

**The Granddaughters of  
Sandino: Examining Gender,  
Sport and Development, in León,  
Nicaragua**

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## Abstract

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By

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This thesis is a sociological study of young women's lives in León, Nicaragua, from the perspective of a female football team. In the historical context of the Sandinista revolution followed by the introduction of harsh neoliberal reforms in the 1990s, this thesis analyses the experiences and responses of a section of the population often overlooked in academic research and marginalised in Nicaraguan society. It examines how economic, political and social processes converge in the spheres of the household, paid employment, education, and on the football field, to shape the young women's experiences, opportunities, and choices. Furthermore, I analyse how these young women alternately conform to or resist these processes, the strategies they employ, and the implications for their futures. I argue that a new perspective of poverty is needed that is able to capture the complexity and precariousness of these young women's lives. Moreover, I argue that sport participation for these women can possibly transcend traditional female roles and result in new female sporting identities for young women in Nicaragua.

In a country with the highest rate of teenage pregnancy in Latin America, this group of young women – aged between 14 and 23 – are particularly of interest given none of the players are married or have children and instead state their intention to plan parenthood, for instance, after finishing education, establishing a career, or when '*la situación*' (Nicaragua's economic crisis) has hopefully passed. Attitudes and conflicts which arise between the differing expectations of the players and family members provoke tensions that are often the result of economic scarcity and limited opportunities for work or study. Another contributing factor to these pressures is the frustrations of the players with what are more generally acceptable

activities and behaviours for young women in Nicaraguan society. Their behaviours and opinions reveal that motherhood is a central consideration for the players but only under their chosen conditions. Pervasive notions of femininity and masculinity symbolically and materially structure the lives of young women in particular ways overlooked in research on gender and youth in Latin America. By presenting young women's everyday experiences, this thesis challenges assumptions of gender identity that homogenise and essentialise women's experience and throws new light on how poverty has different and complicated effects on individuals' lives. While I argue that gender ideologies of appropriate behaviour persist in Nicaragua and gender relations are often unequal, this thesis shows how young women also negotiate and resist dominant power structures, and reject stereotypically conventional gendered behaviour.

# Contents

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|  |           |
|--|-----------|
| Abstract   | i         |
| Table of contents  | iii       |
| Acknowledgements   | v         |
| Acronyms   | vii       |
| List of Tables   | x         |
| Map 1  | xi        |
| <b>1 Introduction</b>  | <b>1</b>  |
| Socio-political context  | 3         |
| Aims and objectives  | 7         |
| Motivations  | 8         |
| León and women's football in Nicaragua   | 9         |
| Synopsis   | 13        |
| <b>2 Gender, youth and sport: Towards a conceptual framework</b>   | <b>15</b> |
| Gender and development   | 16        |
| Latin American femininities and masculinities  | 23        |
| Gender research in Latin America: exploring differences  | 29        |
| Youth in the social sciences   | 36        |
| Gender and sport   | 41        |
| Conclusion   | 46        |
| <b>3 Methodology</b>   | <b>48</b> |
| Reflexivity  | 50        |
| Developing a methodology   | 51        |
| Playing football and talking to the players  | 52        |
| The dynamics of the research process   | 53        |
| Positionality  | 58        |
| Ethics   | 60        |
| Conclusion   | 62        |
| <b>4 The Nicaraguan women's movement:<br/>Examining the legacies of revolutionary<br/>mobilisation for the granddaughters of Sandino</b> | <b>64</b> |
| US intervention, Sandino and Somocismo   | 65        |
| The FSLN and gender policy   | 74        |
| Economic structural adjustment, gender and employment  | 89        |



|  |            |
|--|------------|
| The FSLN and Danielismo  | 96         |
| Conclusion   | 106        |
| <b>5 Youth, poverty, and the household in León, Nicaragua</b>                                    | <b>108</b> |
| Gender and the household in Latin America  | 110        |
| The players' households  | 118        |
| Household composition  | 122        |
| ' <i>La situación</i> ': Managing on less  | 127        |
| The <i>beca</i> , football and conflict in the household   | 129        |
| Conclusion   | 133        |
| <b>6 Young women's precarious experiences of education and work</b>                              | <b>135</b> |
| The precariousness of education in Nicaragua   | 138        |
| Education and motherhood   | 145        |
| Football and motherhood  | 153        |
| Football and education   | 155        |
| Football and work  | 157        |
| The precariousness of work   | 159        |
| Maquilas in Nicaragua: ' <i>Es que, no es un gran futuro que digamos</i> '                       | 166        |
| Leaving León   | 171        |
| Conclusion   | 176        |
| <b>7 More than just a game?: Football, friends and 'macho-Marys'</b>                             | <b>178</b> |
| ' <i>Yo soy la única rara en mi familia</i> '  | 180        |
| The meanings the players attach to football  | 183        |
| Football: ' <i>Marimachas</i> ', ' <i>Es para hombres</i> '<br>or ' <i>Mejor que anda vaga</i> ' | 192        |
| Sexuality  | 199        |
| Conclusion   | 203        |
| <b>8 Conclusion</b>  | <b>205</b> |
| The importance of a focus on gender and youth  | 207        |
| Contributions to gender and development debates  | 209        |
| Future research  | 211        |
| <b>References</b>  | <b>212</b> |
| <b>Appendix One</b>  | <b>237</b> |

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## Acronyms

|               |   |
|---------------|---|
| AMNLAE        | <i>Asociación de Mujeres Nicaragüenes Luisa Amanda Espinoza</i> (Luisa Amanda Espinoza Association of Nicaraguan women)   |
| AMPRONAC      | <i>Asociación de Mujeres ante la Problemática Nacional</i> (Association of Women Concerned about National Crisis)   |
| ATC           | <i>Asociación de Trabajadores</i> (Association of Agricultural Workers)   |
| CCCS          | Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies  |
| CEB           | <i>Comunidades Eclesiales de Base</i> (Ecclesiastical Base Communities)   |
| CEDAW         | Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination Against Women  |
| CEPAL (ECLAC) | <i>Comisión Económico para América Latina Y el Caribe</i> (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean)   |
| CFF León      | <i>Club de Futbol Femenino León</i> (Female Football Club of León)  |
| CINTERFOR     | <i>Centro Interamericano para el Desarrollo del Conocimiento en la Formación Profesional</i> (The Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training) |
| CONCACAF      | Confederation of North, Central American and Caribbean Association Football   |
| DAW           | Department for the Advancement of Women   |
| END           | <i>El Nuevo Diario</i>  |
| EMNV          | <i>Encuesta Nacional de Hogares sobre Medición de Niveles de Vida</i> (Living Standards Measurement Study)  |
| FENIFUT       | <i>Federación Nicaraguense de Futbol</i> (Nicaraguan Football Federation)   |
| FIDEG         | <i>Fundación Internacional para el Desafío Económico Global</i> (International Foundational for the Global Economic Challenge)  |
| FIFA          | <i>Fédération Internationale de Football Association</i> (International Federation of Football Associations)  |
| FSLN          | <i>Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional</i> (Sandinista National Liberation Front)  |
| FTZ           | Free Trade Zone   |

|        |  |
|--------|--|
| HRW    | Human Rights Watch   |
| ICCPR  | International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights   |
| ICESCR | International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights   |
| IDA    | International Development Association  |
| IDB    | Inter-American Development Bank  |
| IFI    | International Financial Institutions   |
| ILO    | International Labour Organisation  |
| INEC   | <i>Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo</i> (National Institute of Development Information) |
| INIDE  | <i>Instituto Nacional de Información de Desarrollo</i> (National Institute of Development Information) |
| IS     | Informal Sector  |
| IWG    | International Working Group on Women and Sport   |
| MAM    | <i>Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres</i> (Women's Autonomous Movement)                                    |
| MC     | <i>Movimiento Comunal</i>  |
| MDG    | Millennium Development Goals   |
| MRS    | <i>Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista</i> (Sandinista Renovation Movement)                            |
| NGO    | Non Governmental Organisation  |
| OLM    | <i>Oficina Legal de la Mujer</i> (Women's Legal Office)  |
| PCO    | <i>Plan de Conversión Ocupacional</i> (Occupation Conversion Plan)                                     |
| PGI    | Practical Gender Interests   |
| PLC    | <i>Partido Liberal Constitucionalista</i> (Constitutionalist Liberal Party)                            |
| PLN    | <i>Partido Liberal Nacionalista</i> (National Liberal Party)   |
| PRSP   | Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper   |
| SAP    | Structural Adjustment Policy   |
| SEJUVE | <i>Secretaría de la Juventud de Nicaragua</i>  |
| SGI    | Strategic Gender Interests   |
| UCA    | <i>Universidad Centroamericana</i> (Central American University)                                       |

|           |  |
|-----------|--|
| UN        | United Nations   |
| UNDESA    | United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs   |
| UNAG      | <i>Unión Nacional de Agricultores y Ganaderos</i> (National Union of Agricultural and Livestock Producers) |
| UNAN León | <i>Universidad Nacional Autonomo de Nicaragua</i> (National Autonomous University of Nicaragua)            |
| UNO       | <i>Unión Nacional Opositora</i> (National Union of Opposition)   |
| UNOSDP    | United Nations Office on Sport for Development and Peace   |
| USAID     | United States Agency for International Development   |

**List of Tables**

**Page No.**

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Table 1.1

116

Map 1: Nicaragua



Available at URL [http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/nicaragua\\_pol\\_97.pdf](http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/americas/nicaragua_pol_97.pdf)<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> By courtesy of the University of Texas Library.



## Introduction

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Young people aged 15 to 24 constitute 18 per cent of the global population and are viewed as a tremendous resource for national development (UN, 2007). The current global youth population of 1.2 billion are the best educated in history (UN, 2007). Realising the potential of young people is seen as essential to both the well-being of the individual and the future development of the nation. Adequate provision in the areas of health, education, employment and sports and recreation are seen as essential to young people's successful transition to adulthood and meaningful contribution to society. However, a large proportion of this population is struggling to overcome social and economic marginalisation. Of the global youth population 90 per cent live in developing countries where nearly 45 per cent survive on less than US\$2 a day (UN, 2005). Accessing the labour market has historically been more difficult for young people than adults and global economic crisis has exacerbated this situation. Of the world's 620 million economically active youth, 81 million were out of work at the end of 2009, the highest ever figure (ILO, 2010).<sup>1</sup> Further, young people are more likely than adults to be among the working poor (per capita spending of less than US\$1.25 a day) representing 24 per cent of the world's total (ILO, 2010). Young women are seen as facing particular discriminatory barriers to education and employment and in most regions of the world the gap between female and male unemployment rates has increased (ILO, 2010).

There are 103.1 million young people aged 15 to 24 in Latin America, representing 19 per cent of the total population (ECLAC, 2005). The majority of Latin America, including Nicaragua, is currently experiencing a 'demographic window of opportunity' of fertility decline, an increasing working-age population and low-dependency ratios (Buvinic et al., 2009: 354). Young people aged 15 to 24 represent 24.7 per cent of the Nicaraguan population while those aged 0 to 29 represent 77.5 per cent of the population (INIDE, 2005a). The potential of the 'demographic dividend' to be converted into economic growth is dependent on a healthy and educated youth, as well as the expansion of employment opportunities (Buvinic et al., 2009: 354). However, as elsewhere, young people in Latin

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<sup>1</sup> The youth unemployment rate at the start of the crisis was 11.9 per cent in 2007 rising to an estimated 13.1 per cent in 2010 after which it is expected to decrease slightly in 2011. However, compared to adults, young people are more than three times as likely to be unemployed (ILO, 2010).

America face similar obstacles and barriers to education and employment in the face of economic restructuring and the global financial crisis. Nicaragua is one of the poorest countries in Latin America with 48.3 per cent of the population living below the poverty line, four out of ten people living on \$1 a day, and three quarters of the population living on US\$2. (INIDE, 2007b: ix). In 2001, of young people between the ages of 18 and 30, 30.8 per cent were living in poverty and 15.1 per cent in extreme poverty (CINTERFOR, 2003). Labour force participation rates for 15 to 24 year olds show males are twice as likely as females to be employed, while females are also more likely than males to be unemployed (UN, 2010). Figures on years of schooling estimate 43.1 per cent have completed four to nine years of schooling but only 19.9 per cent of the Nicaraguan population have completed more than ten years of schooling (INIDE, 2005a). This has led to concern for a 'lost generation' of young people who are unemployed, underemployed or discouraged by a scarcity of opportunities resulting in increasing poverty for themselves and the next generation, as well as undermining the education, fertility and health of this group. While national governments and international financial institutions are concerned for the lost economic potential of this group and the cost of increasing levels of social instability, the young people themselves have to cope with reconciling their personal hopes and expectations with the realities of day-to-day survival.

