solidarity with gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transvestites are sown.

Proposals for change

After four days of intense sharing and learning about male identities, men set themselves tasks before heading home. At the end of every workshop, the participants draw up proposals for change. There is no set formula. In the light of the analysis, reflections and debates generated in the workshop, each man is asked to examine himself, his family relations and work situation and decide where his change process must begin. Some men pledge to take more part in domestic chores, give more time to their partner and children, and monitor the way they behave in the family. Others promise greater solidarity with gays and lesbians, the reproduction of workshops with other men at work, and say that they will share what they have learned with friends and neighbours. Many say they want to study the issues further; after every workshop appropriate reading material is provided.

Workshop 2: Gender, power and violence

Integrating new participants

The second workshop is normally carried out two to three months after the first and centres on the relationship between gender and male violence. It aims to analyse the roots of violence in men and its effects on them, their families and society. Also covered is the analysis of the relationship between violence and Nicaragua's socio-economic crisis.

In five years of running the course on masculinity and popular education, most of the men who take part in the first workshop also take part in the second. On average, about 60 per cent of the participants take part in the three or four workshops that make up the course, an indicator that they accept the need to nurture processes of reflection and change. The theme of this second workshop attracts new participants, so the number of men who take part is greater than for the first one, often by up to 50 participants.

To get the ball rolling and integrate the new participants, those who took part in the first workshop are invited to talk about their successes in implementing the changes they proposed at the end of the first workshop and the obstacles they faced. It often turns out that other family members, friends and neighbours have been making fun of them, but most men find that their efforts to change are applauded by the people closest to them: their partners, mothers and children. When two or more men from the same community or workplace have taken part, it is usually easier to put the changes into practice because they can support each other.

Children's games

To unravel how violence is incorporated into traditional male identity a good starting point is men's own childhood and the games they used to play. Lists of typical boys' games are drawn up in a brainstorming exercise and comments shared on their content of competition, aggression and violence. Each group then chooses a game and plays it, while the other groups look on. The onlookers share their observations on the use of violence by the players, and analyse the use of power. The players are also asked to share their feelings. The winners are usually satisfied with their performance and demonstrate unbridled triumphalism. The losers are down-hearted, often angry because they have been ridiculed and humiliated.

In the 1999 course, four young men were enthusiastically portraying a very physical game that consists of two men, perched on the shoulders of the other two, aiming to knock each other off the shoulders of his team mate or to floor both of them. After a couple of minutes of pushing and shoving, the game suddenly shifted up a gear and the level of physical contact became uncomfortable.

Perceiving that the 'game' was no longer an act, one of the workshop co-ordinators stepped in, separated the two teams and stopped the game. In the ensuing analysis, all four, when asked by the co-ordinator, denied that they had crossed the line from simulation to reality. At this, the co-ordinator asked the rest of the group if anyone else felt that if he had not stepped in, the four men would have ended up with black eyes and bruises. Everyone agreed

that they too had felt that the two teams were fighting for real. When pushed a little further, one of the young men who had been playing explained that when they rehearsed the game, all had agreed that his team would lose. However as the game went on, and without making any conscious decision, he found himself going against that agreement and fighting to win, a strategy not understood by the other team but to which they reacted spontaneously. Even in the simulation, the desire not to lose took precedence. The rest of the group, when asked why no one except the co-ordinator had stepped in to stop the violence responded, simply and unequivocally, that they were enjoying it. Violence between men, they said, is a spectator sport, as epitomised in boxing¹⁴ and wrestling, and is a frequent occurrence on the streets, in bars and at baseball matches. No one steps in to stop the fighting. Rather, the spectacle is encouraged with cheering.

Types of violence

A second exercise is meant to enable men to discover the different types of violence in Nicaraguan society, who perpetrates it and who is usually at the receiving end. Each participant is given a sheet of paper and asked to draw the violence that he has used against other people during his life and the violence that he has received from others. No prior definition of violence is imposed and men are told that they will not have to stand up in front of the whole group and 'confess' the violence they have used. Similarly, no one is forced to include in his drawing things that he is not ready or willing to share. The drawings, they are told, will form the basis for sharing and debate in small groups. Reminded that the more they put into the workshop, the more they will get out of it, the participants are generally remarkably honest and often include chilling experiences of violence perpetrated and suffered. The extended discussions in small groups enable men to share experiences and insights about violence. For many participants it is the first time they have been able to enter into this intimate type of communication with other men. In the plenary session, groups report back on the types of violence unearthed through their drawings and discussions and some men, if they wish to, share experiences of the violence they have given and received.

The causes and consequences of violence

The definition of types of violence (physical, psychological, sexual, economic, interpersonal, institutional, and so on) and of the most frequent recipients of violence paves the way for analysing the causes of violence and the consequences for women, children and men. Often, women from the National Network of Women against Violence (NNMV) are invited to give a talk on the effects of violence on women's and

children's lives, and the initiatives that women are taking to address the problem.

Proposals to reduce violence

By the end of the second workshop, participants have combined an objective analysis of violence and its causes and consequences in families and society with hard-hitting subjective reflections that enable each man to recognise the presence of violence in his own life and personal relationships. The final step, as in the first workshop, is to make proposals for change. This task is taken seriously and applied to all spheres and dimensions of life. Some men vow to stop using physical violence; others realise that their insistence on controlling their partner is psychological violence; others decide to start with the non-violent education of their children. As well as discovering the devastating effects that their violence has on women and children, the participants have also discovered that 'violence also impoverishes men's lives'. They are also opening up to the possibility of developing more human relationships with other people.

Workshop 3: Unlearning machismo

The third workshop focuses on two main areas: men's own change processes and the issues that must be addressed to enable their strengthening; and the methodological tools needed to carry out training with other men. The logic of the third workshop is that if men wish to reproduce the training activities with other men effectively, they must overcome, as thoroughly as possible, the prejudices and fears that inhibit their own change processes.

Male sexuality, power and homophobia

The third workshop has become recognised as the most appropriate place to delve into male sexuality. In this context, the power of homophobia cannot be played down, as it is one of the main obstacles to men's capacity to change. The social stigma associated with homosexuality is so great that when accused of being homosexual, even the most strong-willed and committed men succumb to pressure not to change.

The starting point, however, is the participants' own sexuality: the perceptions and practices they have developed as part of their masculinity and which have to be questioned. The ways in which many men exercise their sexuality are related to the use of power and violence analysed in the previous workshop. Women are seen as objects, a source of sexual pleasure for men and often their needs and rights are neglected and violated.

¹⁴ At the time of revising this document in early 2001 the only current Nicaraguan world champions in any sport are Rosendo Alvarez and Adonis Rivas, both boxers.

A fisherman's tale

In the workshop in 1999, one participant did a thumb-nail sketch of a man who had been a neighbour when he was a child.

He was a fisherman, from the Atlantic Coast of Nicaragua, where I'm from, and I knew him personally. He hailed from a family of fisher-people but somehow managed to go to school and even to university. But he dropped out and decided to go back to fishing. In his youth he was a heavy drinker, promiscuous, had loads of women and often went with prostitutes. He constantly changed one woman for another.

When he moved out of his family home he got married to a woman who already had a three-year-old daughter with a previous partner. In his private life he began to develop very strange behaviour. As well as drinking a lot, and partying all the time, he began to force his wife to have sex with other men, while he looked on. This abusive behaviour became public knowledge and she ended up having two children, to different fathers, neither of whom was the fisherman. The way he treated her was brutal and now, for example, at 40 years old she has no teeth left. He knocked them all out with his fists. He has tortured her consistently and systematically. He's a big bloke and he beats her up so much that she has had to be hospitalised on several occasions. The police have even had to intervene to hold him back and control him. But whenever she gets out of hospital the first thing she does is go to the police station to get him out of jail saying that she has not pressed any charges. Once he smashed her over the head with a chair and she had to get 20 stitches.

As well as the daughter she had before marrying him, and the two daughters she had with the other men, they had two more daughters and a son together: five

daughters and a son in all. He announced publicly that he was not prepared to support his daughters, because when they grew up they would become other men's property and source of pleasure. He even boasted that he would be the first man to sleep with them and he kept his word. He raped four of his daughters before they reached the age of 12 or 13 and the sexual abuse continued until one by one they all left home. His wife managed to get her first daughter shipped away to Costa Rica.

It is impossible to imagine the suffering these children endured, or the atmosphere of terror that must have existed in that house. It must have been like hell on earth.

I don't know how his wife reacted. She can't have approved. A mother can't consent to the sexual abuse of her children. But she was probably so terrified and economically dependent on him that she had no place to go. She had no paid work and hadn't received any education. She stills lives with him. None of his daughters, nor his son, went to school. When they reached school age, during the revolution, he refused to let them go, saying they were only going to be taught communism and that they'd be better off as illiterate idiots. When his son was nine or 10 years old, he took him out fishing and forced him to do a man's job. At 14 years old the son ran away from home.

Today this man lives in total isolation from the rest of the neighbourhood. No one even wants to talk to him. He's even built a huge 15-foot high wall around his house, symbolic of his own desire to live apart from everyone else. He's cut himself off and nobody really gives a damn about him. Who knows what kind of image he has of himself. (CANTERA 1999: 46)

First sexual experiences

A useful exercise to begin to unravel male sexuality and its relationship to the social construction of masculinity is through a journey back in time. Men are asked to remember their first sexual experience and how they felt at the time. The issues are discussed in small groups. Many participants discover that they have been pushed into having sex at an early age (11, 12 or 13 years), without any sexual education about what was happening. Frequently, sexual initiation is taken care of by fathers, older brothers, cousins, and so on who take the youngster to a brothel. In the small group discussion, men, often for the first time, express the fears and anxieties they felt at the time of their first sexual experience, and which for

years have been smothered beneath a façade of machismo. They also discover that the experience has distorted their vision of male sexuality and the development of their own sexual identity. Men, to be considered men, must have sex with women (lots of women) and as often as possible. Virility is measured by the quantity of sexual conquests and not by their quality. Male sexuality is predominantly genital; penetration and orgasm are requisites of every sexual encounter. Affection, tenderness and even love are women's domain.

Men's vision of women's sexuality

Based on the analysis of their first sexual experiences, men recognise that their vision of women is as passive,

sexual objects that exist for their pleasure. There is also recognition that women are divided into two basic categories: 'sluts and saints'. The latter are women like their mothers and wives; women who, in a spirit of self-sacrifice, abnegation and unconditional love, care for their every need; women who are innocent, pure and faithful. The former are 'the other women': lovers, mistresses and prostitutes who exist for sexual pleasure and those who appear in the pornographic magazines and films that are, for many men, their only access to sexual 'education'. In one workshop in 1998, one of the participants, reflecting on this dichotomy, said: 'We are taught to defend the dignity and sexual honour of the female members of our families, our mothers, sisters, and daughters, but that the women of the family next door are fresh meat.' This phrase clearly reveals the double standards in sexual mores and lays bare the egocentric, androcentric and hypocritical character of traditional masculinity. Moreover, the perception of women as 'fresh meat' invariably leads to sexual irresponsibility and sexual promiscuity among men that has frightening implications for the spread of HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases. It also leads to the systematic sexual abuse of women and children by men who see their own sexual satisfaction as a right.

Masculinity and obligatory heterosexuality

Central to the paradigm of male sexuality described above is the concept of 'obligatory heterosexuality'. Any other expression of sexual identity is viewed as inferior or immoral, and anathema. Homosexual and bisexual men are ostracised and ridiculed and are often subject to physical violence. Homophobic attitudes and practices (both the hatred projected at homosexuals and the fear of being accused of homosexuality) are pivotal in maintaining sexual practices that lead to domination and control of women. In this workshop, the emphasis on dismantling myths related to male sexuality does not aim only to promote greater solidarity with gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transvestites; it also deconstructs their own prejudices and fears about sexuality that will enable participants to deal with the homophobia that will be directed at them when they begin to change their own ways of thinking, feeling and behaving.

Methodology and techniques

Apart from facilitating processes of reflection and change for the participants, a major concern of the course on masculinity and popular education is to equip them to run similar training sessions with other men in their workplaces and communities. Each workshop has space to reflect on the methodology and techniques and the educational model being used. The second half of the third workshop, however, aims to strengthen the participants' understanding of the theory and practice of

popular education and its application to work on masculinity and gender.

Men who come from the same organisation or geographical area, or who share a thematic interest, form groups to plan a training activity that they intend to implement with other men. They must decide the topic of the activity, how long it will be, the characteristics of the prospective participants, sub-themes, objectives, methods, techniques, and so on. The groups decide what kind of activity they are going to prepare: a workshop, seminar, talk, exchange, debate. Usually, before embarking on this exercise, the co-ordinators facilitate a series of exercises to refresh participants' memory of the basic principles of popular education. Many of the participants have already begun to run training sessions with other men and have their own experiences to draw on.

Once the group work is under way members of the co-ordinating team circulate among them to give support to the planning and to facilitate debate. Once the activities have been designed — this can take up to a full day — a plenary session is held. Each group demonstrates to the others the activity it has put together and invites comment. The co-ordinators also provoke debate and systematically prepare a synthesis of the issues covered, to be presented once all of the groups have had a chance to share their work.

Workshop 4: Forging just relationships

The third workshop ends with an evaluation and a brainstorming exercise on the issues to be included in the fourth and final workshop of the course. (In the third workshop of their course, the women carry out the same exercise.) When the men and women in CANTERA come together to plan the fourth and final workshop of each gender course, a basic agenda has already been set, based on women's and men's specific interests. Over the years these have included issues such as male and female gender identities (masculinity and femininity), gender roles and sexual division of labour, violence and power, sexuality, interpersonal communication, communication within the family, non-violent rearing of children.

As the courses are run separately, men and women are curious to discover what has been going on in the other course. Initially, in 1995, the first and only formal contact between men and women was in the one-day encounter at the very end of the process. By 1996, the men's and the women's courses were being held on the same dates and in the same training centre, but still without formal contact until the fourth workshop. By 1998, aware that this was creating anxieties in some men and women, it was decided to include in each workshop a mixed

reflection session of about one hour, where women and men discussed together an issue of common interest (for example, they would watch and reflect on a short theatre piece on violence). This helps to calm anxieties and dissipate fears, preparing the ground for a much more fluid exchange between men and women when they meet in the final workshop of the courses.

Coming together

The workshop on 'Forging just relationships' is a place for men and women to reflect on the issues that they have been working on separately throughout the year. To get the ball rolling and reduce anxiety, a typical exercise is the creation of 'murals'. Using large sheets of paper and split into groups, men are asked collectively to make a collage of images and phrases that encapsulate their image of women and how they would like women to be. Women do the same, creating images of men. Groups of men and women then join together and debate begins. This exercise is provocative. Not only does it enable the identification of stereotypes, but it also shows how far men and women have moved in relation to these stereotypes of themselves and of the other.

Bringing the two courses together means that up to 80 men and women are present. To avoid lengthy and repetitious plenary sessions, it is often necessary to work in sub-groups or to draw lots between the groups to see which ones will present the results of their work. Those who are not chosen can complement the presentations if they have discussed aspects that were not covered by the selected groups. Sometimes it is necessary to form same-sex groups, at other times it is better to have mixed groups, or to bring men and women together once they have had a chance to discuss the issues in a same-sex group.

Gender and 'adulthood'

When violence and power are discussed in this mixed workshop the focus is usually on internal family relations and how to avoid, reduce and eliminate discrimination and violence. Gender analysis is complemented by a generational analysis as 'adulthood' (systematic discrimination against children, adolescents and young people) is recognised as a major problem within families. Adults, male and female, generally disregard the rights of younger family members. These concepts and practices are passed from generation to generation. 'Children should be seen and not heard.' By the end of the workshop most participants have rejected corporal punishment. There is a hunger for non-violent alternatives and for communication methods and techniques that are not based on the control and domination of others. Men, in particular, discover that they never really learn to listen because women and children are considered inferior. Individual styles of

interpersonal communication are stripped down and questioned and the concept of communication is analysed from a gender and a generational perspective. Next, demands are made: women tell men what they need from them to improve relationships in the family, and men tell the women what they need to do the same. The same is done between men and women of different age groups. Dialogue is opened up and many — women in particular — say afterwards that it is the first time that they have been able to talk about these issues with men.

On a number of occasions within the context of the analysis of interpersonal communications between men and women, course participants and facilitators have referred to the well-known book *Men are from Mars, Women are From Venus* by John Grey, which postulates that the differences between women and men are so great that they could originate from different planets. This opens up discussion on the dynamics of interpersonal relations between genders and enables the participants to grasp the scale of the differences in the socialisation processes that men and women go through and which define gender identities. In reality, of course, men are not from Mars and women are not from Venus; and it is on planet Earth that gender violence in all its manifestations has to be eradicated and just human relations forged.

Sexuality

Sexuality is also dealt with in the fourth and final workshop. It is important for men and women to discuss the issues with each other and articulate demands. The first step is to form mixed groups to discuss human sexuality, including the development of their own sexuality and how they currently live it in relation to their specific gender identities. Bringing in an expert or external contributors can provoke further debate and analysis, and videos or feature films may also be used for this purpose.

In 1999, four people of different ages, sexual orientations and backgrounds were asked to take part in a panel on human sexuality. They included a 50-year-old working class woman from Managua who arrived with her 25-year-old son. Together they shared their testimonies: she of the discovery that her son was gay and all the angst, agony and soul searching that had entailed before she was able to accept him unconditionally; he of the loneliness of living for so many years 'in the closet', the pain of being ridiculed and ostracised and the long but liberating process of self-acceptance and coming out. Roberto, a young self-professed bisexual and Olga, a young militant lesbian, also shared the agonies and joys of coming out and answered the course participants' questions, doubts, fears and criticisms with honesty, dignity, pride and solid, up-to-date information. Their

message was clear and simple: life in all its forms and diversity enriches us: let us not be afraid any more.

Seriousness and celebration

'Forging just relationships' is a space for serious work, but it also takes on an air of celebration. This is achieved partly by including a 'cultural night' on the penultimate evening, where women and men can share their artistic talents: music, poetry, dance, and so on. It is also present, however, in the spirit of companionship that is generated. As the final workshop comes to an end and proposals for change are articulated and consensus reached, the final atmosphere is ambiguous. There is a collective feeling of pride at completing both courses and of satisfaction with the achievements, but also a sadness that it is the final workshop. There is also a sense of trepidation. All the participants know and appreciate that their participation in the courses offers them new possibilities as human beings. But they are also realistic about the scale of the challenges facing them in their personal, family and professional lives and in the task of transforming deeply-ingrained attitudes, values and conduct in other men and women.

Thematic workshops on sexuality and communication

In 1996 two thematic workshops were run for the men who had taken part in the course in 1995. The first, on masculinity and sexuality, responded to men's particular interest in male sexuality and enabled them to discover in their own lives the link between power and sexuality. The second was on communication and masculinity, and aimed to enable the participants to discover how male attitudes and values affect their ability to communicate and the quality of their relations with women, children and other men. Both workshops depended heavily on men's willingness to share intimate experiences and their sincerity in analysis and drawing up an agenda for change. They also used techniques from popular theatre to enable men to enter into a different type of communication with and appreciation of their own bodies.

Lack of resources prevented CANTERA running these thematic workshops in subsequent years, but many of the issues addressed and the methods and techniques developed were later adapted and included in the course. This was made possible by increasing the number of days allocated to each workshop, from two days in 1995 to three and a half by 1999.

Systematisation of the course on masculinity

Systematisation is understood as 'an attempt to bring order to, reflect on, interpret and make sense of practice' (Kane 2001:20). In 1994, recognising the novel character of gender work with men, CANTERA decided to adopt a systematic approach to its work on gender and masculinity, with the aim of developing methodologies that could be reproduced easily by other men. As part of this effort, the 23 workshops that had been carried out between 1994 and 1999 were written up and published as booklets. They have been distributed widely in Nicaragua and other parts of Latin America. Preparing each booklet required the taping of reflections and debates that took place in the workshops (once the participants had granted permission), as well as the preservation of graphic and written materials the men produced. Later the tapes and other materials were transcribed, edited and written up. The end product, however, is more than just a chronological report on the workshops. The methodological and theoretical frameworks are clearly expressed and expanded so as to make the content accessible, interesting and educational for others (men and women) who did not take part. The booklets have served an important role in raising awareness on gender and masculinity.

Another important element in CANTERA's efforts to develop appropriate methodologies for gender awareness-raising and training with men was the systematisation of the courses run between September 1994 and December 1997. This process provided a series of theoretical and methodological insights that are synthesised in section 6 of this document.

5. Measuring impact and developing the methodology



Towards A New Masculinity: A study to measure the impact of the courses on masculinity and popular education 1994-97

Design of the study

By 1997 workshop and course evaluations indicated changes in men's attitudes, values and behaviour, within the family unit in particular. The experimental and pioneering character of the work and the interest of funding organisations encouraged CANTERA to measure these changes. It was decided, in 1998, to undertake an in-depth study to measure the impact of the courses since their beginning in 1994.

Objectives and methodology

In general terms, the study aimed to discover what changes had taken place and to what degree. It also aimed to validate and strengthen the methodology of popular education in generating change in men. The study would elaborate a set of indicators to facilitate the

evaluation and systematisation of training courses for men on gender.

The study would cover all the workshops from September 1994 to September 1997. This meant that the 250 men from all parts of Nicaragua (and a few from other countries) who had taken part in 11 workshops and three one-day encounters (two of them mixed), would be the subjects of the study. In practice, for logistical reasons it was possible to include only 140: of the others, some had changed job or moved house, some had left the country and many lived in isolated regions of Nicaragua, which made it difficult to include them).

Developing instruments for the study

The immediate problem was the lack of baseline information on the participants' attitudes, values and behaviour before the courses. It was decided to use four instruments to measure the changes: separate questionnaires for men and women, course reunions, and consultations with women.

Men's questionnaire

The questionnaire for men had seven sections. The first two dealt with general information (number of workshops attended, area of residence, age, profession, educational achievement, sexual preference and conjugal status) and motive for participating. Section 3, entitled 'What are we like now?' aimed to gather data on men's concepts, attitudes, values and behaviour in the year immediately after participation in the course. Its 118 questions aimed to find out about the following:

- Men's concepts/perception of themselves
- Consumption of alcohol, cigarettes and other drugs
- Participation in domestic activities in the home
- Decision making within the conjugal relationship
- Use of violence in the conjugal relationship
- Sexual relations
- Communication and relations at work
- Communication and relations in the community
- The multiplication of educational activities with other men.

The next section asked the same questions, but referred to the 12 months immediately before the respondent took part in the workshops. This created a baseline: change could be measured by comparing the answers 'before' and 'after' participation in the workshops.