Though sport has been recognised as a human right in international declarations since the 1948 Universal Declaration of Human Rights, it is only in the last decade that it has increasingly been seen as a tool for development (DAW, 2007: 3).<sup>2</sup> Sport and its development potential has been associated with a range of social concerns: health, education, employment, social inclusion and peace, and has been implicated in the potential achievement of all eight MDGs.<sup>3</sup> The potential benefits of female sport participation are associated with physical and psychological well-being, and the potential to challenge stereotypes and discrimination (DAW, 2007: 3).<sup>4</sup> The emphasis on sport-in-development and

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<sup>2</sup> The 1948 Declaration recognised that everyone has a right to 'rest and leisure', while in 1978 UNESCO recognised sport as a specific human right stating that 'everyone should be free to develop and preserve his or her physical, intellectual, and moral powers, and that access to physical education and sport should consequently be assured and guaranteed for all human beings' More recently the UN declared 2005 the 'International Year of Sport and Physical Development' (DAW, 2007: 3).

<sup>3</sup> In 2002 the UN Inter-Agency Task Force on Sport and Development and Peace was created to co-ordinate sport issues between areas of development, especially at the community level and encourage the use of sport as a development tool (UNOSDP, 2011).

<sup>4</sup> The International Working Group on women and sport (IWG) was established in 1994 at the First world Conference on Women and Sport held in Brighton, is an independent coordinating body consisting of representatives of key government and non-government organisations from different regions of the world tasked with increasing women's participation in sport: 'for the advancement and empowerment of women and sport globally' (IWG, 2011).

its potential for social transformation, particularly in challenging gendered norms and values, has provoked more critical voices that have questioned some of the assumptions upon which this paradigm is premised.<sup>5</sup> In particular, these authors argue it is important to recognise both the potential and the limitations of sport for development processes (Levermore and Beacom, 2009; Saavedra, 2009). While sport participation may have the potential to address inequalities and injustices for girls and women, it also presents contradictions as sport is still associated with ‘male privilege and power’, ‘male dominance’ and ‘Euro American’ hegemony vis-à-vis the Global South (Saavedra, 2009: 124).

Focussing on the lives of young women footballers in the metropolitan city of León, Nicaragua, this thesis examines the situation for the granddaughters of the revolution in the context of two decades of neoliberal reforms. The purpose of this introductory chapter is to explain the main questions and theoretical issues this thesis will address as well as offer an introduction to the socio-political context of the research. Therefore the following discussion will present the rationale behind the PhD process and the central questions of the research.

## **Socio-political context**

Nicaragua has a long history of elite exploitation and US intervention. In 1909 the US was growing increasingly nervous that the then President of Nicaragua, José Santos Zelaya, who had refused to grant rights to them to build a canal linking the Pacific and Caribbean Coast across Nicaragua, was instead negotiating with the British and Japanese (Walker, 1991: 17). Zelaya was forced from office in 1910 after the US encouraged the Conservative Party to rebel and sent along a military force in support. This marked the beginning of US military presence in Nicaragua that ensured US interests and helped create the Nicaraguan National Guard. This US presence was also the basis for rebellion and the inception of Sandinismo. Augusto Cesar Sandino, supported by peasants and Indians, began a guerrilla war against the Nicaraguan government and US troops during the late 1920s and early 1930s. He successfully forced the withdrawal of US troops in 1932 only to be assassinated in 1934 by the head of the National Guard Anastasio Somoza (Walker, 1997: 3).

Following this, Somoza took leadership of the country through rigged elections in 1936, marking the start of a dynasty which ruled largely through co-optation of domestic elites, the control of the National Guard and US support, until the revolution in 1979

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The Beijing Platform for Action, adopted at the Fourth World Conference for Women in 1995, identifies the role of governments and education authorities in promoting equal access and opportunity for female sports participation (DAW, 2007: 6).

<sup>5</sup> The ‘sport-in-development’ approach describes ‘the perception that the use of sport may assist the international development process’ and therefore ‘as a vehicle to achieve a range of other social, economic and political objectives’ (Levermore and Beacom, 2009: 8–9).

(Walker, 1997: 3). The Somoza family fortune was estimated at US\$500 million while they owned 1.2 million acres of land and 200 companies (Rogers, 2008: 104). The ‘mafiaocracy’ operated by Somoza and his two sons exploited the mass population and by 1970 had begun to alienate the elites (Wickham-Crowley, 1991: 218). Especially significant was the 1972 earthquake that destroyed much of Managua.<sup>6</sup> The international aid that arrived found its way into the pockets of the Somozas which they then used to expand their own interests in different sectors of the economy at the expense of the domestic elites. The National Guard, which had been encouraged to exploit the population by the Somozas in order to maintain loyalty, became increasingly hated (Wickham-Crowley, 1991: 219).

The *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (FSLN) formed in 1961 and led by students and intellectuals took their inspiration from Sandinismo and Cuban *foco* tactics to lead small groups of insurgents in hit-and-run attacks on the National Guard in both urban and rural areas (Wickham-Crowley, 1991: 215). More successful though were attempts to mobilise mass base support amongst the urban population. The Sandinistas staged a number of hostage operations during the 1970s but it was not until 1978 that there was a growing sense that the movement, now united after tactical differences, could overthrow the regime (Walker, 1997: 7). Broad national support from all areas of Nicaraguan society united behind the FSLN including a massive influx of recruits of young people, both men and women. By the summer of 1979 the FSLN announced its final offensive with battles fought simultaneously across six fronts. By July 17<sup>th</sup> Somoza had fled to Miami and the FSLN entered Managua two days later (Walker, 1991: 38). However, securing victory had cost the lives of 50,000 people, 2 per cent of the population and the equivalent in the US of the loss of 4.5 million (Metoyer, 2000: 3).

The FSLN implemented impressive large-scale initiatives to improve the conditions of the majority poor population, particularly in health and education, childcare, land reform, and through the creation of workers unions (Walker, 1997: 9). Thousands of young people were involved in the literacy crusade and a grassroots preventative medicine programme. The Sandinistas ushered in an emphasis on participatory politics especially through the establishment of mass-based organisations representing urban and rural workers, women, young people and peasants, which had formal representation on the Council of State – a corporative structure that served as the country’s legislature until 1984 (Walker, 1997: 10).

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<sup>6</sup> The earthquake in 1972 is estimated to have killed at least 10,000 people and destroyed 75 per cent of the housing in Managua (Rogers, 2008: 105). Managua’s city landscape still bears the scars of the earthquake and of exploitation by the Somozas, with large swathes of waste ground testament to the lack of investment in reconstruction. Interestingly, Managuans have not forgotten the landmarks that stood before the earthquake destroyed them. Newcomers to the city are often confused by directions that are referenced to where a hospital, shop or school used to be.

Membership of these organisations was impressive with one estimate from the US embassy in late 1984 reporting that about half of the population over 16 were members of a grass-roots organisation (Walker, 1997: 14).

Some nationalisation occurred under the Sandinistas, primarily the property of Somoza and those that had fled into exile, but the public sector never accounted for more than 40 per cent of the productive capacity of the country. Using loans and favourable exchange rates the aim was to encourage a productive ‘patriotic bourgeoisie’ through a mixed economy of public and private production. Up until around 1984 these economic policies were effective in increasing GDP by 7 per cent between 1979 and 1983, while the rest of Central America experienced a decline of 14.7 in GDP (Walker, 1997: 9). It was only later with the mounting costs of the Contra War and the withdrawal of World Bank and IDB loans that this trend was reversed. Economic hardship characterised the second half of the 1980s in Nicaragua and the Sandinistas introduced two structural adjustment policies in the late 1980s in an attempt to curb spiralling inflation. The effects of mass job losses and falling real wages were painfully felt by an already struggling population (Rogers, 2008: 108). By 1990 a war-weary population, exhausted by years of North American aggression and economic scarcity, voted for the promise of peace the US-backed Unión Nacional Opositora (UNO) coalition represented. However, the UNO’s rapid and wholesale adoption of the IMF-backed neoliberal doctrine meant deepening deprivation and poverty for the majority of the population, especially women (Metoyer, 2000: 5). The economic restructuring programme of Violeta Chamorro’s UNO government had particularly contradictory consequences for Nicaraguan women who were at once encouraged to return to their traditional roles in the domestic sphere and forced to eke out alternative incomes in the informal sector (Babb, 1996: 32; Bradshaw, 1996: 74).

Following the electoral failure in 1990 some members of the FSLN were suspected of benefitting from the transfer of properties into the hands of the leadership ranks. What has become known as the *piñata* began as an attempt to hold on to assets to support the Party, but turned into what is largely seen as a scramble for the spoils of defeat (Prevost, 1997: 162). Significantly, the episode marked a disjuncture between the rank-and-file Party members and what has become a new class of Sandinista elites (Rogers, 2008: 109). Increasingly, two diverging tendencies began to appear within the FSLN hierarchy and in 1995 a number of key figures departed to form the MRS (Prevost, 1997: 161). Robinson has characterised Central American democracies since the 1990s as ‘polyarchies’ whereby participation by the majority is limited to choosing between a small group of elites that maintain a tight control over the electoral process (Robinson, 1997: 53). In Nicaragua the strength of this control has been cemented through *el pacto*, or a ‘co-governance pact’

entered into by the FSLN leader Daniel Ortega and Arnoldo Alemán of the Liberal PLN Party in 1999, which ensures their control of governmental institutions (Rogers, 2008: 109). Ortega maintained leadership of the FLSN and in 2007 his Party, newly entitled the Government of Reconciliation and National Unity (*Gobierno de Reconciliación y Unidad Nacional*), took power after sixteen years in opposition.

The introduction of neoliberal structural adjustment programmes in the 1990s has had particularly negative consequences for Nicaraguan women. Health and social welfare provision has been drastically reduced while public sector employment, traditionally more associated with female employment, has faced major cut-backs (Babb, 1996; Bradshaw, 1996). As a consequence of economic restructuring and growing unemployment women are increasingly integrated into the informal sector (Perez-Aleman, 1992). One other area of the economy that has seen an expansion in female participation is the manufacturing or *maquila* industry. Since 1990 the importance and size of this sector has grown rapidly in Nicaragua. Between 1992 and 2006 the number of companies operating in Free Trade Zones (FTZs) rose from 5 to 99, while the number employed in FTZs rose from 1,000 workers to 80,000 over the same period. Production from the FTZs accounted for 47 per cent of Nicaraguan exports and 87 per cent of manufactured exports in 2006 (Rogers, 2008: 113–114). The *maquilas* predominantly employ young female labour, who work long hours in exploitative conditions for low wages (Bickham Mendez, 2002: 12–13). In the context of global crisis this sector has begun to fail and between 2006 and 2009 around 28,000 workers lost their jobs (END, 2009). Migration is increasingly seen by Nicaraguan young people as offering greater prospects of employment and an improved standard of living and 87.7 per cent of migrants in 2005 were aged between 20 and 34 (INIDE, 2005b). While the overall fertility rate in Nicaragua has reduced, the adolescent fertility rate (15 to 19 years) remains one of the highest in the region (UNICEF, 2007). Nicaragua also has a high maternal mortality rate at 230 maternal deaths per 100,000 live births, which is more than twice that of Honduras. In the run-up to the 2006 Presidential campaign the Nicaraguan legislature voted for a general prohibition on abortion, even in cases when the mother's life was in danger (Getgen, 2008: 151–152). In this light, the decision to ban abortion in all cases can be seen as particularly prejudicial for young Nicaraguan women. This context of poverty, inequality and vulnerability forms the backdrop for this thesis.

## **Aims and objectives**

The aim of this thesis is to understand the relationship between gender, youth and inequality. In the particular historical context of the Nicaraguan revolution, the Sandinistas attempts at social transformation, and the subsequent introduction and continuation of the neoliberal agenda since the 1990s, this thesis examines processes of economic and social change and their gendered implications. The thesis focuses on the ways these processes shape the players' experiences, opportunities and choices in the key areas of the household, paid employment, education and the football field and analyses the ways in which these young women conform to, or challenge, gender constructions in Nicaraguan society.

The thesis has a number of objectives: i) through a focus on these young women's everyday experiences it examines the differentiated and complex effects of poverty and economic scarcity within the household; ii) to analyse the importance and precariousness of education and paid employment for young women, and the conflicts, challenges and opportunities that are part of their decision-making processes in these key areas of their lives; iii) to evaluate the importance to the players of their participation on the football team, and to what extent this represents a challenge to traditional notions of gendered behaviour.