Participants filled in the questionnaire anonymously and the 'before' and 'after' sections were designed to reduce the risk of the respondent comparing his own answers in each section. For example, section 3 had a question on the consumption of alcohol in the 12 months following participation in the course. To have asked the same question immediately with reference to the 12 months after the course would have considerably increased the risk of the respondent exaggerating, consciously or unconsciously, the change achieved. Some men may have wanted to impress, or may have been unwilling to be completely truthful. Asking the same question in two different sections which referred to two different periods of time meant that the participant would reach the repeated question after having answered more than 100 others. To cross reference his own answers he would have had constantly to flick back and refer to the answers given in section 3, a cumbersome and time-consuming task.

Cross-referencing sections 3 and 4 would generate a **subjective approximation** of the changes that the men had been able to put into practice. It would be the nearest the study could get to measuring change. The covering letter sent out with the questionnaire asked respondents to be honest and reminded them that their answers

would be of benefit to other men, because the results of the study would help to improve the courses.

The fifth section of the questionnaire had two parts. The first focused on a self-evaluation of the major changes experienced as a result of the course and put 14 general questions about attitudes, values and behaviour. It aimed for a **subjective appreciation**, to be contrasted later with the changes quantified by processing sections 3 and 4. These questions were also used in the questionnaire for women (see below).

'Subjective approximation' aims to measure the details of particular changes achieved, whereas 'subjective appreciation' seeks to visualise general trends in change taking place. For example, in sections three and four an individual may register information that reveals that in the year before taking part in the course he slapped his partner on more than 10 occasions whereas in the year after the course this had been reduced to between one and five occasions. This is a subjective approximation of how he himself quantifies his use of that type of violence. In section 5 of the questionnaire when asked 'Do you consider that your participation in the workshops on masculinity has made you less violent?', his response (no, a little, a lot, significantly) reflects his subjective appreciation of the overall trend of his efforts to become less violent.

The second part of section 5 solicited the participants' view of the relevance and importance of workshops' content and the methodology used.

Sections 6 and 7 focused respectively on the elements that had helped and hindered their efforts to put change into practice and gave the participants the opportunity to suggest ways of improving CANTERA's gender awareness-raising and training with men.

Most of the questions were multiple-choice, to make answering and analysis easier. The questionnaire had a total of 312 questions and the results of piloting showed that participants would need from one hour to one hour and a half to fill it in. Many men reported afterwards that it took even longer.

One hundred and thirty-five questionnaires were sent out to men in 17 local government areas in Nicaragua and five to men in Costa Rica, El Salvador and Guatemala. To guarantee anonymity, participants were supplied with a blank envelope in which to return the questionnaire to CANTERA. The length of the questionnaire was a risk but, 80 per cent (112) of the questionnaires sent out were returned. This was the first result of the study: an indicator of men's continuing interest.

Women's questionnaire

A shorter questionnaire was sent to women to gain a **subjective appreciation** about how the men had changed. This was compared with the men's version. This questionnaire consisted of the 14 questions in section 5 of the men's questionnaire and focused on the main changes experienced as a result of attending the course. The women — partners, mothers, daughters, sisters and colleagues of the participants — were asked to focus on one man they knew who had taken part in the course, and to relate the changes they had witnessed in him. The questionnaire was filled in by 45 women from different communities, NGOs and community organisations.

Course reunions

The second method of data collection was to hold a series of reunions with men who had participated in the workshops between 1994 and 1997. The reunions aimed to enable the men to share their original motivation for taking part in the course and the changes that they had been able to make in their own daily lives. They also aimed to enable men to say which elements (internal and external) had helped and hindered their change processes. Focusing more on qualitative change, the reunions were also an important space for men to come together and reinforce their commitment to change and gender equity. Meeting others who had taken part in the course in different years helped kindle enthusiasm. Sixty-one men took part in four reunions, two of which were held in Managua and two in semi-rural areas of the country.

Consultations with women

Women were also consulted through meetings designed to enable them to share their experiences. In some cases several attempts had to be made to bring women together and many women, for a variety of reasons, did not feel very motivated to participate. Most of the women had never taken part in any gender awareness-raising activity and the invitation to participate in the consultations was somewhat threatening. Culturally it went against the grain for women openly to discuss intimate aspects of their relationships, especially in the absence of their partners. Those who did take part, however, were open and sincere, discovering similarities and even giving each other advice on dealing with specific difficult situations. In general, the changes that their men had made, no matter how small, were much appreciated.

Characteristics of the participants and major changes achieved

Analysis of the 112 questionnaires returned cast some unexpected light on the participants. Their average age

and academic levels were generally much higher than the national average. Also, taking into account the extremely high unemployment rate, the number who had steady jobs was unusually high. This is because most of the men who took part in the workshops were in some way linked to community development organisations and processes (as NGO staff, members of youth groups, farming co-operatives, and so on), many of which try to include gender in their work. The study divided men into three categories:

- Highly-educated adults living with an established partner who at the time of the course on masculinity were working for or were linked to NGOs or community-based organisations. Most of these lived in urban areas.
- A smaller group of young men and adolescents, mostly single and with lower levels of education, but many studying. Many of these, too were linked to NGOs and community-based organisations, but not necessarily as employees.
- A significantly smaller group of men from rural areas, mostly agricultural workers with lower levels of education, and with partners.

Only 6 per cent of those who filled in the questionnaire declared themselves to be exclusively attracted to other men.¹⁵ Given that in the United States an estimated 10 per cent of the adult male population is believed to be exclusively homosexual (Fernández de Quero 1996: 174) and that gay organisations barely exist in Nicaragua,¹⁶ one might have expected the course to attract a higher proportion of gay men. There are four possible explanations:

- Men who have accepted themselves as gay have already worked through important changes in their masculinity and their response to the traditional paradigm of hegemonic masculinity. For the majority this implies reflecting on their own sense of identity and recreating it. Thus the opportunities offered by the courses on masculinity do not correspond to a specific need of this group of men.
- Gay men who are still 'in the closet' fear being 'outed' or obliged to share their experiences of masculinity.
- NGOs and community associations are permeated and dominated by heterosexual attitudes and values which

¹⁵ All statistics in this section, unless otherwise noted, are taken from the impact study *Hacia una Nueva Masculinidad*, carried out by CANTERA in 1998 and published in 1999.

¹⁶ The absence of gay organisations is partly due to changes made to the Penal Code in 1992 that criminalised 'sodomy', and which have been widely interpreted as anti-gay legislation. Although there is no systematic repression of gays and lesbians, the legislation has had a serious impact on the gay community's capacity to organise.

are unattractive to openly gay men. Homophobic practices and attitudes marginalise gays, who are therefore under-represented in these organisations.

- Some men may not have told the truth about their sexual preference.

Half of the men who took part in the study were employed directly by NGOs or community-based organisations. This meant that they were much more likely to hear about the courses.

Most of the men participated in the course because their organisation sent them. That, however, does not seem to have affected their willingness to take part. Seventy-eight per cent of these men said they put up no resistance. Of the 20 men who said they had resisted going, only one said he had put up considerable resistance. In the five years that the courses have been running, only once have men actually walked out. This happened in 1997, when the expectations of men from a government agency clashed with the content and methods of the course. They had expected that the workshop would adopt a more traditional vertical style of education and provide them with theoretical information on gender and masculinity and thus were unwilling to enter into the dynamic of the course. Unaccustomed to a methodology that encourages critical reflection, and unaware that their own values and behaviour would be the focus of that reflection, they decided to leave on the second day. An important lesson is that men must be willing to expose themselves, their values and behaviour to criticism.

Other motivating factors registered, especially among young men, were curiosity, and dissatisfaction with the prevailing model of masculinity.

Major changes achieved: comparative analysis of men's and women's views

The 14 questions about general changes (subjective appreciation) put to men and women covered the following areas: self-perception, use of violence, consumption of alcohol and cigarettes, sexual responsibility, conjugal responsibility, quality of conjugal relationship, paternal responsibility, participation in domestic activities, quality of human relations in the work place, discrimination, solidarity with women, solidarity with gays and lesbians and the quality of human relations in the community. The questions sought to discover if any significant changes had resulted from participation in the course on masculinity.

The men unanimously affirmed that the courses had served as a catalyst for change in their lives and this was confirmed by the women. Men and women tended to agree that there had been:

- Changes in the way that men perceive the meaning of their maleness
- Greater participation in domestic chores
- Greater solidarity towards women
- Improved relations in the work place
- Reduction in discriminatory practices.

In some categories, women observed greater change than the men themselves claimed:

- Paternal responsibility
- Solidarity with gays and lesbians
- Improved relations within the community.

In other areas the men felt there had been greater change than was observed by the women:

- Less use of violence
- Sexual responsibility
- Improved relations with partner
- Greater conjugal responsibility.

Men put much more emphasis than women on changes achieved in the family unit, especially in their relationship with their partner. This is partly because more than 60 per cent of the women who filled in the questionnaire were not related to the men they observed and therefore did not share their living space. This made it more difficult for them to give reliable information on men's behaviour in the family.

In-depth analysis and measurement of changes registered in attitudes, values and behaviour

Sections 3 and 4 of the men's questionnaire focused on five different areas of men's interaction in society: personal, conjugal, family, work and community.

Personal change

The most profound changes reported by men were in their capacity to be self-critical about ways of being men in society, and their ability to be patient with other people. Many said they had significantly improved their communication skills with women, children and, to a slightly lesser degree, with other men. This claim was borne out by women's observation of improved relations in the community.

Despite small improvements in the ability to express feelings and emotions, less than half the men said that they could do so with ease or relative ease after participating in the workshops.

Less than half of the men declared themselves to be significantly or fairly in solidarity with gays and lesbians after the course. Men from Managua expressed greater solidarity than men from other parts of the country, who also found it more difficult than Managuans to demonstrate affection and tenderness.

The courses were important spaces for the men to develop a capacity to value themselves and demonstrate affection and tenderness. They also contributed to minor reductions in the consumption of alcohol and cigarettes.

Participants' age plays a particular role in changes. Young men aged 15-24 demonstrated spectacular increases in the ability to value themselves, be patient with others, show affection and tenderness and improve their communication skills. It should be remembered that young men are still in the process of defining their identity. More than half of this age group said that they often felt lonely, much more than other age groups.

Men with partners were less likely to feel lonely than others, and declared themselves to have developed a greater capacity to be patient with other people. Their capacity to be self-critical rose significantly, compared to other categories of men.

Changes registered by men in conjugal relationships

Decision making

Married men or men in common-law relationships showed a greater disposition to take into account their partner's needs, opinions and interests and a tendency towards joint decision making in areas such as home administration, to have sex (or not) and even about which channel to watch on television. Resistance was observed, however, to sharing decisions about their own autonomy and the 'right' to take decisions about their own lives (health, education, social mobility and so on) without consulting their partners.

Use of violence

The study *Confites en el Infierno* was the first rigorous attempt to generate quantitative and qualitative information on conjugal violence against women in the city of León. Of the women interviewed in the study, 60 per cent reported that they had been subjected to violence (physical, sexual or psychological) at least once in their lifetime. The most common type of violence reported was conjugal violence, accounting for 75 per cent of cases. Of the women who had been married or had a partner at least once in their lives, 52 per cent had been subjected to conjugal violence (Ellsberg *et al* 1998: 45).

The methods and findings of that study informed the design of the study on the impact of the masculinity courses. Its co-ordinator, Mary Ellsberg, helped conceptualise the CANTERA study, particularly with regard to violence. The definition of two major categories of violence, physical and psychological, and of 12 types of violence to be measured, were based on those in *Confites en el Infierno*. This ensured that the information generated would reflect women's experiences of violence and the significance they give to particular acts of violence. It also reduced the risk of imposing men's perspective.

Of the 112 men who returned the questionnaire, 54.5 per cent reported having used physical or psychological violence at least once against a present or former partner, a figure that roughly corresponds to the findings of *Confites en el Infierno*. Put another way, 61 women had been exposed to violence from their partner or boyfriend at least once before, during or after his participation in the course on masculinity.

The theory that physical and psychological violence often go together, although there can be psychological without physical violence, was supported by the respondents' answers. Almost half of the 61 men said they had used both types of violence, while the others admitted only to the use of psychological violence. Only one man reported using physical without psychological violence.

Course participants are atypical of the male population of Nicaragua, and most are involved in human development with a commitment to social justice. It might be supposed, therefore, that the percentage of Nicaraguan men who use violence against their partners must be significantly higher. Another study carried out by the Inter-American Development Bank and FIDEG in Managua put the percentage of women who have been subjected to physical violence (not necessarily from their partner) as high as 70 per cent (Morrison *et al* 1997).

Measuring and quantifying reductions in violent behaviour

To measure reductions in the use of violence, 39 men who said they had used violence against their partner both before and after the course were selected for deeper analysis. Two main categories were used: physical violence and psychological/emotional violence.

Seven types of psychological/emotional violence were included in the questionnaire:

- Humiliation of partner
- Denial of permission to visit friends and/or family
- Control of people who visit her at home
- Insistence on always knowing where she is and with whom

- Shouting at her or offending her in public
- Failure to give her money for the housekeeping
- Threatening to punch her.

Five types of physical violence were listed:

- Pushing and shoving
- Blows with fist or other objects
- Slaps
- Throwing objects at her
- Use, or threatened use, of knives or guns.

The questionnaire asked not only whether men had used each type of violence, but also how frequently they had done so in the 12 months before the course and in the 12 months after. Frequency was divided into four categories: 10 times or more, 5-10 times, 1-5 times and never. This made it possible to quantify the changes in the participants' use of psychological and physical violence.

Reductions in the use of psychological/emotional and physical violence

In the case of psychological/emotional violence, the maximum number of positive answers (admissions to having used specific acts of violence) is 273 (39 men multiplied by the seven types of violence). In the year prior to the workshops the 39 men together registered 142 positive answers; in the year following the workshops these had fallen to 91. This fall of 51 represents an aggregate reduction of 36 per cent in the possible number of times that the 39 men could admit to the use of specific types of psychological/emotional violence. It does not take into account the frequency nor the intensity with which the types of violence were used. Although these answers suggest an overall reduction in the actual number of violent acts perpetrated, this is impossible to ascertain since one of the categories '10 times or more' in theory allowed specific acts of violence to be perpetrated an infinite number of times.

It is interesting, therefore, to take into account the frequency with which the 39 men admitted to using specific types of psychological/emotional violence. Broadly, admission to the use of specific types of violence used with a frequency of '10 times or more' dropped by 85 per cent, and those used with a frequency of 'between 5 and 10 times' by 73 per cent. Those types used with a frequency of 'between one and five times' rose by 8 per cent and those who answered 'never' by 40 per cent. Table 1 shows how these reductions were spread among the seven types of violence. The tendency to reduce the frequency in use of violence is clear, especially the fall in percentages of positive answers for '10 times or more'. Indeed, four types of violence (denying permission to visit friends and/or family, shouting at the woman or

offending her in public, failing to give her money for housekeeping and threatening to punch her) that had been reported with a frequency of 10 times or more prior to the workshops were not registered with this frequency in the year after participation in the workshops. However, all seven types of violence, although reported as less frequent, are still being perpetrated after participation in the workshops.

As might have been expected, admission of using physical violence was less common than for psychological/emotional violence. The maximum number of positive answers (admissions to the use of specific types of physical violence) that could be registered totalled 195 (39 men multiplied by five types of violence). Comparing the 48 positive answers registered in the year before the workshops to the 21 in the year following the workshops, this difference (27 less) represents an aggregate reduction of 56 per cent in the possible number of times that the 39 men could admit to the use of specific types of physical violence.

As in the case of psychological/emotional violence, the analysis reveals a tendency for the men to reduce the number of times that they actually carried out acts of physical violence. After the workshops there were no reports of the use of any type of physical violence with a frequency of '10 times or more' and admissions to the use of specific types of physical violence 'between five and 10 times' had dropped by 80 per cent. Those used with a frequency of 'between one and five times' had also dropped by 30 per cent and those who answered 'never' rose by 21 per cent. Table 2 shows how these reductions were spread among the five types of physical violence. Again there was a clear tendency to use physical violence less frequently. Indeed, the only type of violence registered after the workshops with a frequency of between 'one and five times' is throwing objects at the woman. The use or threatened use of knives or guns has been eliminated.

In the 12 months after the course, the acts of psychological/emotional violence that continue to occur to a greater degree are humiliation and insistence on knowing where the woman is and who she is with. Those which have been significantly reduced are shouting at or offending her in public, and threats to punch. Pushing and shoving is the most common act of physical violence, while just one man reported having slapped his partner in the year after the course.

The reduction in the number of positive answers (admissions to the use of specific types of violence) and the tendency to use violence less frequently should be interpreted in the context of the changes in the men's

Table 1 Reductions registered in the use of psychological/emotional violence

<i>Acts of violence</i> ^{BSV}	Humiliation of partner		Denying permission to visit friends and/or family		Controlling people who visit her at home		Insisting on always knowing where she is and with whom		Shouting at her or offending her in public		Failing to give her money for the housekeeping		Threatening to punch her	
Frequency	Before %	After %	Before %	After %	Before %	After %	Before %	After %	Before %	After %	Before %	After %	Before %	After %
Not applicable	3	10	3	3	8	5	3	3	3	5	3	3	5	5
No answer	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	5	5	0	0
10 times or more	18	3	15	0	18	3	33	10	8	0	3	0	10	0
Between 5 and 10 times	21	3	8	5	7	3	15	8	8	0	8	3	10	0
Between 1 and 5 times	37	58	33	28	26	21	31	38	15	8	20	20	18	23
Never	21	26	41	64	41	68	18	41	66	87	61	69	57	72
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes:

- a) 'Before' refers to the year immediately prior to participation in the course on masculinity and popular education.
- b) 'After' refers to the year immediately after taking part in the course on masculinity and popular education.
- c) Percentages are calculated based on the maximum number of positive answers (admitting the use of specific acts of violence) that could be registered by the 39 men who used psychological/emotional violence both before and after their participation in the training courses on masculinity which is a total of 273 (39 men multiplied by 7 types of violence).

Table 2 Reductions registered in the use of physical violence

<i>Acts of violence</i> ^{BSV}	Pushing and shoving		Blows with fist or other object		Slaps		Throwing things at her		Use of or threat to use knives or guns	
Frequency	Before %	After %	Before %	After %	Before %	After %	Before %	After %	Before %	After %
Not applicable	5	3	5	3	3	3	3	3	5	3
No answer	0	3	0	0	0	0	0	0	0	0
10 times or more	10	0	3	0	5	0	5	0	5	0
Between 5 and 10 times	10	0	8	0	3	0	3	5	3	0
Between 1 and 5 times	18	28	12	7	15	3	17	10	5	0
Never	57	66	72	90	74	94	72	82	82	97
Total	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100	100

Notes:

- a) 'Before' refers to the year immediately prior to participation in the course on masculinity and popular education.
- b) 'After' refers to the year immediately after taking part in the course on masculinity and popular education.
- c) Percentages are calculated based on the maximum number of positive answers (admitting the use of specific acts of violence) that could be registered by the 39 men who used physical violence both before and after their participation in the training courses on masculinity which is a total of 195 (39 men by 5 types of violence).

attitudes, values and world view, and in the way they conceive of their masculinity. The qualitative changes imply that reduction in violence is a result not only of men learning how to control themselves and create non-violent options, but also of transformations in attitudes and values.

Sexual relations

Bearing in mind that a significant proportion of men were not married or in common law relationships at the time they filled in the questionnaire, the section on sexual relations was oriented towards sexual relations with a 'steady sexual partner' and did not focus exclusively on marital relationships. The percentage of 'no answers' was notably higher in this section than in the one on personal changes. This is probably due to the number of men not in relationships, but also to the intimate nature of the questions.

The questions took in:

- Ability to achieve sexual satisfaction
- Ability to give sexual satisfaction
- Expression of affection and feelings
- Sexual attitudes and behaviour with other women
- Attitudes towards and discrimination against homosexuals
- Sexual education
- Use of force (physical and psychological) to get sex
- Extramarital sex (with women and men)
- Use of condoms as a birth-control method
- Use of condoms to prevent HIV/AIDS and other sexually transmitted diseases.

Concern for the sexual pleasure of their partners rose slightly and more so than the men's own pleasure in sex. Men in steady relationships, men who work for NGOs and men from Managua, in particular, registered greater capacity than other men to both give and receive sexual pleasure after their participation in the course. They also demonstrated greater ability to express feelings and affection towards their partners.

Significant change was detected in men's attitudes and behaviour towards women. This was expressed in reduced levels of sexual harassment at work and in the community, and a change in men's perception of female friends as potential sexual conquests. Only 1 per cent of the men admitted to using wolf-whistles or sexually harassing women after the course (compared with 10 per cent previously) and men from Managua and men in relationships declared that after the course they had eliminated this type of behaviour.

The minority of men (14 per cent) who admitted to discriminating against gays and lesbians before the workshops fell to a mere 1 per cent of the overall sample afterwards. Men in relationships and men who work for NGOs had apparently overcome any tendency to discriminate against homosexuals. However, only 27 per cent of the latter claimed to have gay friends, making them and men from rural or semi-rural areas the two groups with fewest gay friends, after the course. In contrast, almost half of the men from Managua stated that they had gay friends.

The number of men who actively look for sexual education rose from 36 per cent to 55 per cent, Managuans being more likely to seek out educational materials. This may have more to do with opportunities and resources available than with willingness to do so.

Forty-one per cent of men in relationships admitted to having sex with other women. This fell slightly to 38 per cent after the course. Few admitted to having sex with other men. The percentages of men who admitted using psychological and physical force to get sex fell from 23 per cent to 13 per cent and 12 per cent to 9 per cent respectively. It is interesting to compare these figures with the unpublished results of a survey carried out in León on sexual abuse, by the same team that did *Confites en el Infierno*. More than a quarter of the women interviewed and one-fifth of the men claimed that they had been sexually abused before the age of 18.

Before the workshops, only 24 per cent of the men said they used condoms with their partners as a contraceptive method and 13 per cent said they used them to prevent HIV/AIDS or other sexually transmitted diseases. These figures changed slightly to 26 per cent and 16 per cent respectively. The most significant change in condom use was the doubling of the number of men who said that they always used condoms in their sexual relations with 'other' women, from 10 per cent to 20 per cent of the total sample — still relatively low. This can be explained partly by the number of men who do not have partners, and who claimed that they did not have sex with other people. It also says more about how men see their partners than about any serious awareness of the dangers of unprotected sex. Condom use does not figure as a specific theme in the course.

Changes in the family

In relation to children

Few men responded to the questions on how many children they have with their current and previous partners and the amount of money and time they spend

on their children. The response rate was so low that the information could not be considered statistically trustworthy and so had to be discarded. One possible explanation may be technical problems with the design of the questionnaire. In this section men had to respond by writing numbers, a shift from the rest of the survey, where they only had to put a cross in a box. It is also possible, however, that many men were unwilling to share such information. Paternal irresponsibility is widespread in Nicaragua and many men father children whom they either fail to acknowledge or fail to take responsibility for.