## **The importance of a focus on youth and gender**

Whilst there is a considerable body of research on women's roles in processes of socio-economic change in Latin America, there is relatively little written on the differentiated experiences of young women. Studies of youth in Latin America tend to focus on issues of street children, youth gangs, violence and crime, the majority of which are dominated by the experiences of young men (Hecht, 1998; Rogers, 2006). Additionally, the areas of young people's education and employment have received a great deal of attention from academics, governments and development agencies. However, young women are often approached from a narrow perspective that tends to focus on reproductive health and rights and young women's role as potential mothers. Such approaches essentialise and homogenise their experiences and identity and ignore the complex, diverse and multifaceted nature of young women's lives. Few studies have taken the focus of this thesis to analyse the ways in which gender constructions are experienced by young women in the spheres of the household, education, work and leisure activities. By utilising a gendered lens this thesis is able to build on feminist approaches that emphasise the importance of centralising previously marginalised voices, in this case the voices of young women (Mohanty, 1991). Similarly,

studies of youth in the social sciences, informed by feminist epistemologies, have more recently emphasised the importance of young people as social actors in their own right (Wulff, 1995; Caputo, 1995). Though the focus remains on gender as it intersects with youth, I am not discounting other oppressions in young women's lives based on class and ethnicity. Rather, the intention is twofold: to redress the scarce attention that has been paid in the literature to young women's gendered experiences of poverty; and to analyse the differentiated ways in which young women conform, negotiate and resist traditional gender roles.

## **The contributions of this thesis to research on gender, youth and sport**

This study makes a number of contributions to theoretical and empirical approaches to and conceptions of gender and youth in Latin America. Firstly, through an analysis of poverty and the household this thesis makes visible young women's previously marginalised perspective of the gendered dynamics of intra-household relations and the precarious reality of their everyday lives. Secondly, the young women's lives reveal the gendered difficulties of transitions from education to work in Latin America as overlapping and sometimes conflicting commitments and obligations that continue to reflect the persistence of gendered norms and values in Nicaraguan society. Thirdly, this thesis reveals how sport represents a vehicle for young women's social development and an arena of alternative public participation that can transcend gendered norms of behaviour. Finally, the approach and focus of this thesis represents a unique contribution to research on gender in Latin America that includes young women's sporting lives.

## **Motivations**

To a large extent the questions of this thesis were a response to personal experiences prior to beginning the PhD. The focus on youth was grounded in both academic and professional experiences. At undergraduate level my year abroad in Bolivia in 2001 involved researching NGO initiatives on issues of reproductive health and rights for young people in El Alto, La Paz. Following this experience, having graduated from university, I gained professional experience as a youth worker working with marginalised young people in the South of England. Particularly I was able to observe how young people in the UK experienced and coped with poverty and how many were disengaged from the wider society of school and work, and disinterested, apathetic and disengaged from political activism and representation.

As an undergraduate in Latin American Studies I had always had an interest in Nicaragua and its exceptional history of revolution and resistance in the face of powerful US



opposition. The impetus for researching young people in Nicaragua for this study came from an interest in understanding whether and in what ways the legacies of revolutionary leadership and neoliberal politics had influenced the youth of Nicaragua today. My initial research questions sought to investigate the political lives of young Nicaraguans. On a preliminary fieldwork visit I began to research youth participation in political parties and formal youth organisations. Coincidentally I met the coach of the León football team and having played competitively since a young age, I was invited to train and play for the University football team. As I spent more time with the players I learnt more about their personal problems, interests, hopes and expectations. I began to formulate a new focus and saw my connection to the players as a unique opportunity to reveal the experiences of a group of young people with a particular perspective of Nicaraguan society that had not been researched or represented.

The subject matter for this thesis came about through a combination of my personal experience and a serendipitous meeting. The research began with the intention of investigating the importance of football to the players' lives but as I became more familiar with the players and they with me, the scope of analysis broadened to reflect the ways in which football overlapped and conflicted with other areas of their lives. Additionally, it was important to reflect on my own position in the research and how I was viewed by the players. Although I was a member of the team and football was a common interest between us it was easier to build relationships with some players and not others. This depended largely on how often the players came to training and if they were closer to me in age. Therefore, the questions I chose for the research and the data collected were influenced by chance and the issue of positionality.

## **León and women's football in Nicaragua**

With a population of 174,051 León is the second largest city in Nicaragua after the capital Managua while the department of León has a population of 355,779, the fourth largest in the country (INIDE, 2005a). It is a colonial city and university town with a rich historical past.<sup>7</sup> In the 1950s a policy of monoculture was introduced and the area began producing cotton for export but was severely hit by crisis when world prices crashed in the 1980s, resulting in high levels of unemployment.<sup>8</sup> The economy of the city is now based largely on the

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<sup>7</sup> One colonial legacy was the intense rivalry between the Conservatives of Granada and Liberals of León for administrative control of the country, which in the end fell to the latter. Economically the cities also diverged with Granada's wealthy elite class based largely on cattle ranches, while León looked to trade and the entrepreneurship of a growing middle-class (Walker, 1991: 12).

<sup>8</sup> Further, the environmental effects of cotton monoculture include pollution of local water sources and severe deforestation (Montiel and Barten, 1999: 17).

commerce created by the influx of students to the six universities in the city (students represent nearly half the population of León), the large assembly plants (which mainly employ women) looming on the outskirts of the city and the agricultural trade through the city's markets. After Managua, León has been hardest hit by both economic crisis and natural disasters, especially Hurricane Mitch in 1998. At a national level Hurricane Mitch killed 3,000 people while 865,700 people were directly affected (20 per cent of the population), most of whom were left homeless. The estimated costs of reconstruction were US\$1.4 billion (Cupples, 2007: 158). In Leon it was estimated around 120,000 people were affected and more than 5,000 homes destroyed, while 30 per cent of agricultural land was damaged (Montiel and Barten, 1999: 25).

### The role of FENIFUT

Organised women's football has existed in Nicaragua since 1960 but it is only more recently that the game has become the number one sport for women and girls. The total number of registered players (both youth and adult) has grown from 800 in 2000 to 7,250 in 2006 (FIFA, 2008). The *Primera División* or First Division is centrally organised by the Nicaraguan Football Federation, FENIFUT (based in Managua), which is responsible for organising, promoting and developing the game at a national level. Since 1998 the national championship has averaged around eight to ten teams from around the country. The main problem for women's football teams competing in the national league is a lack of funding, and they generally have to rely on the support of the players' families and the institutions that they represent. For this reason, four of the oldest teams in the league are those affiliated to universities which tend to be better resourced.<sup>9</sup> According to Dalila López, the Director of Women's Football for FENIFUT, the Federation subsidises 50 per cent to 100 per cent of the cost of referees, provides six footballs per team and pays for the registration and administration of the teams and players.<sup>10</sup> They promote the game through radio, newspapers and television. They also run regular FIFA-supported training courses that the team coaches have to attend. All of the teams in the *Primera División* have male coaches and in an attempt to promote more involvement of females at all levels of the game, the coaches are obliged to bring a female assistant to the training days. The teams are responsible for providing copies of a player's documentation (identity card, birth certificate and two photographs) and

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<sup>9</sup> A lack of financial resources at the clubs in the Women's Premier Division has meant that from year to year participating teams change. The effect on the long-term development of the game is highly detrimental as most of the players are unable to fund their own transportation and therefore without a local club are unable to participate. Instead what tends to happen is the strongest clubs – that is, the best resourced clubs which are usually attached to universities – are able to offer financial assistance leading to a concentration of the best players amongst a small number of clubs.

<sup>10</sup> Interview, Dalila López, Director Female Football, FENIFUT (11 August 2008).

transportation to games which can involve overnight stays in some cases.<sup>11</sup> The league is open age.

Since 2006 FENIFUT has been working with three national teams at Under-17, Under-20 and Senior level. In June 2008 the Under-20 team represented Nicaragua in Puebla, Mexico, at the Under-20 World Cup Qualifying Competition; the squad included five of the León players. FENIFUT receives funding from FIFA (the international governing body of football) of US\$250,000 every four years, 10 per cent of which is designated for developing the women's game.<sup>12</sup> However, as Dalila López explained, the funding does not cover the amount required to support the *Primera División* and the three national teams; instead FENIFUT has to ensure funding from other sources.

## CFF León

The team was formed as part of the Goooleón project and jointly funded by the German Football Federation and through private donations. The project initially supported a number of men's teams in León in partnership with the UNAN León University until 2001, when Dirk Pesara expanded the project and instigated the formation of a women's team: FC UNAN. Pesara is a German ex-pat who has been living and coaching football in the city since 1998. Following scouting trips around León's schools, universities and *futsal* leagues, Pesara invited players to train, and the team joined the *Campeonato Nacional Femenino Angelita Morales Avilés* in 2001.<sup>13</sup> The project provided football strips, footballs and money for expenses. Pesara, the Coach of FC UNAN, paid the players a *beca* or scholarship of C\$500 (US\$30) a month to cover their transport costs and expenses which represents a significant amount for young women in such a poor country. Additionally, the players were

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<sup>11</sup> Dalila explained that often players do not have birth certificates or are being cared for by grandparents who do not have the permissions for them to play; in these cases FENIFUT tries to help players sort out the appropriate paperwork (11 August 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Through FIFA's *Goal Project*, Nicaragua was the first in the CONCACAF region to receive US\$400,000 in 2001 to build a training centre in Diriamba, an hour's drive from Managua. Through the same Project US\$414,105 has been earmarked for a 2000-seater national stadium in Managua. The third *Goal Project* involved a further US\$400,000 investment in the expansion of the national stadium to 6,640 and to include safety fencing and sanitary facilities; FENIFUT contributed US\$35,480. When I visited the stadium to watch the Under-20 women's team train the seating and facilities were far from finished however. In October 2008 *Goal* earmarked US\$400,000 to be spent on promising young players from disadvantaged backgrounds to prepare them for a professional career. Part of the sum is also to be spent constructing a football academy for the national men's and women's teams. FIFA (2008).

<sup>13</sup> *El Campeonato Nacional Femenino* or the Nicaraguan Women's National Championship like so many other groups and organisations in Nicaragua bears the name of a fallen hero of the revolution, Angelita Morales Avilés, who spent time in Cuba with Carlos Fonseca Amador investigating the history of General Sandino before she was killed in Managua by the Somoza National Guard on 14 May 1977. Nicaragua has not forgotten its heroes and martyrs and their legacy is still tangible to the young players in the women's national football league which is named after her.

encouraged to study at the UNAN and offered places at the University provided they passed the entrance exam. However, as we shall see, not all the players received the full *beca* and some received only a portion of this amount.<sup>14</sup> The offer of a university place was also not as straightforward as intended. There were restrictions on the subjects available to the players and the personal circumstances and responsibilities in other areas of their lives meant it was impossible for most of them to study full-time.

The relationship between the Coach of FC UNAN and the University was always difficult. The Coach had consistent problems with University officials whom he found obstructive and unhelpful. Though the University was supposed to provide the team with training facilities and transport, he had to constantly negotiate to ensure these were forthcoming. By 2008, the Coach, who had grown increasingly impatient and dissatisfied with the arrangement with the UNAN, relaunched the team as the first *Club de Fútbol Femenino León* (CFF León). Although from this point on the team was nominally independent from the University, it continued to use the latter's facilities and transport. Pesara had also ensured university places would still be available to those players who were able and wanted to study full-time. However, in May 2008, the German Football Federation decided not to renew funding for the team. Through donations from friends and his own funds Pesara continued to pay the players a *beca* until June 2008 when the players were told there would be no more payments. The players held a meeting independent of the Coach and decided to continue playing until the end of the season but as a consequence of not receiving the *beca* the players came under increasing pressure from family members unhappy about the amount of time they dedicated to football. The implications of the players' commitment to football for other areas of their lives and the particular difficulties they faced in 2008 through not receiving the *beca* are the subject of greater analysis in the subsequent chapters.

The players were expected to train two hours a day, four afternoons a week, Monday to Thursday. On Saturdays some of the players played in a *futsal* league (indoor five-a-side football) which involved a mixture of teams from schools and universities around the city; Sunday was match day for the *Primera División*. Twenty-one players registered for the 2008 season but only sixteen played regularly in matches. The players on the team were aged between 15 and 23 and of the sixteen regular players the average age was 19.

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<sup>14</sup> Since the León team was formed in 2001 and during the period of my fieldwork in 2008, the arrangements as to who received the *beca* and how much they received constantly changed depending on, amongst other reasons, how often players trained, how often they played in matches, the expenses they had to pay for transport and living costs, and in 2008, whether the team received funding from Germany. This complicated situation meant some players felt they were unfairly treated by the Coach, and the *beca* was often a topic of complaint.

## Synopsis

Gendered notions of appropriate behaviour are pervasive in young women's lives. A key aim of this thesis is to demonstrate how an examination of young women's experience of gender inequality not only broadens our understanding of experiences of gendered oppression, but also reveals how young women at times conform to, negotiate and resist dominant notions of gendered behaviour.

Chapter Two outlines the theoretical framework for the thesis and situates this study in the broader context of debates on gender and development and approaches to youth in the social sciences. Drawing on feminist critiques of essentialising and homogenising analyses of women's experience, this thesis emphasises the analytical potential of gender difference. From this differentiated notion of gender identity, we move on to a discussion of gender constructs in Latin America and the particular meanings and values ascribed to gendered activity in the public and private spheres. Following this, the discussion moves on to conceptualisations of youth in the social sciences. Notions of youth as social actors in their own right have become more dominant and allow a more diverse and multifaceted approach to young people's lives. From this position the relationship between gender identity and sport is examined and the potential for sport to transcend the boundaries of appropriate gendered behaviour.

In order to represent the players' lives as fully as possible the research methods had to be flexible and responsive. Chapter Three examines the research methods adopted for this research and its focus on previously marginalised voices, together with a discussion of the issues of ethics, reflexivity and positionality. I particularly focus on the challenges and obstacles I had to overcome in the field as a result of personal choices, relationships and external constraints. The methodological approach of this thesis and focus on the experiences of sportswomen contributes to a small but growing body of sport ethnography research.

Chapter Four presents the socio-political and historical context for the thesis and examines women's experience of revolutionary mobilisations in the 1970s, the FSLN's attempts at challenging gender inequality, and more recent feminist organising in post-revolutionary neoliberal Nicaragua. Particular attention is paid to the varied forms of women's mobilisation and political participation in revolutionary and post-revolutionary Nicaragua, and the consequences of such participation for challenging and transcending gendered notions of appropriate behaviour. The final part of the chapter examines the

legacies of revolutionary mobilisation for the granddaughters of Sandino and the potential of the women's movement to engage this next generation.

Chapter Five examines the players' experience of poverty within the household and the centrality of gender identity to understanding young women's domestic roles and responsibilities. By analysing the players' everyday experiences the chapter captures the complex, precarious and vulnerable nature of young women's lives, and how gender and stage in life combine to shape their experiences of poverty. The potential of young women to resist traditional roles is explored through an examination of conflicts that arise with family members, as a result of their commitment to football. Following this, Chapter Six considers issues of education to work transitions for the players, focussing on their experiences and opinions to reveal the factors that influence their decisions in education and work. Though the players' options and experiences of paid employment reflect dominant notions of gendered activity associated with women's reproductive role in the private sphere, the priority they place on greater freedom and independence and their continued commitment to playing football suggests these young women are able to negotiate and resist traditional gender norms and values.

Chapter Seven examines the meanings the players attach to their involvement in football and how these contrast with those of family and the wider public. Aspects of particular importance for the players are in relation to the friendships and social dimensions of training and travelling to matches. In contrast, oppositions to the players' involvement tend to reveal pervasive notions of femininity and masculinity. Central to these notions are perceived understandings of appropriate activities for young women associated with the private realm and the family. Such oppositions also demonstrate the potential of sports activities to challenge notions of appropriate behaviour for young women. Finally, the conclusion brings together a discussion of the central argument of the thesis, contributions this thesis has made to research on young women's lives, and possible directions for future research.

## Gender, youth and sport

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Pervasive notions of femininity and masculinity symbolically and materially structure the lives of young women in particular ways overlooked in research on gender and youth in Latin America. By presenting young women's everyday experiences this thesis challenges assumptions of gender identity that exist in the literature and throws new light on how poverty has different and complicated effects on individuals' lives. This thesis argues that a new perspective of poverty is needed, that is able to capture the complexity and precariousness of young women's realities. While it is argued that gender ideologies of appropriate behaviour persist in Nicaragua and gender relations are often unequal, this thesis shows how young women also negotiate and resist dominant power structures, and reject stereotypically conventional gendered behaviour.

The purpose of this chapter is to situate this study in the broader context of theoretical debates on gender and development, in order to provide the theoretical framework that will inform the analysis in subsequent chapters. This case study challenges more traditional approaches that tend to prioritise gender over other identities, and view gender as a rigid, undifferentiated construct. Such an approach restricts understandings of the complex, diverse and multifaceted nature of young women's lives. Therefore the approach of this thesis resonates with more recent theoretical developments that critique homogenising and essentialising analyses of women's experiences. Instead, emphasis is placed on the analytical potential of gender difference as well as the importance of the complex and dynamic interplay of specific historical and cultural processes (Mohanty, 2003; Marchand and Parpart, 1995).

I will combine this more differentiated notion of gender identity with more classical approaches to gender constructions in Latin America. In particular I will examine theoretical constructs of masculine and feminine identity, and how these inform notions of public and private activity for men and women (Stevens, 1973; Cubitt and Greenslade, 1997). I argue that, despite the strong criticisms that have been levelled against these constructs, they are still relevant to the analysis of the opportunities and obstacles young women face in their everyday lives.

The approach of this thesis complements research on youth since the 1990s that demonstrates the diversity and agency of young people's experiences and especially how they are important actors in their own right (Caputo, 1995; Wulff, 1995). This thesis shares the preoccupation of the current paradigm of youth studies in the social sciences with understanding the ways in which young people's lives vary according to different social and temporal contexts, and therefore notions of young people cannot be generalised, homogenised or assumed to be universally understood (Caputo, 1995; Wulff, 1995; Hecht, 1998; Ansell, 2005). Finally, the chapter examines approaches to gender and sport and particularly the potential of sport to serve as a vehicle to challenge and transgress traditional gender boundaries.

The chapter begins with an examination of approaches to women in the gender and development literature, and the particular contributions of feminist theory from Women of Colour and Third World women. The approach of this thesis finds the emphasis on understanding the multiple oppressions that exist in women's lives and the material and ideological specificities of women's experience particularly useful in uncovering constraints but also choices and freedoms for young women.

This is followed by an examination of Stevens (1973) concept of *marianismo*. Although Stevens presents a binary model of stereotypical characteristics of femininity and masculinity, they are a useful starting point for understanding gender relations in Latin America. The characteristics of the model lead us to a consideration of the gendering of public and private space and the social value attached to certain gendered types of behaviour in Latin America. Following this, through an examination of the literature on gender in Latin America, I argue that this body of research has historically paid attention to the differential ways women experience historically and culturally specific economic and political processes, and the intersection of gender with other inequalities of class and race within the family and labour force. The discussion then turns to developments in approaches to youth in the social sciences and highlights more recent debates and research especially in a Latin American context. Finally, this chapter will examine how more differential and dynamic notions of gender have been applied to analyses of women's experience of sports and served to destabilise dominant notions of femininity and masculinity.

## **Gender and development**

Theories of underdevelopment and development have been premised on a linear conception of progress, between what colonial discourses characterised as a 'primitive' and 'backward' Third World, and the 'progressive' North (Marchand and Parpart, 1995: 11). Liberal



conceptions of development emphasise modernisation, efficiency, integration and nation building (Rai, 2002: 50). Women were seen as an impediment to the development process because of their perceived unwillingness or inability to enter the modern world. A number of factors combined to challenge the previously marginalised status of women in development approaches. By the 1970s more critical voices highlighted how development had not progressed as planned and aimed to shift the emphasis of liberal Western agendas on development through economic growth (Rai, 2002: 58). During the first UN Decade of Development (1970–1980) women became ‘visible’ in areas of rights and welfare, particularly health and education. Additionally, the UN Decade for Women (1975–1985) focussed on making ‘visible’ the experiences of women across the globe. In 1970 Boserup’s critical contribution to the women and development debate demonstrated how development projects had in fact worsened women’s economic status and position (1970). Boserup analysed the detrimental effects of increased agricultural mechanisation on women’s earnings and was the first study of its kind to specifically address women’s status. From a liberal feminist perspective, Boserup argued for greater equality and the improved efficiency of development policy on behalf of women’s interests. However, Boserup’s emphasis on the material aspects of women’s inequality, ‘under-emphasised the social and political structures within which women were located and acted’ (Rai, 2002: 60).

Nevertheless, the Women In Development (WID) paradigm gained strength in policy and academic research during the 1970s, concerning itself with the material and measurable aspects of women’s lives and the incorporation of women into development processes (Chant with Craske, 2003: 5). WID, with its basis in colonial and ‘orientalist’ discourses, viewed women as largely ‘tradition-bound conservatives and therefore obstacles to modernisation’ (Chowdry, 1995: 30). Chowdry argues that the rootedness of WID approaches in modernist discourses of liberalism and colonialism actually serve to disempower Third World women as evinced by the focus of the main approaches of this paradigm: welfare, anti-poverty and efficiency (Chowdry, 1995: 26). Both welfare and anti-poverty approaches are ‘premised on the assumptions of women as mothers performing childrearing tasks, [and] identified women solely in their reproductive roles’ and as such, focussed on family planning, health, education and basic needs provision, policies that still dominate in international development agencies (Chowdry, 1995: 32). The recognition of women’s previous marginality from development processes in the first phase of development practices had resulted in predominantly welfare-focussed interventions, primarily concerned with population control; ‘Huge populations that eroded the benefits of growth, rather than the patterns of ownership and control of the means of production, were thus considered to be the problem’ (Rai, 2002: 57). From this perspective women were

viewed as ‘objects’ to be helped, not ‘subjects’ with their own agency and ability to act, ‘Third World women are presented as the hapless victims of endless pregnancies, bowed down by poor health, illiteracy and poverty’ (Chowdry, 1995: 33).

By the 1980s feminists were increasingly critical of WID’s homogenising perspective of women’s experience, and the narrow focus of programmes on the material aspects of women’s lives. The potential of this perspective to understand and to challenge gender inequalities is undermined by a liberal approach that advocates equity and integration without a critique of gender relations and ideology (Marchand and Parpart, 1995: 13). Partly as a result of developments in policy and feminist scholarship, there has been a ‘progressive shift’ from women as a category of analysis to looking at gender, which according to Chant marked ‘a move [in principle at least] from WID to GAD [Gender And Development]’ (2003: 8). This has had important consequences for analytical approaches, especially ‘the growing currency of gender as a dynamic social construct’ and therefore the importance of understanding difference in the context of women’s lives (Chant with Craske, 2003: 8). Focussed on gender relations and inequalities in the household and labour market, access to and control of resources, and the material and contextual position of men and women, GAD is seen as having a much greater political potential than WID. Rai argues it is perhaps for this reason, that is, the more ‘confrontational’ potential of GAD, that while predominant in feminist debates mainstream development planners have largely ignored the framework (Rai, 2002: 73).

The development of the GAD approach was influenced in the 1980s by a number of emerging feminist discourses. Third-wave feminism has sought to critique work of feminists in the 1960s and 1970s that was based on a monolithic, universal and generalised conception of ‘women’s’ experience.<sup>15</sup> Instead, the focus and theoretical approach developed analysed differences among women that include gender as well as race, ethnicity, sexuality, age and class. The approach of this thesis shares much of the concerns of third-wave feminism: ‘that women’s experience of difference, inequality, and oppression varies according to their total locatedness within societies’ stratificational arrangements or *vectors of oppression and privilege* – class, race, ethnicity, age, affectional preference, marital status, and global location’ (Lengermann and Nebrugge, 1996: 310). Such challenges coincided with debates between feminists concerning the appropriateness and applicability of postmodernist critiques that rejected universal claims to knowledge and focussed instead on ‘peculiarities and difference’ (Marchand and Parpart, 1995: 1).

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<sup>15</sup> See for instance Butler, 1990; Scott, 1990; Spivak, 1999, whose work is considered to have contributed to new so-called ‘Third Wave’ feminist debates.

Postmodernist approaches particularly appealed to Black and Third World feminists whose re-conceptualisations of and approaches to analysing women's lives, have challenged previous feminist thought precisely because of the focus on difference amongst women. These feminists were increasingly critical of European and North American feminists whose analyses they saw as grounded in and limited by their own experience as white, middle-class, Western women (Marchand, 1995: 56). Women of Colour in North America linked the marginalised reality of black women's experience with critical thought and demonstrated how class as well as gender created inequality both between and amongst men and women:

Women in lower class and poor groups, particularly those who are non-white, would not have defined women's liberation as women gaining social equality with men since they are continually reminded in their everyday lives that all women do not share a common social status (hooks cited in Marchand, 1995: 56).

At the same time, feminists in the South identified the prevalence of a 'colonial/neo-colonial discourse' in Northern scholarship 'which represented women in the South as an undifferentiated "other", oppressed by both gender and Third World development' (Marchand and Parpart, 1995: 7). Development approaches to women have come under increasing scrutiny as feminists have highlighted the importance of difference (Chowdry, 1995: 26). Perhaps the most influential of these critiques came from Mohanty's analysis of representations of Third World women in research by Northern feminists (2003). Mohanty highlights how Third World women have been represented as a homogenous, powerless group who are 'victims of particular socioeconomic systems', and defined in terms of how they are affected by institutions and systems (2003: 23). The essentialised version of women Mohanty identifies, based on two binary oppositions, is characteristic, she argues, of a good proportion of Western feminist work on women in the Third World (2003: 19). The first binary of man/woman, places the male oppressor in opposition to the oppressed female. The second oppositional binary of First World woman/Third World woman positions the former as liberated and modern and the latter as traditional and backward (Mohanty, 2003: 22). Both binaries are hierarchical and therefore place Third World woman as subordinated to and less powerful than both men and First World woman; 'The binary representation of First World/Third World women establishes a world order where Third World women have failed to reach the evolutionary pinnacle of the First World' (Udayagiri, 1995: 164). According to Mohanty, such representations and analyses that perpetuate these hierarchical binary oppositions demarcate and define the distribution of resources and power:

[f]eminist analyses which perpetuate and sustain the hegemony of the idea of the superiority of the West produce a corresponding set of universal images of the "third world woman," images such as the veiled woman, the powerful mother, the chaste virgin, the obedient wife, etc. These images exist in universal, ahistorical splendour, setting in motion a colonialist discourse which exercises a very specific power in

defining, coding, and maintaining existing first/third world connections' (Mohanty, 2003: 41).