In relation to domestic chores

As can be seen in Table 3, participation in domestic chores rose in terms of the number of men who participated in specific chores and the frequency of participation. Only with three chores, however, was there an increase of 10 per cent or more: washing dishes, preparing breakfast and cooking dinner. The domestic activities that do register increases are mainly limited to common interest activities (cooking, cleaning, going shopping, mopping the floor, sweeping the patio, and so on). Men's contribution to caring for or attending to the needs of others (washing and ironing other family members' clothes) barely changed. It was minimal both before and after the course.

Similarly, the comparatively low numbers of men who report doing domestic chores three or more times a week (both before and after the course) imply that domestic tasks continue to be considered women's work. It would appear that many men are prepared to help out now and again when circumstances demand or when other activities and priorities permit. Few, however, change their ideas of domestic work and enter into real solidarity with women, taking part in domestic chores to put the principle of gender equity into practice.

Changes in the work place

The analysis of changes in attitudes, values and behaviour focused on the quality of respondents' relations with women and men at work. It also included the use of sexist language and the topics of men's conversations. In general, the men seemed to be making conscious efforts to modify their ways of relating to women in the workplace. The number of men who said they listened to women's opinions in meetings and made efforts to include women in decision making increased. There was also a significant decrease in sexual harassment by men who admitted to sexually harassing women (sexual insinuations, wolf whistles, unauthorised physical contact) before the course. This is supported by the increase in men's awareness of the sexist and degrading nature of misogynist jokes and remarks and their

Table 3. Participation in domestic chores

Note: Figures represent percentage of all the men included in the study (112)

Chore	Participation in chore before the course (%)	Participation in chore after the course (%)	Three times or more a week before course (%)	Three times or more a week after course (%)	Never before course (%)	Never after course (%)
Wash the dishes	55	71	17	25	22	7
Go shopping	56	63	27	33	13	6
Sweep the patio	54	59	12	21	15	11
Make breakfast	44	54	11	18	29	19
Cook dinner	42	52	8	12	29	21
Iron own clothes	47	48	18	20	20	19
Wash their own clothes	51	49	14	15	21	23
Financial administration of the home	47	45	23	20	22	15
Mop the floor	39	45	12	13	28	21
Cook lunch	45	46	6	10	27	26
Iron partner's clothes	12	15	3	2	39	36
Wash partner's clothes	11	14	3	3	38	36
Wash children's clothes	12	14	3	3	29	28
Iron children's clothes	10	12	4	0	34	32

declarations that they engage in these less than they did before. Many men also said they had developed a greater capacity to talk to other men in their workplaces about issues related to masculinity and gender, and even to question sexist and discriminatory behaviour by other men.

The number of men who claim that they never used sexist language doubled after the course.

In men's conversations with women, topics such as sport, politics and social problems take precedence over topics of a more personal and intimate nature. Many men still find it difficult to express feelings and to talk about personal problems with other men and with work colleagues.

Changes in the community

The study revealed a relatively low level of participation by men in political parties and trades unions, traditionally dominated by men, both before and after their participation in the courses. Indeed, slight decreases were detected that coincided with increases in their participation in community associations and organisations. This is probably related to a general sense of disillusionment with traditional party politics, but could also be due to a growing dissatisfaction with the nature of traditional male participation in political parties and trades unions and a search for alternatives. This is supported by the fact that young men (15–24 years) reported the lowest level of participation in political parties and the highest level of participation in community groups. The number of men linked to some type of men's group doubled after the course and those who were beginning to take part in this type of group were young men, men from Managua and men who work for NGOs. This implies that it is more difficult for men from rural areas or who are not linked to an organisation to participate in these types of groups.

Marked increases were detected in the participants' confidence in their capacity to conduct educational activities with men, and this was reflected in an increase in workshops and seminars they conducted with other men. They also feel better equipped to influence the way that other men think and act in the community.

The need for integrated strategies

The changes detected by this impact study are heartening but, at most, represent the efforts of a handful of men taking the first steps towards modifying the patriarchal attitudes, values and behaviour that they have been brought up with. Caution must be taken, therefore, in

making claims for profound and long-lasting changes. Both the internal and external pressures that men face not to change are easily capable of reversing the transformation processes described in this section. If anything, the study reveals the urgent need for the further development of methodologies for gender work with men. Perhaps more important, if change in men is to be prolonged, strategies must be drawn up that take into account not only the 'unlearning of machismo' but also the development of organisational and political proposals aimed at strengthening and sustaining these change processes. This process has already begun and is the focus of the rest of this document.

The training manual *El Significado de Ser Hombre*

By 1997, interest in gender work with men had increased dramatically, not only in Nicaragua but also in other parts of Central America. Former course participants were keen to undertake educational activities with other men but lacked confidence and methodological expertise. Motivated by their enthusiasm, and aware that only a small percentage of men could take part in its masculinity workshops, CANTERA decided to develop a training manual to facilitate training with men at grassroots level in different parts of the country.

The first step was to design, implement and evaluate a series of educational activities with men in poor neighbourhoods of Managua and in semi-rural areas close to the city. In co-ordination with the Men Against Violence Group in Managua workshops on male identities, violence and discrimination were carried out in five communities. The workshops (adapted from the courses on masculinity and popular education) were subjected to critical analysis. By 1999 the experience had been systematised and was the basis for the training manual *El Significado de Ser Hombre* (*The Meaning of Maleness*), a proposed methodology for gender training and awareness-raising with men. The manual consists of 10 modules, each one with its specific theme, objectives and step-by-step guide for implementation.

In 1999 CANTERA, with the support of the IDB, piloted the manual in six communities in Nicaragua. Before this started, a monitoring and evaluation system was developed, which aimed to:

- Detect technical weaknesses (content, focus, methodology, and so on) in the ten modules and propose improvements
- Assess the validity of the educational model and the proposed methodology and their capacity to generate changes in men's attitudes, values and behaviour

- Quantify actual changes in the participants
- Assess the accessibility of the methodology proposed in the manual.

In February 1999 a two-day training workshop was held for the 18 facilitators who would pilot the manual (three in each community) to familiarise them with its content and focus and to strengthen specific training skills. Between March and July the manual was used, with each of the six communities adapting the 10 modules to its own specific needs. Most of the activities were supervised by members of the CANTERA technical team. In May, half-way through the training, the 18 facilitators met with the technical team to iron out difficulties, and the technical team met to analyse and synthesise the information from the supervision sessions. This led to technical and methodological modifications and the systematisation of proposals for the improvement of the sections on using the manual, as well as the content and focus of the training modules themselves.

In September and October 1999 focus groups in two communities, with participants in the training and with

women, confirmed significant changes in the men's attitudes, values and certain types of behaviour. Perhaps, however, the most important element of this process of monitoring and evaluation of the manual was the validation of the methodology as a means to generate critical thinking about traditional hegemonic masculinity. Men's vision of themselves and of society's expectations of masculinity had been challenged and they had begun to think about themselves and other people in a different way.

By the end of 1999 the results and findings of the monitoring, evaluation and validation of the training manual had been consolidated in an extensive document that included a list of recommendations for changes to be incorporated into the manual. At the time of writing this document CANTERA was still analysing these recommendations to ensure that the second edition of the manual not only contributes positively to processes of gender awareness-raising and training with men in Nicaragua and other countries in Central America, but also that its focus and content comply with CANTERA's vision of gender and masculinity.



6. Problems and lessons



Parallel to the impact study and the elaboration of the training manual, CANTERA also put emphasis on the systematisation of the courses on popular education and masculinity. Systematisation differs from evaluation in that it focuses not only on the assessment of objectives but also on the critical analysis of the processes generated. It aims to involve practitioners in the collective construction of theory, based on their own practice. The systematisation of CANTERA's masculinity and popular education courses was carried out within a Central America regional framework and formed part of ALFORJA's¹⁷ attempts to systematise its educational processes. Many people, both men and women, took part: participants in the courses, CANTERA technical staff and local project activists, and staff members of other ALFORJA centres. The theorisation that ensued enabled the articulation of 'problems encountered' and 'lessons learned', many of which are synthesised below.

Problems

The problems that men face when they begin to deconstruct their masculinity and think and act differently may be internal or external. Internally, many

men may fear being laughed at, ridiculed or ostracised by other men and also by women. Even when radical changes in attitudes and values have been internalised, changes in behaviour do not always appear immediately and they are rarely put into practice coherently and consistently. Men's capacity to change is affected, not only by their own determination, but also by external factors such as the company they keep and the attitudes of the people they live and work with. In some situations, therefore, men may be able to stand up for their newly discovered values and principles but in others this may prove difficult, complicated and even dangerous.

For many men it is easier, for example, to mop the floor (inside the house where the neighbours cannot see them), or reduce their use of violence, than to change the way they relate to other men in a public place such as a bar or a baseball or football stadium. This does not necessarily mean that men are being hypocritical. It simply reflects the amount of thought and effort required for real,

¹⁷ ALFORJA is a Central American popular education network that consists of the following centres: CEASPA, Panama; CEP, Costa Rica; CANTERA, Nicaragua; CENCOPH, Honduras; SERJUS, Guatemala; FUNPROCOOP, El Salvador and IMDEC, Mexico.

sustainable change. It is easier to change if other men in the same workplace or community are embarking on similar processes of transformation.

Just as patriarchal society demeans women who do not conform to the gender norms assigned to them, many men face constant pressure not to change. One of patriarchal society's most powerful deterrents against change is homophobia.

One way to strengthen men's commitment to change is to emphasise, not only the need for solidarity with women but also the urgency of promoting development for men. Once men begin to realise that their lives can be improved, it is easier to deal with, for example, homophobic remarks. Another important element is the sensitisation of men to gays, lesbians, bisexuals and transvestites.

The three main obstacles to change mentioned by men in CANTERA's impact study were:

- Women in the workplace lack confidence in men's capacity to change
- Other people (mother, partner, father, children, and so on) give little support
- Lack of gender policies at work to promote and consolidate changes.

Of these, two refer to the workplace, suggesting that change is easier in the family unit although even there many men do not feel supported.

The lack of confidence that men detect in their female colleagues is related to doubts among the women about gender work with men. Some women believe that it is a waste of time and that men will never change. Others fear that many men will learn how to modify their discourse on gender relations and equity, but that far from improving their behaviour, will actually discover more subtle ways of dominating. Many, however, are convinced that if women's position is to change, so must men's and therefore welcome, with a mixture of hope and reservation, work on gender issues with men. Most women would agree that it is not their job to take on the task of sensitising and training men on gender issues.

For many organisations the incorporation of gender into institutional strategies and programmes still means prioritising work with women by addressing the practicalities of improving their living conditions: health, education, access to employment and credit, and so on. In a recent encounter between ICD development workers and their counterparts in Managua, one woman development worker pointed out that most of the

ideological work being done on gender in the Nicaraguan ICD programme was being carried out by men with men. Women's organisations, although obviously not ignoring the need for changes in concepts, attitudes and values, were focusing on the institutional strengthening of women's organisations, the promotion of technical careers for women and the general improvement of women's living conditions. The ensuing debate focused on the different stages of development that women and men are in as regards gender analysis and practice. Women are generally much more aware than men of gender inequalities, rights and so on. The programmes supported by ICD in Nicaragua with women's organisations respond to the need of women's organisational and technical capacities, and thus guarantee their empowerment.

Organisations that have started to work on gender analysis, or that aim to mainstream gender, must define (and often redefine) basic concepts about the work they plan to do. In these processes, little emphasis has been put on the conceptualisation of masculinity and how it relates to other elements of institutional strategy. Even within organisations that have begun to promote analysis of masculinity as an integral part of their developmental aims and objectives, defining a gender policy and reaching consensus has not been an easy task. This lack of clarity can be disconcerting for men who have been sent by their workplaces to receive training on masculinity and then find that institutional change is not taking place at the same rate as their own personal change. It is frustrating, and a major deterrent for men who want to change.

Lessons

Many lessons from CANTERA's work are obvious from the description of the content and focus of the courses that has been the main thrust of this document. It seems appropriate, however, to offer a set of recommendations to men and women interested in starting awareness-raising and training programmes with men on gender and masculinity.

In relation to popular education

In CANTERA's work on gender and masculinity the educational model has been of vital importance in making change possible. Popular education, as understood in Central America, is not the only model that may lead to change, but it does mean that the link between change and methodology has been rigorously evaluated, systematised and validated. In the study *Hacia una Nueva Masculinidad* men said several elements related to the educational model were extremely important. These are elaborated below.

Men's own situation as a starting point

Experience teaches that men put up more resistance to work on gender if the starting point is a theory of gender and gender relations. Many men reported that in their workplaces they had attended various talks and seminars on gender, violence, and so on, mostly given by women. These provoked two reactions. The first was to ignore the information as irrelevant to men and their lives. Many men quickly forgot most of the content. But they remember a sense of being accused and blamed for gender inequalities. This puts them on the defensive, awakening fears that women's real agenda is not equity but turning the tables — a fear, of course, nurtured and strengthened in male circles.

Men respond better when their own experiences are taken as a starting point. This enables them to discover for themselves the elements of their socialisation that have instilled in them macho attitudes, values and behaviour. A sense of individual and collective responsibility can emerge. Understanding the whys and wherefores of male gender identity opens up the possibility of change.

New spaces for reflection and analysis

In traditional male circles communication is limited to such topics as sport, politics and, of course, women. For most men the gender course represents a new space to think about issues that men rarely discuss. Men are gently eased into looking at themselves. It is at first an unnerving experience, but quite quickly most of the men welcome and value it. They give themselves and each other permission to share thoughts, feelings and experiences on an intimate level and for many it is the first time in their lives that they have been able to do so. The content of their reflections and analysis are not abstract issues of gender theory but real experiences. Important in this analysis is the focus not only on the objective analysis of lived experiences (the who? when? what? where? and why?) but also the subjective: the articulation of feelings. Again, for many men it is the first time that they have been able to lower their defences and be themselves, express fears, doubts and joys.

Using a variety of methods and techniques

Focus on personal history and lived experiences is not an exclusive element in CANTERA's work with men and it could make the workshops too intense for most men. It is therefore important to include components that can complement and deepen analysis and proposals for change. Watching and analysing feature films, for example, has been a particularly useful method to deepen reflection and analysis on certain issues. For example, the

New Zealand film *Once Were Warriors*, a graphic depiction of the effects of machismo (especially violence) on women, children and men, enables the ideological dismantling of machismo. This method also equips participants with the tools to analyse media coverage of power and violence and make links with the way that power and violence permeate their own lives.

Panels and debates on specific issues, with the participation of experts (men and women) has also proved to be an important method for developing analysis and broadening knowledge, as has the distribution of articles and publications on gender, masculinity, violence, sexuality, and so on.

Popular education holds that learning should be fun. The use of dynamics and techniques that demand physical movement and that are enjoyable greatly enhances the atmosphere in a workshop. These can be short and simple games to get people moving and build confidence and trust, or more elaborate techniques that lead to the critical analysis of a particular aspect of masculinity.

The collective articulation of proposals for change

Having analysed their own attitudes, values and behaviour, the men are asked to think about what they can change and how. There is no set recipe and it is important to give the participants a chance to start change where they feel it can best be implemented and sustained. For some men this may mean greater participation in domestic chores, for others a serious attempt to stop using physical violence. They make informal contracts with each other, and this encourages and motivates them to make the changes. If they are from the same community or workplace they can support each other's change processes. It is emphasised that change does not take place within the workshops but in everyday life. The workshops are a privileged space, almost like a religious retreat, where men can step out of themselves for a time, take a critical look at themselves, and propose self-improvement.

Group work

Men open up quickly and easily when given the opportunity to reflect on their lives and values. The use of small groups for more intimate sharing and analysis was highly rated by the men. However, the importance of confidentiality and the 'right to remain silent' must be stressed. Each individual must be allowed to set his own limits on how much he is willing to share. The degree of openness in the workshops is surprising, especially when the men are told that the more honest they are in their sharing experiences the more they will get out of it.

It helps to get men to agree to a set of basic rules for the smooth running of the workshops. This can easily be done as a brain-storming exercise, inviting men to make suggestions for improving the workshop. Usually they propose a mixture of practical things, such as no smoking and punctuality, and things more related to the ethos of the workshops, such as the right to pass, confidentiality, and listening to what other men say.

Sustainable change

CANTERA's educational model for awareness-raising and gender training with men focuses on the deconstruction of social attitudes, values and behaviour and the collective construction of alternative ways of expressing and living masculinities. In doing so, it emphasises not only rational understanding, but also qualitative change in each man's values and attitudes and its subsequent internalisation. It is not simply a question of equipping men with mechanisms and techniques for controlling dominant tendencies and violent outbreaks, but rather of facilitating internal transformations in their view of the world. This greatly increases the possibility of sustainable change.

Solidarity with women and men's own 'gender agenda'

Solidarity with women and a commitment to their development is a central component of the educational model that CANTERA has developed to promote the processes of gender awareness raising and training with men. These processes must have the improvement of women's welfare, human rights and quality of life as a principal objective.

This does not mean, however, that this educational model focuses exclusively on women's strategic and practical gender needs. If substantial, sustainable change is to be achieved, improvements in the quality of men's lives must also play a central role in the training processes. Men must take on board that they too have much to gain in terms of physical and mental health, interpersonal relationships with women, children and other men, and within themselves on a spiritual level. In CANTERA's courses men begin to talk for the first time about tenderness, sensitivity and the ability to express feelings as a human right to be sought after and cherished.

Solidarity with women and men's own 'gender agenda' are not contradictory and should be seen as mutually interdependent and complementary. To focus on one to the detriment of the other will inhibit the possibility of change based on the integral human development of women and men.

Selecting participants

Self-motivation

Men need some self-motivation if they are going to open their masculinity to scrutiny. They should not be forced to take part in training programmes on gender and masculinity. Policies that do not take into account individuals' specific needs and personal processes can inhibit the mainstreaming of gender in an institution.

Overcoming resistance

Popular education is easily adaptable to men from all sorts of backgrounds and experiences. As it demands active participation, some men may feel inhibited and even uncomfortable with the methodology at the beginning. Although it is important to try to involve everyone as much as possible, it must also be remembered that different people participate in different ways. Some men will not feel comfortable speaking out in large plenary sessions or reporting back on group discussions, but may come into their own in small groups. In general, in Nicaragua, few people resist popular education methods and techniques. It is important, therefore, to know the specific needs, interests and possibilities of the participants in relation to the proposed methodology, and to remember the basic principle that men are unlikely to change if their perceptions and beliefs are not challenged.

Popular education as a methodology

One of the myths about popular education is that it is designed to facilitate educational processes with poor people whose academic achievements are low. Popular education is much more than that. It can be used with all sorts of people, whatever their background, academic achievements or professional standing. All the participants must understand that they will get out of the workshops what they put into them: that they take responsibility for their individual and collective processes of reflection and change. To achieve this it is important that they understand the methodological framework of the training. Reflections on methodology can be built into the training process to enable men to see the logic between stated objectives and the methods and techniques used. This helps not only their own understanding of change but also in their future work with other men.

Characteristics of the participants

Each workshop brings together men whose social conditions, life experiences, values and behaviour are

extremely varied: men of different ages, professions, geographical origins, marital status and academic achievements. This has been one of the strengths of the courses. Young men often say how useful it is to be able to exchange ideas and experiences with older men, and men from Managua benefit a great deal from the presence of *campesinos*. Despite their diversity they soon discover what they have in common in the male gender identity that society has imposed on them. This enables them to discover that they share many problems and aspirations.

Work with adolescents and youth

In gender awareness-raising and training with adolescents and young men, some specific elements should be taken into account. First, adolescents and young men are still in the process of self identification and although some of their attitudes and values will be firmly ingrained, they will probably be questioning others. Many young men and adolescents take part in the course because they are dissatisfied with traditional masculinity. The workshops offer these men an opportunity not so much to change but to look for alternatives. The methodology encourages reflection on experiences. Most young men will not have to delve very far into the past to discover how their masculinity has been constructed.

Selecting training facilitators

Preparation and commitment

The success of gender awareness-raising and training developed in the popular education framework depends partly on adequate preparation and the facilitators' commitment to popular education and gender equity. Facilitators should have a solid grasp of the theory and practice of popular education and of gender and masculinity. Ideally, they will have had the opportunity to challenge and change their own attitudes, values and behaviour, either by participating in formal training processes, or through informal experiences that have led them to question and change the way they see themselves as men, and the way they relate to women and to other men. They should be making conscious and visible efforts to implement these changes in their own lives. They must practise what they preach. This does not mean that they have been totally sensitised to gender justice, but that they maintain an openly critical attitude towards their own values and behaviour.

Team work, planning and evaluation

It is recommended that training processes on gender awareness with men are run by a small team of two or three men. One may have particular strengths in using

popular education techniques to provoke and deepen debate; another may have a deeper understanding of the theory of gender and masculinity. Yet another may feel more at home in a supportive role. No one has to be perfect and it will be hard to find one person who meets all the requisites demanded of a good facilitator for this type of training. That is why it is important to build a team, and that means dedicating sufficient time to planning and evaluation of the educational activities. Everyone in the team must understand the structure, aims and objectives of the proposed activity and the internal logic linking these to the content and methodology. In CANTERA, for each day of training one day is set aside for planning.

Evaluation and systematisation is also important for the facilitating team if they aim to improve their individual and collective skills and knowledge. It is particularly important for first-time trainers in masculinity issues.

Characteristics of the facilitators

Facilitators need to be sensitive, flexible and creative. Men are riddled with doubts and fears and the courses often require them to deconstruct paradigms and principles that they and their fathers, grandfathers and great-grandfathers have lived by. Creativity and flexibility are needed to push men as close to the edge as they are willing to go and thus enable them to challenge their attitudes and values. Sensitivity is needed in difficult situations when debate becomes heated or confrontational. Facilitators must have a deep respect for the participants and acknowledge that everyone has his own process to work through. They should resist judgement. Some men will be harder to cope with than others and perhaps the facilitators will not actually like some of the participants (and vice-versa). It is not always easy to strike a balance between holding a professional distance and recognising that the facilitators' own experiences can contribute to the process of critical analysis and change. The golden rule is for the facilitator to contribute his own experience only if it can help deepen the debate or provide new insights. It should be offered as fresh material and can therefore be kept on hold until there is a lull in the debate or men have run out of things to say. It can often serve as a catalyst for creative and constructive conclusions.