Mohanty argues that the privileging of gender difference as an explanation for the origins of oppression undermines the descriptive potential of gender difference. Descriptive analysis should inform representations of women however, opportunities to explore the complex and dynamic interplay of specific historical and cultural processes are subordinated to homogenising descriptions of powerlessness and victimhood: 'it is merely a matter of specifying the context after the fact. "Women" are now placed in the context of the family or in the workplace or within religious networks, almost as if these systems existed outside the relations of women with other women, and women with men' (Mohanty, 2003: 26). The effects of social relations are sidelined, according to Mohanty, in an analysis that takes men and women as pre-constituted 'sexual-political' subjects. Approaching 'women' as an analytical group essentialises them to their gender identity above any other and implies a 'monolithic notion of sexual difference' based on the binary of male power and female subordination, 'Such simplistic formulations are historically reductive; they are also ineffectual in designing strategies to combat oppressions. All they do is reinforce binary divisions between men and women' (Mohanty, 2003: 31).

Mohanty and others have presented a major critique of development and underdevelopment approaches, viewing them as rooted in colonial essentialisms and universalisms (Mohanty, 2003; Chowdry, 1995; Marchand, 1995; Udayagiri, 1995). Further, WID and GAD are 'political discourses, which legitimise mainstream definitions of modernisation and development' (Udayagiri, 1995: 160). Mohanty in particular is critical of the economic reductionism of liberal feminist approaches to examining the effects of the development process on Third World women. There is often an underlying assumption in this literature, she argues, of the inevitability of economic progress through development and therefore the appropriateness of 'development' as the basis for cross-cultural analysis:

Women are constituted as women through the complex interaction between class, culture, religion, and other ideological institutions and frameworks. They are not "women" – a coherent group – solely on the basis of a particular economic system or policy. Such reductive cross-cultural comparisons result in the colonisation of the specifics of daily existence and the complexities of political interests that women of different social classes and cultures represent and mobilise (Mohanty, 2003: 30).

There is an a priori assumption of women's shared experience of oppression across class and culture. Despite 'women' as a category of analysis having a discursive rather than material subjectivity, the 'discursively consensual homogeneity of women as a group is mistaken for the historically specific material reality of groups of women' (Mohanty, 2003: 23). Such an assumption leads to attempts to identify 'powerless groups of women' rather than

‘uncovering the material and ideological specificities that constitute a particular group of women as “powerless” in a particular context’ (Mohanty, 2003: 23). Therefore women’s lives are characterised by ‘constraints’, ‘needs’ and ‘problems’, rather than ‘choices’ and ‘freedoms’ (Mohanty, 2003: 30).

The essentialising tendencies that Mohanty describes are prevalent amongst Northern-based institutions formulating policy concerned with women in the South (Marchand and Parpart, 1995: 7). As I will argue later in this chapter, essentialising assumptions are apparent in development policy approaches to young women that focus on reproductive health and their maternal identity. The privileging of young women’s potential role as mothers is often a result of development institutions’ preoccupations with how young women can contribute to broader processes of national economic development, and the possibly detrimental consequences for the economy of ‘early’ motherhood. This approach is encapsulated in WID programmes aimed at removing the obstacles and constraints caused by early union and motherhood to more ‘efficient’ individuals, through welfare or anti-poverty measures (Chowdry, 1995: 32) rather than those providing greater opportunities and choices for children and mothers.

While acknowledging that the postmodernist/feminist debate has revealed the neo-colonial discourses underpinning gender and development approaches, Marchand criticises Mohanty’s failure to analyse the role of class. She also questions the assumption that such discourses solely emanate from Western feminists: ‘In arguing that colonial discourses have been created and perpetuated by Western scholars, Mohanty implicitly denies subject agency to “Third World” women herself’ (Marchand, 1995: 57). In so doing Mohanty falls into the same trap she is herself criticising: the voice of third world women is silenced and they are portrayed as ‘victims’ of Western feminist discourses. More broadly, postmodernist feminist concerns with contesting and deconstructing discourses of power has led some to question the political potential of the project (Udayagiri, 1995: 166). Liberal feminists still view modernisation and development as the main vehicle for improving women’s status and see postmodern critiques as not applicable to their work on policy formulation, focussed as they are on national level analysis and implementation. Marxist feminists are critical of postmodernism’s deconstruction of meta-narratives which they see as lacking a critique of the power of structures in women’s lives. From this perspective, postmodernism offers limits for political action and the transformation of unequal power relations, and is restricted to strategies of resistance which some see as inadequate (Hartsock, 1990: 167). Indeed, for some, postmodernist preoccupation with textual analyses negates understandings of the material effects of poverty in women’s lives – an analysis of malnutrition, hunger, ill-health and education for instance, are lost from view (Udayagiri, 1995: 175). But the critical issue

for those stressing the limits of postmodernist analysis is the lack of subject agency: 'If the category "woman" is fundamentally undecidable, then we can offer no positive conception of it that is immune to deconstruction, and we are left with a feminism that can be only deconstructive and, thus, nominalist once again' (Alcoff, 1988: 410). Essentially, if there is no category of 'women' to speak of, then around whose interests can feminists formulate demands? Some degree of 'essentialising' is necessary from the perspective of political action in order to formulate theories of agency and strategies of resistance (Marchand and Parpart, 1995: 6; Udayagiri, 1995: 176).

Pointing to an absence of theorising regarding resistance to global restructuring Marchand and Runyan argue that resistance should be reconceptualised as 'involving attempts to intervene in and renegotiate various boundaries between public and private, global and local, market and state, state and society, and so on' (2000: 157). They argue there has been a lack of attention to resistance in the face of global restructuring amongst political economists and international relations scholars because of the dominant perception of globalisation as an inevitable process. Such attention as there has been, focuses on large-scale movements, organised labour and 'guerrilla and independence movements' (Marchand and Runyan, 2000: 19). The broader conception that they propose 'allows us to capture the diverse activities which people employ to counteract the negative effects of neoliberal global restructuring' and by illuminating the private allows the inclusion of the previously invisible activity of women (Marchand and Runyan, 2000: 157). It is the activities and practices precisely at the boundaries of ideology that are important to describe and analyse. Such activities are the practices of everyday life and are shaped by social, economic and political processes that have material consequences. It is at the boundaries where people resist or conform and in so doing possibly redefine social constructions of femininity and masculinity, as I argue is the case for the footballers in this study.

Few feminists adopt wholesale the postmodernist approach, most worry about the political implications of such a project and many adopt and synthesise some aspects. Feminists in the North have been strongly influenced by a new important focus on the 'local' and the implications for understanding women's lives. Indeed, this thesis shares Marchand and Parpart's belief that the debate between feminism and postmodernism can inform both theory and practice concerning women's development:

The critique of modernity and Western hegemony, the focus on difference and identity, the emphasis on the relationship between language and power, the attention to subjugated knowledge(s) and the deconstruction of colonial and postcolonial representations of the South as the dependent "other" have much to say to those involved in the development business (Marchand and Parpart, 1995: 11).

Recent critiques of essentialising and homogenising approaches to gender and development allow for a more nuanced analysis of the differential ways women affect and are affected by historical and socio-economic processes. Following this perspective the following section examines research on gender identity in Latin America.

## Latin American femininities and masculinities

Stereotypical depictions and assumptions of masculinity and femininity have dominated social sciences literature on gender in Latin America, characterised by the image of the dominant male and the subordinate and subservient female. The prevalence of the term *macho* has led Melhuus and Stølen to assert: ‘If there is one term which is unambiguously associated with Latin America, it is the term *macho*, and its derivatives *machismo* and *machista*’ (1996: 14). However, it is only in the last few decades, following feminist concerns to highlight the diversity of women’s experiences, that the socially constructed meanings of femininity and more recently masculinity have been explored. This section will examine constructions of masculinity and femininity and the ways in which research has challenged previous assumptions. Such critiques have revealed the diversity of both femininities and masculinities that exist and how they intersect with other identities in order to understand the variety of inequalities that shape people’s lives.<sup>16</sup>

Research on gender in Latin American has been strongly influenced by Evelyn P. Stevens’s concept of *marianismo* outlined in the essay entitled ‘*Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo*’ (1973). Based on research in Mexico, Stevens’s historical analysis traces the gendered characteristics of *machismo* and *marianismo* to the Old World and argues that amongst Latin American *mestizo* culture there is a ‘well-defined pattern of beliefs and behaviour centred on popular acceptance of a stereotype of the ideal woman’ which like its counterpart – *machismo* – is ubiquitous across the region: ‘There is near universal agreement on what a “real woman” is like and how she should act’ (Stevens, 1973: 94). Typical characteristics of *machismo* are described as ‘exaggerated aggressiveness and intransigence in male-to-male interpersonal relationships and arrogance and sexual aggression in male-to-female relationships’ (Stevens, 1973: 90). Women on the other hand are characterised as possessing a ‘feminine spiritual authority, which teaches that women are semi-divine, morally superior to and spiritually stronger than men’ (Stevens, 1973: 91). Though they

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<sup>16</sup> Kulick has further demonstrated the complexity and multiplicity of gender and sexual identity in Latin America through his research on transgender in Brazil (1997).

should be 'submissive to the demands of the men: husbands, sons, fathers, brothers', this is legitimated by the general acceptance of women's 'moral superiority' (Stevens, 1973: 95).

Having outlined appropriate feminine characteristics, Stevens goes on to describe behaviour which falls outside of the parameters of *marianismo*; she admits that not all women conform to the stereotypical characteristics of *marianismo* and offers a description of the "bad woman":

The same culture provides an alternate model in the image of the "bad woman" who flaunts custom and persists in enjoying herself. Interestingly enough, this kind of individual is thought not to be a "real woman". By publicly deviating from the prescribed norm, she has divested herself of precisely those attributes considered most characteristically feminine and in the process has become somewhat masculine (Stevens, 1973: 96).

*Marianismo* is shown to idealise women's chastity and nurturing nature. Consequently, those women who 'flaunt' such customs risk their femininity and therefore their morally exalted status. Interestingly, Stevens highlights the role women themselves play in maintaining oppressive gender relations and therefore *marianismo*'s persistence (Chant with Craske, 2003: 10). Stevens's descriptions are exaggerated and she does admit that they represent an ideal type that most women do not conform to. Stevens's work is widely referenced as a starting point for understanding gender relations in Latin America; perhaps this is because, as Craske points out, in a very general sense her description of gender relations does hold true in many cases, and offers a description of the parameters of appropriate gender behaviour in certain Latin American contexts (Craske, 1999: 12).

The concept of *marianismo* has been criticised in a number of ways and academics have demonstrated its inadequacies in explaining the Latin American reality. Ehlers (1991) provides a robust critique demonstrating how, in contrast to Stevens' analysis, women's subordination is not uniform – women are affected in different ways and to different degrees according to variables other than gender, such as class, ethnicity, race and especially significant for this discussion, age. Ehlers criticises Stevens for a lack of material analysis of women's lives and the role of the sexual division of labour. Further, Ehlers demonstrates how gender relations are not static but change and evolve depending on women's material realities (Ehlers, 1991: 2). Ehlers does acknowledge that *marianismo* at least provides a rationale for female subordination and asserts it has 'evolved into a universal model of the behaviour of Latin American women' (Ehlers, 1991: 1). But she criticises the way it idealises and simplifies the reality of women's lives, and generalises characteristics derived from the Latin American middle class, to describe the experience of all Latin American women.