The main taboos: sexuality and religion

Facilitators need to be sensitive to the participants' religious beliefs and to their fears, doubts, prejudices and stereotypes about human sexuality. Unconditional solidarity with gays, lesbians and bisexuals is of vital importance and facilitators must never allow homophobic

or misogynist statements to go unchallenged. A good technique is to throw back the comment to the rest of the group asking what they think, who disagrees, and so on.

The men who participate in CANTERA's course on masculinity and popular education have various religious beliefs or none. The role of religion in constructing masculinity and perpetuating patriarchal society must be dealt with, given the Judaeo-Christian influence on Nicaraguan culture. Indeed, even when it is not formally part of the workshop design, participants' own interests and needs often lead to debate on religion. Many men of all ages and backgrounds will have strong religious beliefs and convictions and may use Biblical quotes to support traditional gender premises that uphold male superiority, not only as a natural phenomenon but also as a supernatural one. Facilitators must not ridicule or insult men's beliefs even if they do not share them. As in the case of sexuality, it is important to deal with religion in a spirit of respect.

If the group is diverse, the men are sure to have different opinions on religion and will be more than willing to share them. It is a mistake for the facilitator to enter into tit-for-tat arguments on religion with one or two participants, as this risks isolating them within the group and wastes time on things that will not be resolved in the workshop. It is important, however, to challenge the defence of male power and dominance, based on religious doctrines, while respecting each individual's religious beliefs. The authority and power invested in the co-ordinating team should not be used to impose a particular vision or interpretation of religion.

Offering alternative religious views of the world, for example passages from the *Popol Vuh*, the sacred book of the Mayan people, has proved to be an interesting way to broaden debate and promote critical awareness. The aim is not necessarily to reach a consensus and the facilitators ought to acknowledge the existence of different opinions and interpretations. They can also offer theological reflections on interpreting the Bible (the danger of quoting texts in isolation, for example) and the central message of Christianity, either introducing new ideas — not as infallible truths, but for further consideration — or summing up ideas other participants have put forward.

It is also appropriate, when drawing conclusions or making a synthesis of the topics discussed, to refer to the overall message of Christianity as one of social justice.

Managing change

Change can be expected to take place on three different levels: cognitive, affective and behavioural. On a

cognitive level, men who take part in popular education processes will develop a greater capacity to be critical and self-critical, and will improve their analytical skills.

Applying these skills to their own personal history and male socialisation processes will enable them to acquire a new vision of masculinity as a social phenomenon rather than a natural condition, of what it means to be men. It will open them up to changes in the way they think about and use power in their relationships, especially in the family. This presupposes changes in their vision of women.

On an **affective level**, men are likely to begin to discover a new capacity to respect other people, women in particular, and their sense of self-esteem may also increase. Many, too, will begin to develop the ability to articulate and express their feelings with greater freedom and without fear of being ridiculed.

On a **behavioural level**, men's actions will change as their attitudes and values change. This may be expressed in many different ways, but is likely to include a greater willingness to share domestic chores, a reduction in the use of violence to resolve conflict or impose their own will and a greater sense of solidarity with women and with groups that suffer discrimination. Discriminatory practices should also have been reduced considerably.

Implementing integrated educational processes

Educational processes

Awareness-raising and gender training must be understood as educational processes. One-off activities may have some effect, but men need time between educational activities to put change into practice. Each man will discover his own dynamic, because change is different for each individual. Thus when CANTERA began the work in 1994, it decided to facilitate educational processes that would lead to concrete changes in men's attitudes, values and behaviour.

The internal logic of educational activities

In these processes, themes and topics must be dealt with in a logical sequence. CANTERA's experience is based on men being able to discover the difference between 'sex' and 'gender', with their own experience as a starting point for reflection and change. Once the social character of male attitudes, values and behaviour has been established and links made between these and men's own ways of living their masculinity, it is possible to develop specific topics: discrimination, violence, power, fatherhood, sexuality and so on.

CANTERA's work has given specific importance to violence and its relation to gender and power, partly because family violence is alarmingly common in Nicaragua, but also because it is central to men's shared sense of identity. As the work has developed over the years, the emphasis on sexuality and its relation to male power and privilege has gradually been increased. In general, however, it would be a mistake to try to begin educational processes with men with the issue of sexuality, given the fears, taboos, stereotypes and prejudices associated with it.

The systemic character of machismo

Perhaps the most important factor in structuring, planning and implementing educational processes with men is the recognition of the systemic character of machismo as an oppressive ideology. Initiatives that aim to challenge and alter that system should also have a systematic approach. They cannot limit themselves to one or two elements of the system. In CANTERA's work with men, priority is given to the personal and family spheres, but this does not exclude other dimensions (work, community) and the proposal of changes in these. In processes that involve men from the same workplace, it may make sense to take that situation as a starting point. However, men need to discover the roots of their attitudes, values and behaviour at work if they are to understand them and want to change them. This requires emphasis on male socialisation processes, which need to be covered early in the process. Changes in concepts, perceptions, attitudes and values, even when reflected on and analysed in relation to one particular sphere, represent universal internalised 'truths' that permeate and condition men's behaviour in all spheres of life. Re-appraising how women are treated at home and the underlying ideology that perpetuates such treatment also has a far-reaching effect on the way men relate to women at work and in the community, and it is not difficult for them to apply it to other dimensions of their lives. It may, however, require the identification of strategies and specific mechanisms to implement and sustain change in each sphere of life.

If recognising the connectedness of different spheres of life is important, so too is awareness of the relationship between different aspects of machismo. Violence cannot be addressed if sexual violence is omitted, and this in turn cannot be understood if human sexuality and homophobia are avoided. The concept and practice of power as a male attribute necessary for the domination and control of women is central to traditional masculinity. The treatment of other issues must be developed in the framework of this key concept. The design of educational processes must enable thorough

examination and criticism of the social construction of male power, its diverse manifestations and effects on women and men of all ages.

Gender equity and ideological positions

The promotion of gender awareness-raising with men is an issue of social justice and human development. But not all men working for the latter will be open and receptive to a critical analysis of their masculinity. The paradigm of dominant masculinity crosses ideological barriers and many men who profess commitment to a left-wing, socialist and even revolutionary vision of society have failed to include gender analysis into their class and social analysis, even at a rational level. A classic case in Nicaragua in recent years is that of Daniel Ortega, General Secretary of the FSLN (Sandinista Front for National Liberation) and former Sandinista President of Nicaragua. Accused by his stepdaughter, Zoila América Narváez, of having sexually abused her as a child and young woman, Ortega's parliamentary immunity and the support he has received from male politicians of all persuasions, have inhibited any legal action against him.

Machismo is not the exclusive property of conservative, right-wing men and many of these will be willing to examine their own attitudes, values and behaviour. All sorts of men have taken part in CANTERA's courses on masculinity. Conspicuous by their absence, however, have been members of political parties, especially those in leadership positions. It would appear that, as yet, they are unwilling to reflect on male power.

Linking gender and masculinity to integrated community development initiatives

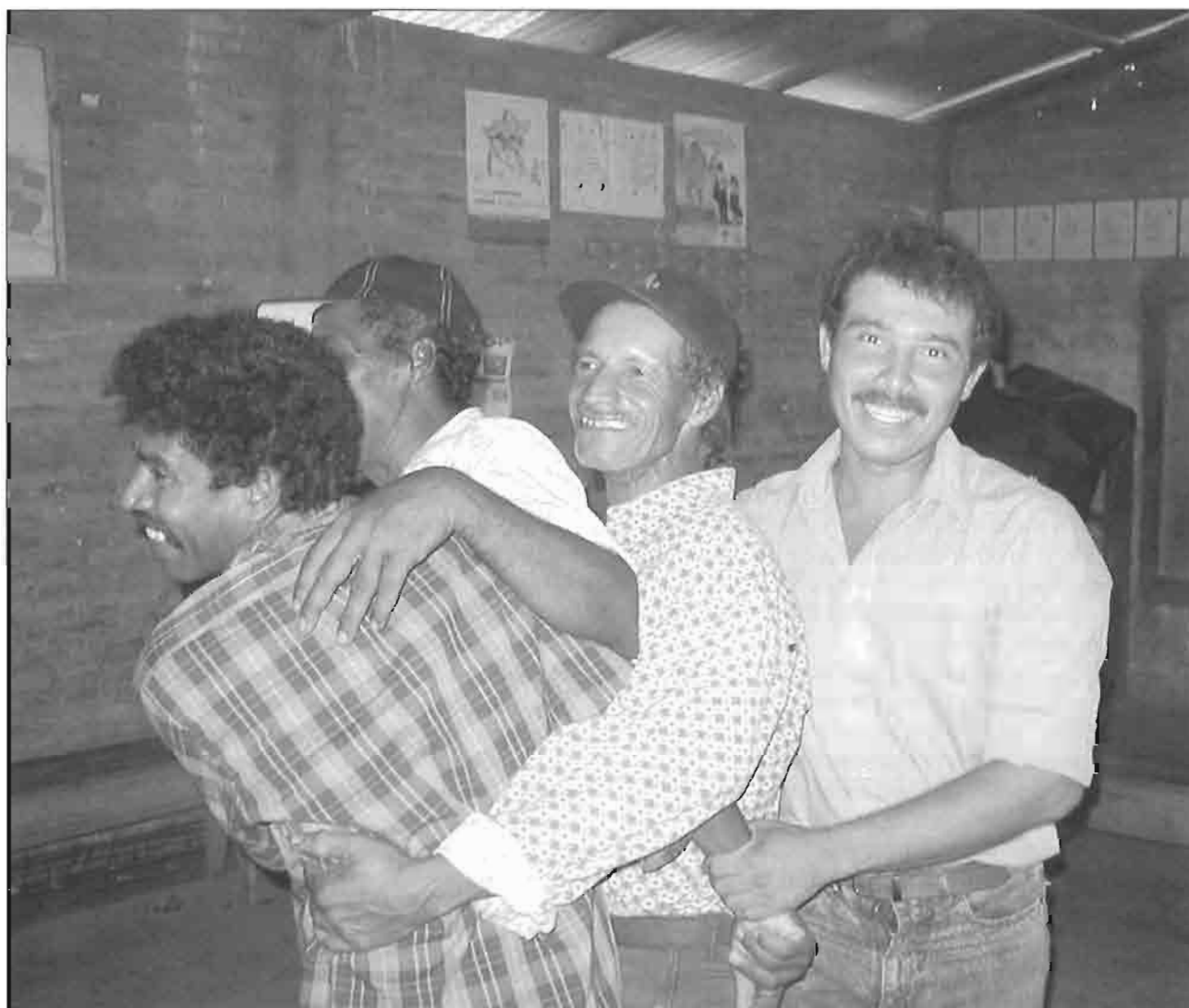
It is to be expected, however, that men involved in community development will be more open to change and many of them will be linked to left-wing organisations. Training programmes with men on gender and masculinity are more likely to succeed if they are conceived and implemented as an integral element of the development strategies of NGOs and community-based organisations. Adolescents and youth, for example, may already be organised in associations, groups or movements that reflect their interest in cultural activities, the environment or other aspects of development. It would be important to build on the organisation that already exists and make links between gender, masculinity and the issues that young people are already addressing.