The historical basis of Stevens's work has been questioned and research has shown that *marianismo* may in fact have originated as a strain of Victorianism in the late nineteenth century (Navarro, 2002: 262). Others criticise the model for its poor empiricism leading to imprecise arguments, an ahistorical approach and essentialist conclusions (Bourque and Warren, 1981; Moraes-Gorecki, 1988; Browner and Lewin, 1982). Though Melhuus and Stølen offer rare praise for her work in highlighting how women may not be passive victims of oppressive relations and rather may be active agents in their maintenance, they also point out that there is too little attention to the political and economic conditions in which gender relations are constituted (1996: 12). Stevens's approach leads to the idealisation of women's lives that in reality are not solely located in the 'protected' household (1996: 12). In perhaps the most robust critique of Stevens's work, Navarro makes a powerful argument for rejecting the concept outright as 'an ahistorical, essentialist, anachronistic, sexist, and orientalist fabrication' (2002: 270). Further, Navarro criticises North American academics for the legitimacy and longevity *marianismo* has achieved, although she points out that this is probably because of a lack of other research on the ideological origins of women's subordination in Latin America (2002: 269). Instead, Navarro calls for greater attention to the specifics of Latin American women's lives in order to challenge previously held assumptions and expand our frameworks of understanding: 'Feminist scholarship should be grounded in the cultural, geographic, and historical specificity of gender arrangements. We must "*desalambrar*" or "remove the wires" from the theoretical frameworks that have been imposed on the study of women and gender in Latin America' (Navarro, 2002: 259).

It is both interesting and disconcerting that Stevens's conceptual framework for understanding gendered behaviour in Latin America has taken such a prominent position in gender research in the social sciences, given that the term itself is not popularly used (Lancaster, 1992: 310; Gutmann, 1996). Through a detailed analysis of the material reality of young women's lives, and an examination of the particular form and effects of gender ideology, this thesis is an important contribution to understandings of gender relations as they affect and are affected by, young women in Nicaragua. Such an approach, grounded in the social realities of everyday lives, avoids relying on conceptual assumptions and instead interrogates meanings and practices as they are affected by broader political and economic processes.

The ideal of femininity *marianismo* presents is not simply the opposite of masculinity according to Lancaster, with the one active and the other passive, as this would be a depiction only from a masculine viewpoint. *Marianismo* is a depiction of an ideal of motherhood:

The traditional ideal of femininity is not simple “passivity” – working-class Nicaraguan women were never expected to be shrinking violets – but rather an ideal of elevated motherhood. Traditional feminine practice, then, is conceived as a different mode of doing than male practice: feminine action emphasises planning over risk, self-abnegation over self-promotion, domesticity over worldliness, action in and through networks rather than interpersonal competition. The leitmotifs of the feminine ideal might be summarised as caring, nurturing, and self-sacrifice – which is to say, a form of acting on behalf of others (Lancaster, 1992: 93).

However, Lancaster notes that *marianismo* is not a term in common usage and that when the term was discussed with informants they rejected it because of its association with female virginity, as ‘virginity is not and never has been an important element of the Nicaraguan ideal of proper womanhood’ (Lancaster, 1992: 310n.1). Its best usage is as an analytical category although its utilisation as a heuristic device presents a number of problems; the separation of gendered power and practices limits our understanding of inequalities that may exist within those spheres (Lancaster, 1992: 309–310n.1). Further, as Gutmann argues, distinctions help to theorise difference but are unhelpful to understanding change: ‘Theories of distinction may tell us important things about many social differences and how these are created and developed by dominant groups, but they do not necessarily provide an indication as to whether and how change may take place’ (Gutmann, 1996: 23).

## Machismo and Latin American masculinities

If conceptions of femininity have thrown up narrow and stereotypical images of Latin American women, Latin American men have similarly been depicted in limited terms as drunken, aggressive and violent (Melhuus and Stølen, 1996). The first major challenges and attempts to expand understandings of Latin American masculinities emerged in the 1990s. Similar to work on women, approaches to masculinity have revealed the heterogeneity of masculine identities in Latin America and challenged narrow conceptions of what are perceived as men’s and women’s roles.

That there is a great deal of consensus on the characteristics of machismo as representing domination over women and other men attests to some degree to its broad relevance (Cubitt, 1995; Pescatello, 1976; Stevens, 1973; Nencel, 1996). As Chant points out, though machismo is often ‘embroidered and reified’, stereotypes still have practical relevance as evinced by the popular usage of the term to denote both positive and negative characteristics of male behaviour (Chant with Craske, 2003: 16).

More recent ethnographic work on Latin American men has challenged essentialising and undifferentiated accounts of masculinities in the region and demonstrated the variety of male identities that exist (Gutmann, 1996; Lancaster, 1992). Gutmann’s work

on *machismo* in Mexico City has shown that while fathers spend less time with their children than mothers, working class men often play a much more active role in their children's upbringing than amongst the upper classes and fatherhood is a critical part of their identity. Unitary conceptions of fatherhood and masculinity therefore are misleading and there is a necessity to attend to the differences amongst men: 'Unless the contradictory gender identities of these youth, as cultural citizens of both society and family, are accounted for in both public and private spheres, we will be unable to understand the part played by gender in the specific, local manifestations of change in Mexico City' (Gutmann, 1996: 171).

By revealing a variety of masculine identities Gutmann helped to deconstruct monolithic stereotypes depicting masculine power and domination of the public sphere. Demographic changes have had important repercussions for the men and women in Gutmann's study especially in terms of changing patterns of integration into the labour market. Such changes provide the basis for a renegotiation of gender identities: 'In Santo Domingo, the very indeterminacy and ambiguity of social life provides an opportunity for both men and women to negotiate male identities' (Gutmann, 1996: 23). Above all, Gutmann challenges the reliance in previous literature on fixed, unitary and essentialising understandings of men and women and emphasises the fluid nature of masculinity and femininity.

Roger Lancaster's analysis of gender and power and the persistence of gender ideologies in Nicaragua, explains *machismo* as a system that organises social relations by placing value on the individual. *Life is Hard: Machismo, Danger, and the Intimacy of Power in Nicaragua* (Lancaster, 1992) is an ethnographic study of the lives of three families in a working-class barrio in Managua during the latter part of the Sandinista revolution. Based on intimate and detailed descriptions of people's everyday interactions, Lancaster argues that machismo represents not simply an ideology but a system that organises social relations between men, as well as between women and men, and generates its own ideologies that have material value:

[machismo] is not a set of erroneous ideas that somehow got lodged in people's heads. Rather, it is an organization of social relations that generate ideas. Machismo, therefore, is more than an "effect" produced by other material relations. It has its own materiality, its own power to produce effects. The resilience of machismo as a system has nothing to do with the tendency of ideological systems to "lag" behind changes in the system of economic production, for machismo is more than a "reflection" of economic practices. It is its own economy (Lancaster, 1992: 236).

*Machismo* is more than an ideology, it determines and organises the material value of social relations: 'As in the case of colorism, and no less than in economic production proper, machismo produces and circulates values: the value of men and women. What is ultimately

produced – in all three systems – is one’s social standing’ (Lancaster, 1992: 236). Machismo is an embodied and enacted set of practices designed to demonstrate the self as ‘active’: ‘Every gesture, every posture, every stance, every way of acting in the world is immediately seen as “masculine” or “feminine,” depending on whether it connotes activity or passivity’ (Lancaster, 1992: 237). Lancaster’s work demonstrates how males are able to accrue value and therefore social status through the performance of certain machista behaviours.

Machismo is valued not only by other men, but also by women who act as ‘intermediaries’ in the ‘ongoing exchange system’ that represents the maintenance of masculine value (Lancaster, 1992: 237). Given that previous studies have predominantly focussed on machismo’s negative effects on women (domestic violence, alcohol abuse, abandoning children), it is important to recognise Lancaster’s contribution to theorising machismo as an organisation of social relations which structures power relations between men, as well as men and women (Chant with Craske, 2003: 15). However, there is a lack of attention to the ways men and women resist and redefine gender roles, especially the new spaces for participation that women found and created during the revolution. Further, Lancaster’s understanding of machismo as a system predominantly organising social relations between men with women as ‘intermediaries’ leaves little space for an analysis of the agency of women. Lancaster’s attention to practices that reflect traditional relations results in a lack of attention to new identities. In contrast, the purpose of this thesis is both to pay attention to new practices that challenge traditional relations and to illuminate new identities for young women.

The asymmetrical sexualities of men and women can be found in patterns of socialisation for girls and boys. Girls’ activity and play is located and tends to be restricted by parents to the domestic sphere, while boys are encouraged to have greater freedoms outside the home and socially (Chant with Craske, 2003: 144). Certain gendered characteristics are encouraged and reaffirmed in the ways children are raised. Lancaster’s work is particularly appropriate to this discussion, based as it is on ethnographic research in Managua in the late 1980s. He shows how the association between violence and machismo is reinforced from a young age as boys are taunted into rages and praised for using profane language, while the same behaviour is commonly punished for females (Lancaster, 1992: 42). From as young as two Lancaster observed how boys were encouraged to play unsupervised outside the home and sent on errands, while females are kept within the confines of the house and ‘not pushed towards personal autonomy’ (Lancaster, 1992: 42). Parents and adults therefore play a crucial role in maintaining the values associated with appropriate gendered behaviour, ‘childrearing remains highly gendered and is very much designed to instil the core values of machismo in successive generations’ (Lancaster, 1992:

41). These values both locate young men and women and define the parameters of what is acceptable gendered behaviour. As young women reach puberty the parameters of appropriate behaviour become intrinsically linked to appropriate sexual behaviour for males and females. Perceptions of appropriate sexual behaviour are key to understanding the greater limitations on mobility outside the home for young women.

For the approach of this thesis the model has two particularly important consequences for perceptions of appropriate gendered behaviour. Firstly, through an emphasis on the caring and submissive nature of women in Latin America, *marianismo* locates and limits females to the domestic sphere, while public power in spheres of politics, work and the street, becomes the domain of male domination. As such, young women in Latin American society are predominantly associated with domestic responsibility and located within the 'protective' boundaries of the domestic sphere. Secondly, perceptions of appropriate behaviour restrict women's sexuality to marriage and reproduction. These characteristics of gender behaviour do not describe the reality of most women's lives. However, they are powerful referents and it is important to understand when young women are able or even choose, to subvert socially ascribed roles and behaviours. Those young women that transgress the appropriate boundaries of location and sexual behaviour risk their reputation and status through diminishing their social 'value'. However, in reality young women may choose or are forced to transgress these boundaries.

## **Gender research in Latin America: exploring differences**

I argue that research on women in Latin America has historically highlighted the differential ways women experience economic and political processes as well as the ideational structures of gender ideology. Though a great deal of the research produced has tended to focus on economic factors in determining women's experience in Latin American society, more recently there has been a focus on the role of cultural productions of gender combined with the structural dimensions of people's lives. This section examines this development in the literature on gender in Latin America.

The impetus of the UN Decade for Women (1975–1985) led to a proliferation of feminist interest and research on the experiences of women across the globe including Latin America, where previously women had been notably absent from social science research (Melhuus and Stølen, 1996: 9). Women In Development (WID) became the prominent paradigmatic approach, focussing on integrating women into development agendas and a concern for the material and measurable aspects of women's lives (Chant with Craske, 2003: 6). However, research on gender in Latin America has highlighted the limitations of attempts

to understand gender inequality through material analysis alone that have led to mostly economically determined understandings of gender.

## Gendered notions of public and private activity in Latin America

The characteristics of *marianismo/machismo* as described above delineate distinct spheres of participation for men and women, with the latter predominantly associated with the private sphere, caring for the family and the home, while the former occupies the public sphere of work and politics. Rather than distinct spheres, feminists have emphasised the interrelation between the two (Craske, 1999; Cubitt and Greenslade, 1997; Pateman, 1983). In research on women in Latin America the distinction has had implications for many areas of women's lives; for their economic roles (see Fernández-Kelly and Sassen, 1995; Tiano, 1984), for human rights (Jelin, 1996) and for political participation (Jaquette, 1994). It is important to understand the 'private' is more than a physical space but is in fact at the centre of the reproduction of gender inequality. The distinction has been so taken for granted that the dynamics of private life have been overlooked and have therefore made invisible those who are predominantly associated with the home: women. For this reason the public/private dichotomy has been central to feminist theorising for the last two centuries and because of the ambiguity inherent in the distinction, is highly contested (Pateman, 1983: 281).

Given the previous invisibility of women's lives in the private sphere, one area of particular importance to gender analysis in Latin America is the family:

Although treatment of 'the Latin American family' in Eurocentric overviews of world family patterns, and in economic policy analyses, has often been characterised as stereotyped, monolithic and gender blind, in feminist writings on Latin America families have seldom been dealt with in ways other than which reflect them as non-uniform, dynamic and as encompassing highly variegated gender relations (Chant with Craske, 2003: 6).

Feminist research on the family in Latin America has consistently highlighted the variety of forms and relations that exist (Chant with Craske, 2003: 6). This research has revealed that gender categories, based on the dualism of 'male' and 'female' characteristics, are too simplistic to understand the variety of roles and structures within the household and how gender intersects with other inequalities of race, class and age, variables which are historically and culturally context specific (Scott, 1986). Research on women's lives looking at the household and migration (Radcliffe, 1986), the intersection of gender, class and ethnicity (Ennew, 1986) and female labour force participation (Pearson, 1986), have all demonstrated the variety of gendered experiences that exist amongst women. This is in contrast to earlier work on gender which was 'marred by a tendency towards economism and an implicit reliance on gender stereotypes' (Scott, 1986: 24). One particularly prevalent

stereotype in the social sciences according to Scott, is the assumption that women are integrated into the labour force because of their 'natural' skills and low wage demands: 'Such views assume that *all* women's labour was cheap (and for the same reasons) and that *all* women were equally submissive and dexterous, regardless of differences in their personal circumstances' (Scott, 1986: 25). However, there are differences amongst women in employment levels and situations, and importantly there is a lack of attention in such an analysis to political and ideological factors (Scott, 1986: 25). The perpetuation of the myth that women have low skills and a capacity for mind-numbing jobs does not fit with the reality of increasing education levels for women that outstrip men. Clearly, other factors structure young women's limited integration into the labour force and the strength of gender ideology has to be considered. Scott criticises such a focus in social sciences studies of labour, for perpetuating 'these conventional assumptions, either by explaining women's labour market activity in terms of a stereotypical supply function or by ignoring the influence of gender altogether' (1986: 25). Here Scott underlines Mohanty's assertion of the importance of avoiding the privileging of gender difference to explain women's experience of inequality and oppression:

By their very nature gender ideologies are vague and diffuse; they will be actualised in different ways at different stages of the life and domestic cycles. Also, different social classes, ethnic groups and communities have different ways of institutionalising the ideology of gender relations, just as they have different kinship structures (Scott, 1986: 26).

The same simplistic stereotypical assumptions pervade policy formulation, 'Therefore it is important to develop policies that are based on a differentiated conception of gender, one that recognises the needs of different groups of women, as well as distinguishing between various types of need' (Scott, 1986: 26). Scott makes a powerful argument about the necessity to avoid deterministic understandings of the role of gender ideology as it affects the behaviour of men and women:

... [S]tereotypes play a role as ideology in affecting the behaviour of the men and women we study in all sorts of way. The point is, however, that this role is not a deterministic one, but rather one of influence and constraint. It can be understood as an aspect of the normative regulation of behaviour, but we need other concepts in order to understand the degree of regulation that is effected, and the circumstances under which it breaks down. It is important that gender stereotypes should be problematised *as* ideologies and studied in their own right, rather than rejected out of hand. Only in this way will we understand how they are perpetuated and modified over time (Scott, 1986: 26).

This thesis echoes this call and argues that nearly three decades later, gender is still simplistically considered in development policy targeting young women, the majority of

which focuses on sexual and reproductive health rather than employment and education demands which are seen as more crucial to young women themselves (Bradshaw, 2008: 71).

Another key debate is to what extent labour force participation has altered traditional gender roles and relations in the household:

If the household and family are to have an impact on development rather than merely be units of analysis that are “impacted upon,” then the embodied practices of power that they express must be examined in relation to other scales of analysis and action. The ways in which household and family ideologies of gender articulate with communities, regions, nations, and processes of globalisation remain key issues for feminists. (Laurie, 2009: 388).

Economic crisis and neoliberal structural adjustment programs have increased women’s burden of paid and unpaid labour, and research indicates a range of consequences for gender relations in the household (Chant, 2002). Some argue women’s increased role in the labour force has challenged the image of the ‘male breadwinner’ and resulted in greater power over decision-making (Safa, 1995a). Moreover, what has been overlooked in research and development policy has been the possibility of the household as a ‘site for “everyday” resistance’ to economic and political oppression, and masculine authority (Laurie, 2008: 381; Safa, 1995a; Benería, 1991). Conceptualising the household in this way allows for greater agency on the part of household members to resist processes of neoliberalism and globalisation than has previously been acknowledged in the gender and development paradigms of the 1980s and 1990s.

At the other end of the debate there is less optimism regarding the implications for the household and gender relations. It is important to bear in mind that the large increase in female labour force participation in Latin America is as a result of economic necessity and household survival rather than for personal development and financial enrichment (Benería, 1991; González de la Rocha, 1988). Given the constraints within which women have entered paid work González de la Rocha argues there has been a continuity in unequal domestic power relations precisely because of women’s continued domestic and childcare burden: ‘On the one hand, the crisis has forced women to participate in remunerated work, although it has not liberated them from their domestic responsibilities; on the other hand, the norms and values that are attributed to men and women have not changed’ (González de la Rocha, 1995: 25). The contradictory nature of women’s participation premised on their identities as both providers and carers results in their greater responsibilities and workload. Other research points to the social value women derive through their association with the domestic sphere. Harvey looks at Ocongate in the Peruvian Andes where, she argues, women gain greater respect for their domestic labour (1994). Lancaster similarly observes how women can be as instrumental as men in maintaining gendered stereotypical behaviour (1992).



Given the continued importance of motherhood for some women, 'Employment ... has not replaced the centrality of domesticity for women, but simply been incorporated into an ever-expanding portfolio of maternal obligations' (Chant, 2002: 552).

The unequal terms of women's incorporation have been highlighted as a further factor explaining the lack of change in gender relations. Despite increasing wage differentials for men and women, 'Women's wages are not secondary income but instead have become important pillars of family and domestic support, despite the fact that they are meagre and invisible' (González de la Rocha, 1995: 25). Women are working as hard as their male counterparts for less money because of continued discrimination in the workplace: 'Women continue on average to have lower levels of education and vocational training than men in Latin America. Coupled with gender discrimination in the labour market this generally means inferior occupational status, lower wages and less job security' (Chant, 2002: 550).

There is a growing body of research on the 'crisis of masculinity' whereby men perceive their position as primary breadwinner and decision-maker is threatened (Chant, 2000). This has followed greater dependency on women's earnings to the household and the growing informalisation of men's work (Gutmann, 1996; Elson, 1999). One consequence of women's greater bargaining power in the household, it is argued, is an increased number of women leaving their partners and husbands and therefore greater numbers of female headed households (Chant, 1997; Safa, 1995a). Increasing desertion and domestic violence have also been identified as related trends (Gutmann, 1996; Benería, 1991).

This short discussion on household gender relations points to the persistence of traditional gender roles despite the changes wrought in household dynamics by economic restructuring:

... the contradictions between traditional gender norms and women's actual behaviour creates role conflicts that many women reconcile by privileging their domestic roles and by viewing wage work as a way to perform their roles as wives and mothers more effectively. As a result, partnered women often see themselves as merely supplemental wage earners even where they are the sole support of their households. Thus while wage work can facilitate women's empowerment within the domestic sphere and sometimes the public sector, traditional gender roles have resisted the potentially transformative effect of women's employment (Tiano, 2001: 202).

Alongside a focus on the family and the household, motherhood has received a great deal of attention in research on Latin American women. Stevens argued that Latin American women can be characterised as naturally subordinate to males and with a moral and spiritual disposition to nurture and care and therefore unlikely to challenge their position in society

(1973). This conception, however, has been challenged as motherhood has been shown to be 'a source of power, and more particularly a basis for political participation, identity, resistance and/or transformation' (Chant with Craske, 2003: 10). The literature examining women's participation in social movements in opposition to authoritarian regimes has been particularly influential in challenging assumptions of conceptions of motherhood in the region (Safa, 1995b; Jaquette, 1994; Criquillon, 1995; Molyneux, 2003). This literature shows that it was precisely women's identity as mothers that motivated their entrance into political life making demands for basic needs or human rights in times of economic crisis and state terror.<sup>17</sup> Their association with the apolitical private sphere and therefore perceived unthreatening identity meant they were able to organise without suspicion or repression. Though many women were motivated to participate predominantly because of their identity as mothers, the literature has demonstrated that many women experienced a greater level of political consciousness through their experience, which has led to a redefinition of the political to include the private domestic realm of motherhood (Safa, 1995b: 238). As Chant points out, though it has been shown women have historically had a public identity, 'it is also true that women nowadays much more visibly straddle the arbitrary divide between the public and private domain' (2003: 13). This trend is reflected in research that demonstrates how females are spending more time in education, delaying motherhood in some cases and bringing up children on their own in others (González de la Rocha, 1995; Chant, 2009).

Cubitt and Greenslade (1997) assert that although the public/private dichotomy is most often utilised as an analytical tool its usage does not escape ideology and the two realms are still heavily associated with gendered spatial and power arrangements. The private is related to the family and reproduction and is seen as the 'natural' realm of females, while the public is understood as 'socially determined' (Cubitt and Greenslade, 1997: 52). It is essential to understand then the cultural value associated with activities in either realm that constitute the private sphere as 'natural subordinate' (Pateman, 1983: 284). Similarly, Gutmann argues that the terms 'public' and 'private' are not the problem, it is what is meant by the terms and universal applications that reinforce rigid dichotomies of gendered behaviour (1996: 148). Cubitt and Greenslade suggest that there is a need to look again at definitions of what constitutes the public and private space and whether empowerment is an outcome of greater incorporation into the public realm. While some call for greater analytical rigour in applying notions of the public and private, others reject the distinction completely. Okin reminds us the 'personal is political' and therefore the distinction can only mislead (Okin, 1990). Though the dichotomy does mask gender inequality it also carries

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<sup>17</sup> See Jelin for an analysis of the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo, in Argentina, one of the most widely known and powerful women's groups who organised in opposition to state repression and in defence of their children and relatives (1990).

with it immense symbolic value for men and women, young and old, in everyday life. It has become deeply embedded in understandings of the social and political world, shapes the behaviours and relationships, and places value on the activities that take place within each sphere. A less rigid understanding of notions of public and private are more helpful to understanding the complicated realities of young women's lives and the ways in which their activities and choices transcend the dichotomous distinction. The literature on women's social movements has demonstrated that the boundaries between public and private are not clearly defined and the distinction should be understood as an 'analytical abstraction' rather than a description of the social reality (Cubitt and Greenslade, 1997). Similarly, based on research on women's economic roles, Tiano has suggested a conceptualisation of the spheres as two poles of a continuum where actors tend to congregate in the middle; such an analysis avoids the invisibility of women's activities (1984). A less rigid approach then is appropriate to this research which pays attention to the gendered norms and values associated with the distinction: 'the divide has never been a realistic description of people's lives but an idealised account of social and gender relations which give markers for appropriate behaviour' (Craske, 1999: 22). These markers will become evident in the subsequent discussions of the players' experiences in the home, education, work and on the football field. In the context of Latin America such "abstracted empiricism" Redclift argues has increasingly 'disintegrated' in light of new research which questions the fundamental assumptions upon which they are premised:

"abstracted empiricism," in which the definition of research on "others" – whether women or genders – tends to reflect dominant philosophical traditions and political positions (freedom, autonomy, empowerment, identity), and to create a homogenized object of analysis (Mexican women, Latin American gender), has raised critical questions about the relationship between theorizers and theorized, about the geographical division of theory and practice, and about the grounding of theory itself in a specifically Western gender epistemology' (Redclift, 1997: 228).

Research has demonstrated women's crucial contribution to the economic survival of the household and their contribution to Latin American economies and development processes (Chant, 1997; McClenaghan, 1997). McClenaghan in particular underlines the importance of the link between gender identity and ideology in the context of paid and unpaid work. She argues that while women's increasing participation in paid labour has the *potential* of destabilising traditional gender ideology, women have generally been incorporated into the labour force at the 'bottom of the labour hierarchy' (McClenaghan, 1997: 21). Many more women have entered the labour force out of necessity for survival in light of the effects on the household of crippling structural adjustment policies. She criticises feminist theorists for ignoring the reality that many women participate in the labour force as an extension of their mothering role and are engaged in poorly paid and vulnerable work (1997: 23). Importantly

for this thesis, McClenaghan argues that gender identity is key to understanding how gendered power relations are reproduced between reproductive work and productive work:

This is the terrain in which ideology provides the rationale for substantiating women's secondary worker status. While the research on women and the labour market must occur within a structural context which includes consideration of the characteristics of gendered labour market and the economic climate, identity cannot be omitted (McClenaghan, 1997: 30–31).

Similarly, Redclift argues the economy should be understood as gendered and 'infused with ideologies of sexual differentiation, of spaces, skills, tasks, and values' (Redclift, 1997: 226).

Montoya makes a particularly interesting contribution to the public/private debate in her attempt to '*desalambrar*' or tear down what she sees as conventional approaches of feminists that exclusively view the public domain as the site of 'women's agency, power, and/or resistance' (2002: 68). She sees the distinction as unhelpful for understanding women's lives and instead argues that female agency is demonstrated in the home through the ways women choose to transgress dominant gender ideologies pertaining to women's sexual morality:

According to dominant gender ideologies operating in El Tule, women who are labelled "of the house" or "of the street" were supposed to have earned these statuses through their behaviour, particularly their sexual behaviour ... The fixity of these ideal trajectories thus reflected the putative binary morality of Tuleño womanhood. Tuleño women's stories, however, reveal that such fixed life patterns were rarely borne out in practice (Montoya, 2002: 67).