Men changing men

CANTERA's experience of awareness-raising and gender

training with men has opened up all-male spaces coordinated by men. Initially some men feel strange and awkward without women present, but the need for men-only spaces cannot be over-emphasised. The absence of women enables men to express feelings and share experiences that they would find far more difficult to discuss otherwise. This should be borne in mind when developing training programmes. At some point, however, women and men must meet formally to share and discuss their proposals for and commitment to gender equity. Experience has shown, however, that using mixed spaces to start gender awareness-raising and training with men can be frustrating and counterproductive. Women, in general, tend to have a

much clearer vision than men do of the implications of gender analysis for their own lives. They are also more articulate in expressing their feelings, experiences and needs. This can be intimidating for men and lead them to go on the defensive, or even worse, adopt an aggressive position. Sometimes, the presence of men can silence women, who may be unwilling or perhaps unable to share their experiences with men. When this happens, there is a real danger that men will dominate the proceedings, analysing and reflecting in a superficial way without really getting to the core of the issues. An early mixed encounter can sow conflict between men and women, even unintentionally, and such schisms are notoriously difficult to heal.



7. Suggestions for awareness-raising and gender training for men



The need for processes of individual and collective integrated human development

In CANTERA's work on gender and masculinity perhaps the greatest achievement has been the systematic development and validation of a methodology that is relatively easy to replicate and that facilitates change. However, the scope of the products — the course and the training manual — is limited, and provides little more than an introduction. It does not cover in depth such issues as human sexuality, use and abuse of drugs, or responsible fatherhood, and only begins to touch on communication skills. However, the course and manual are the beginnings of change processes. There is a need to continue developing methodologies and strategies that will enable men to deepen their change processes and ensure their sustainability.

The work of other organisations on masculinity and gender in Nicaragua

CANTERA is not the only organisation in Nicaragua that has been working on issues of masculinity, gender and

violence. The feminist NGO Puntos de Encuentro has included the issues in its programmes, especially in its work with young people. In 1999, Puntos de Encuentro ran a massive multimedia campaign aimed at men living in areas most heavily affected by Hurricane Mitch, which devastated large areas of the country at the end of 1998. Based on studies of the effects of major natural disasters in other countries, the campaign on 'Violence against women: a disaster that men CAN prevent' took as its starting point the premise that family violence rises in the aftermath of such disasters. The campaign ran for several months and included television and radio spots, posters, leaflets, calendars, baseball caps and the running of workshops and seminars for men on violence.

Other NGOs in Nicaragua, such as CISAS and CIPRES, have also given priority to the training and awareness-raising among their male employees and participants in their programmes and strategies. State organisations, including the Ministry of Health, the police and the army, with the support of international development organisations such as the World Health Organisation, the United Nations Population Fund and the German International Co-operation (GTZ), have also run training programmes on gender awareness that include an analysis of masculinity and violence.

Coordinated strategies for gender awareness-raising with men in Nicaragua

Perhaps the common denominator, however, is the Managua-based MAVG. Its members have been crucial contributors to the development and implementation of the programmes and initiative taken by CANTERA, Puntos de Encuentro and others over the years. Either as staff members, temporary consultants or volunteers, the MAVG members have been an important source of manpower for implementing these programmes and helping to open up new opportunities in other Central American countries. In 1995 the MAVG organised the First National Encounter of Men Against Violence, in which 100 men from all parts of Nicaragua took part and which received extensive media coverage. In 1999 the Second National Encounter took place and participation had to be limited to delegates from different parts of the country. There it was decided to raise the profile of the group to enable the establishment of a national network of men against violence. In the final months of 1999, the group embarked on a phase of strategic planning and in May 2000 held the first assembly of the newly-formed Association of Men Against Violence (AMAV), which aimed to draw in men from all over the country and support their educational activities and organisational initiatives. A seven-man management committee was installed and an advisory committee has been set up that includes prominent women and men from different walks of life with a variety of professional

skills and personal qualities. In July 2000 the AMAV, supported by ICD, CAFOD, SCIAF, Trócaire, Irish Aid and Family Health International (FHI), began operating from a new office in Managua from which it is currently developing and implementing strategies for the training and awareness-raising among men on gender, masculinity and violence. In the near future, and as a follow-up to its current work, it aims to design methodologies for training men on other issues such as responsible fatherhood, human rights and sexuality. Following CANTERA's example, the implementation of training workshops and processes on these issues will be systematised and training materials produced.

Thanks to the efforts of CANTERA, Puntos de Encuentro, the MAVG and others, thousands of men in the past seven years have had their basic ideas on masculinity seriously challenged. Many have embarked on processes of change. Follow-up, however, has been difficult given the institutional mandates of these organisations and their large workloads. The AMAV aims to 'fill the gap' by offering support and follow-up to men in all parts of the country, thus contributing to the consolidation and sustainability of their efforts to change their own lives and influence the way other men think and act. AMAV also intends to act as a catalyst for the creation of a national network of men against violence, encourage and assist the setting up and strengthening of local groups, and support national and local educational activities.



8. Conclusions



In her documentary *Macho* about the MAVG in Managua, independent film-maker Lucinda Broadbent asks the question with which this paper began: who would have believed that in a country like Nicaragua men would be questioning traditional male values and behaviour and committing themselves to gender equity? It is tempting just to say that despite decades of poverty, social unrest, natural disasters and 'underdevelopment', innovative and inspiring initiatives can and do take place in countries such as Nicaragua. To do so, however, would be to simplify the issue and perhaps miss the point completely.

On account of its unique 10-year revolutionary experiment of the 1980s, some changes were instituted in Nicaraguan culture that no amount of counter-revolutionary backlash could erase. Women gained a critical consciousness and achieved levels of empowerment and autonomy that would in the 1990s evolve into a diverse and autonomous women's movement described by Sofia Montenegro as 'an emergent political force'. (*La Corriente* 1997: 36). Men too, their perceptions of themselves and their values, were changed by their participation in the revolution. For a minority the vision of social justice that motivated them to take up arms in the 1970s and 1980s eventually led to the creation of the Men Against Violence Group and the work on gender and masculinity carried out by CANTERA, Puntos de Encuentro, and other NGOs.

It is all part of 'the process' and it can be no coincidence that work on gender and masculinities began in Nicaragua and not in El Salvador or Guatemala, where revolutionary movements failed to come to power. That does not mean, however, that a revolution must gain (and lose) power before men can unlearn machismo. In Nicaragua socio-cultural circumstances converged, a historic opportunity presented itself and was seized by a handful of men, spurred on by feminist colleagues and friends concerned with the levels of male violence against women and eager to prevent and eradicate it. Eight years later, international development agencies, international and national NGOs and community development organisations in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Central America are in the process of incorporating 'masculinity' into their development programmes and projects as part of their gender policies. Men's groups are beginning to appear in various parts of Nicaragua, in El Salvador, Honduras, Guatemala and Costa Rica.

In the early 1990s, when gender, masculinity and violence were first discussed by Nicaraguan feminists, serious doubt was cast on the possibility of men taking gender seriously. Historically, feminist thought had perceived men as adversaries and the idea of building alliances with them was anathema to many. To do so was to ask men voluntarily to give up rights, privileges and power and the question was constantly asked: who in their right mind

would be willing to do such a thing? Such an altruistic gesture seemed diametrically opposed to all that was understood about the dominant, controlling and authoritarian character of traditional masculinity.

It could be argued that it is premature to talk of significant changes in men's attitudes, values and behaviour and that the results of CANTERA's work on gender and masculinity should be taken with a pinch of salt. To do so, however, would be to ignore the individual and collective response of hundreds of men in Nicaragua and other parts of Central America who have accepted the invitation to reflect on their masculinity and who have embarked on a journey of self-discovery and change. In workshop and course evaluations and during the systematisation of the courses on masculinity, many men said they were being inspired to change. The following are typical examples:

'The course has strengthened my commitment to change the way I behave towards others. I've become aware of reality as it is and this in turn helps me to put my convictions into practice on a day to day basis.'

'Now that we are aware of how things really are, it is our duty at work, in the family and in society at large, to relate to others without imposing laws, but rather in a democratic way.'

'To avoid the use of violence it is important first of all to recognise the violence that we do use against women, in the family and in society, however insignificant we may consider that violence to be. If we become aware that we are violent, the desire to avoid it is a sure sign that things are going to be better and that we are going to live a more dignified life.'

'What I liked most (about the course) was that the majority of the men shared the same concern: a desire to change our own depressing reality and improve the way we relate to women.'

'For the first time in one of the workshops I managed to grasp the link between theory, what we think and the ideas we have, and practise. I'd never before considered myself to be homophobic but I discovered during the course that I was. But I also learned how to overcome it. On a personal level the course helped me to improve certain attitudes I had and overcome some fears that I couldn't shake off despite the fact that I'd been taking part in the men's group in Managua for two years! You really learn not just by talking and sharing ideas, but also by putting into practice what you say.'

It must be acknowledged, however, that in most cases the change processes initiated by men do not go beyond

limited, micro-realities: men's own individual identities, immediate family relations, workplaces and sometimes friendships. Moreover, it is impossible in such a short time to guarantee that these change processes have matured and consolidated. Indeed, the changes that have been reported and observed are almost exclusively in the private, domestic sphere (which has been the focus of the education work) and there are no claims that this has had or will have any direct influence on men's behaviour and participation in public and political structures and institutions.

At best, hypothetically, it could be argued that individual change processes that encourage men to question male stereotypes and socialisation processes will contribute, in the future, to significant changes in men's concepts of power and its exercise in public and political spaces. Change may seep from the bottom up, as a 'critical mass' evolves and as some transformed individuals leave their mark on the institutions in which they participate. But there is also a need to develop ways of promoting the participation of men in the analysis of male power in public, private and political organisations, and of changing power structures and power relations.

Some men in Nicaragua have taken the initiative and are questioning their own assimilation of machista attitudes, values and behaviour. Given the vast gender inequity in all spheres of Nicaraguan life, and the systematic exclusion and exploitation of women, changes in a handful of men must be seen, at most, as a starting point, a very small drop in an immense ocean. With all the doubts and risks involved, men's concern with gender issues and their willingness to reflect and change represents a new opportunity and perhaps a new era in the struggle for gender equity.

To minimise the risks and maximise the benefits for both women and men, work on gender and masculinity must continue to be developed in a pro-feminist framework that defines gender equity as its ultimate goal. It is men, however, who must take the ultimate responsibility for promoting and consolidating change processes in themselves and in other men. In doing so they must recognise that critical input from women and women's organisations is not only desirable but indispensable. To maximise men's contribution to gender equity, it is important that initiatives on 'masculinity' take place within a broad framework of Gender and Development that focuses on the integrated development of all women and men and on improving the quality of their lives and relationships.

Paddy Welsh
Managua, January 2000 – April 2001

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Men aren't from Mars

Unlearning machismo in Nicaragua

Development practice paper

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One of the most significant outcomes of Nicaragua's revolutionary experiment of the 1980s was the emergence of an autonomous women's movement that campaigned for civil and political rights, women's welfare and human development. It challenged the power relationships between men and women, and the way men systematically dominate and control women in public and private.

But by the early 1990s, many women and some men in Nicaragua felt that if gender equity was to be achieved men, too, would have to change.

This publication documents a pioneering effort by the Managua-based Centre for Communication and Popular Education (CANTERA) to encourage men to examine and change their behaviour. It provides an in-depth account of the training courses on masculinity developed by the centre, and the changes in men's attitudes, values and behaviour that ensued. Rather than accepting the idea that men and women come from 'different planets', participants in the courses are encouraged to focus on their own world: to examine and unlearn their own society's rules and expectations about being a man.

The author, a leading figure in the development of the methodology, acknowledges that the changes achieved so far are in the private sphere. But he insists that 'men's concern with gender issues and their willingness to reflect and change represents a new opportunity ... a new era in the struggle for gender equity'.

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