Montoya's contribution underlines the importance of avoiding dichotomous approaches to women's, indeed, people's lives. That the majority of the literature discussed above is predominantly concerned with women's identity as mothers demonstrates the persistence of motherhood as a particular ideal of motherhood and therefore the pervasiveness of gender ideologies. However, it perhaps also points to a preoccupation and limitation of current approaches to women in Latin America that this research aims to redress through a focus on the everyday lives of young women. The following section moves on to a discussion of conceptualisations of youth in the social sciences.

## **Youth in the social sciences**

The following section will trace how approaches to the study of youth have developed in the social sciences and evaluate how current debates are useful for understanding the lives of young women in Latin America and more specifically Nicaragua.

The focus the Centre for Contemporary Cultural Studies (CCCS) placed on class and subcultures represented an attempt to explain inequalities that existed in post-war Britain and highlighted the spectacular forms of cultural participation of young people. It became a catalyst for renewed interest on research on youth; however, as much as it inspired it also provoked criticism. The interest of the CCCS was in the structural and cultural origins of youth subcultures and their work has been criticised for being theoretically overly-deterministic. The approach emphasised the role of class and structures in young people's lives, and placed too little emphasis on the agency of young people themselves. Young people's activity and identity was conceptualised as a product of, and a response to, the hegemonic adult culture and ignored their agency as actors in their own right (Nayak, 2003; Caputo, 1995; James, 1995; Wulff, 1995). Jones argues that often, young people have been studied in terms of how they fit social structures whether by 'stage in life course, age, generation, social class, gender or as individuals' (2009:4). Wulff (1995) criticised the work for too narrow a focus on resistance and deviance and ignoring other identities of young people. Research on childhood and youth since the 1990s has seen a proliferation in both volume and disciplinary approach. In various ways academics from sociology, anthropology and geography, amongst others, have attempted to demonstrate the diversity and agency of young people's experiences and especially how they are important actors in their own right. With this greater interest has come a shift from functionalist approaches to more qualitative, anthropological approaches to the study of youth. In contrast to previous approaches to studying young people, contemporary debates challenge universal explanations of youth and have sought to illuminate the various and complex ways in which class, gender, race, ethnicity, sexuality, disability and other social variables interact (Nayak and Kehily, 2008). Further consideration has been given to the ways young people are affected by and can benefit from new processes of globalisation (Nayak and Kehily, 2008).

One of the major debates in research in the social sciences has surrounded the ambiguity of the concept of youth. Wulff (1995) argues that anthropology has largely neglected youth as a subject matter and when they have been the focus of research they have been conceptualised as 'human becomings' rather than 'human beings'. Instead she argues young people should be seen as 'active agents – in differing ways and with varying force – in the construction of the meanings and symbolic forms which make up their cultures' (Wulff, 1995: 1). Caputo argues there has been too much emphasis on socialisation processes whereby the focus is on the ways children and young people learn to become part of an adult world. Such an approach conceptualises children and young people as agency-less and 'passive' social actors and overlook the ways in which they are 'actively engaged in the production of culture' (Caputo, 1995: 29). In order to refocus the discussion and centre

children's and young people's experiences as 'human beings' rather than 'human becomings', Caputo argues they should be at the centre of analysis as 'active agents engaged in the production and management of meaning in their own social lives' (Caputo, 1995: 20). Anthropological understandings of culture have tended to conceptualise 'bounded wholes' which emphasises differences between cultures and in so doing homogenises differences within. Patterns of subordination within cultures go unrecognised, especially those of women and children, and '[c]ulture, portrayed in terms of a unified system of meaning, privileges the voice of the powerful. In turn, cultural meanings that may be held by the groups that oppose dominant interpretations continue to be excluded in order to uphold this representation of culture' (Caputo, 1995: 19). Gender ideology if we understand it as a 'unified system of meaning' would therefore have the same privileged position, however, through a recognition of the ways in which it is opposed or resisted, the experiences and voices of the previously marginalised – young women, in this case – can be brought into focus.

Despite their prominence and importance to social, political and economic trends, 'youth' as a social variable has not merited a prominent position in scholarly research on Latin America (Babb and Wolseth, 2008: 4). Where young people are the focus of analysis, the literature tends to look at issues of street children, youth gangs, children's rights and girls/women's reproductive rights. Indeed, Hecht argues that children become interesting to researchers when they are the 'victims or perpetrators of violence' (2002: 242). Given the association of masculinity with violence and aggression, and femininity with vulnerability and victimhood, studies that take such a focus can serve to reaffirm universal conceptions of gender.

Though to a large extent research on youth in Latin America has been somewhat neglected, what there is demonstrates both the diversity of experiences that exist and has challenged previous homogenising approaches based on Western universalisms and generalisations (Nayak, 2003; Hecht, 1998; 2002; Green, 1998). Green highlights the diversity of childhood experiences in Latin America by looking at family structure, children who work and the essential role young people's labour plays in the household. He looks at the lives of street children, their sexual and drug experience and also friendships and relationships. They are presented as both perpetrators and victims of violence, whether communal or political (Green, 1998). The literature emphasises a conception of youth as socially constructed and stresses the importance of understanding the everyday lived realities of young people's lives. Through his ethnographic study on street children in Recife in the north-east of Brazil, Hecht (1998) identifies two contrasting contexts of childhood: *nurturing* and *nurtured*. Nurturing children are poor and from an early age have the

responsibility or, moreover, the moral obligation to contribute to the household. Nurtured children, in contrast, are predominantly middle-class and rather than contribute to household maintenance, represent an economic liability for the household: ‘Whereas the status of nurturing children is dependent, to an extent, on what they *do*, nurtured children are valued by virtue of *being* children’ (italics in original, Hecht, 1998: 21). In describing the characteristics relevant to a particular experience of childhood at a particular place and time, Hecht’s work is a unique and important contribution to the literature on childhood in Latin America and speaks eloquently on the lived realities and the challenges of everyday life for the young people he encounters on the streets of Recife. The model demonstrates how the characteristics of childhood vary according to levels of wealth or poverty (Hecht, 1998: 72). The players in this study have more in common with the characteristics of ‘nurturing’ children who have to make financial contributions to the household and assist with household maintenance through reproductive work. However, in many ways their lives are worlds away from the violent lives depicted by Hecht.

Hecht’s model is important as it avoids previous distinctions of childhood and youth based on deviance/innocence and care/constraint and therefore rejects those explanations based on biological determinism. In his discussion of the spaces nurturing and nurtured children occupy, Hecht describes how nurtured children are completely dependent on adults to accompany them outside of the private realm of the home. Conversely, nurturing children are dependent on access to the public sphere in order to contribute to the household. That the presence of young people on the streets is perceived then as inappropriate – reflected by the attention given to the issue of street children by politicians, police and the media – perhaps says much more about those who control regulatory discourse and the domination of hegemonic ideologies of appropriate behaviour for children and young people.

Through a historical analysis of childhood in Latin America, studies have demonstrated how meanings of age are complicated by other social variables of class, race and gender as well as projects for national development. ‘*Minor Omissions*’ is a collection of essays that demonstrates the ways in which children and young people have been and are essential actors in Latin American history and society, and how notions and interpretations of childhood differ according to the temporal and spatial context (Hecht, 2002). Premo looks at crime and notions of childhood in 18<sup>th</sup> century Lima and reveals how the provision of legal counsel, leniency or punishment was determined by the young person’s place in the ‘socio-racial and gender hierarchies of the city’ (2002: 133). Age was used ambiguously by officials to ascertain the punishment of the individual with, for instance, ‘a slave turned over to his master for punishment ... and an español ragamuffin found a home’ (Premo, 2002: 134). Rizzini describes how the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century project of nation-building in Brazil

came to encompass a concern for society's treatment of the poorest children. However, notions of childhood were ambiguous between 'endangered and dangerous', and paralleled Western ideologies concerning control and protection (2002: 166). Rizzini argues that the concern for children's plight was motivated politically, and society was to be protected from 'potentially troublesome' young people from a particular social class who might disturb and destabilise the project of capitalist development: 'The "idle" segments of the population could be contended with if they were rendered, from childhood, useful elements for the country's capitalist development. At the same time, protecting children was a means of safeguarding society itself' (Rizzini, 2002: 166).

Children and young people have been victims as well as moral and political actors in wars in Central America. According to Peterson and Read, their participation in revolutionary movements challenges Western mainstream notions of childhood which emphasise 'innocence, ignorance, and isolation from the moral and political conflicts of the world' (2002: 228). Exploring their experiences helps understand alternate notions of childhood and the social construction of identity. Further, children and young people share many of the beliefs and behaviours of the community in which they live and this should be viewed as a continuum between childhood and adulthood rather than distinct categories – they are neither all accepting nor isolated from the wider adult world (Peterson and Read, 2002: 229). Children and young people cannot be conceptualised therefore as either opposing/resisting or conforming to adult hegemony. A conception of young people as active social actors must therefore include an analysis of the ways in which they contribute to the maintenance of hegemonic ideologies as well as resist.

In a recent and unprecedented contribution, *Latin American Perspectives* devoted an entire volume to a focus on youth in the region (2008). Wolseth and Babb highlight the various ways young people have influenced cultural politics in Latin America, arguing that in order to do so, they must be understood as 'more than passive recipients of others' actions' and treated as 'a significant category of analysis' as race, gender, sexuality and other variables are considered (2008: 4). Young people in Latin America at a general level are more visible in public life; they are consumers and producers of global styles and music. Young women and men are at the forefront of altering gender relations as indicated by, in some cases, the increased sharing of domestic labour between the sexes (see Gutmann, 1996). More females than ever are entering and finishing higher levels of education and there is greater work available for young women in the manufacturing and service sectors. Increased income does not necessarily translate into increased power at home or at work, 'as these young women move from patriarchal authority in the household to patriarchal authority in the factory' (Wolseth and Babb, 2008: 5). Young women in particular have



increased access to education and employment opportunities, although it is not clear whether they themselves benefit the most from this situation. This thesis argues structural constraints based on gender inequalities still shape young women's opportunities and decision-making processes and need to be considered when evaluating young women's experience. To evaluate the structural importance of gender ideologies an approach that focuses on the complexity of factors influencing young women's lives is required.

## **Gender and sport**

Sport represents an important arena for examining how social constructions of gender are reproduced and also contested. The section begins by demonstrating how modern organised sports in the West have traditionally been viewed as a 'male preserve' and imbued with 'natural' masculine characteristics. Following this a consideration of feminist critiques of gender and sport reveals how 'masculine hegemony' operates to reproduce gender inequalities in the sporting sphere. An examination of recent debates demonstrates the potential of sport as an arena whereby traditional notions of masculinity and femininity are contested.

Until the late nineteenth century, sport in a Western context had largely been an activity for young men and bachelors that was often violent and predominantly about gambling and drinking, and took different forms for the aristocrats or working classes in Britain, Australia and the United States (Giulianotti, 2005: 80). These games were relatively free of rules and external authority and often resembled, according to Dunning, 'ritualised fighting in which groups were able to pit their strength against local rivals' and as such were characterised by high levels of violence (1986: 81). The advent of modern organised sport is associated with processes of industrialisation and development and first took place in nineteenth century public schools, where in the late Victorian period sports became associated with strong Christian virtues of 'hardiness and endurance' (Giulianotti, 2005: 81). In this context, rules, restraint and the elimination of violence became highly prized (Dunning, 1986: 82). Schools began to reward sporting achievement and this was associated with the drive of British industry and empire. This ideal of male sporting achievement, 'muscular Christianity', became influential across the global British Empire (Giulianotti, 2005: 81). In this comparative context the modern era of sport was seen as a 'civilising' force while also, importantly, imbuing young men with the appropriate characteristics of manliness that reflected these modernising societies:

This can be seen from the fact that such games were justified ideologically, partly as training ground for war, partly in terms of their use in the education of military and

administrative leaders for Britain's expanding empire, and partly as vehicles for the inculcation and expression of 'manliness' (Dunning, 1986: 82).

Modern organised sport was a 'male preserve' of competitiveness, aggression and (controlled) violence, characteristics seen as inherent to masculinity and 'macho values' and an essential element of men's socialisation in the modernisation process (Dunning, 1986: 82). Sport in the modern era, however, was also a reflection of the social inequalities and ideologies of wider society and served 'to bolster a sagging ideology of "natural superiority" over women and over race-and-class subordinated groups of men' (Dworkin and Messner, 2002: 17; Whitson, 1994). Women's sport participation was characterised as low visibility and mediated by class – in Victorian Britain it was a middle-class domain (Giulianotti, 2005: 82). When women did participate in sport they did so under specific rules, while their movements were curtailed and often diminutive to the male game (Giulianotti, 2005: 82). Approaches to women's health in Victorian Britain involved a combination of both medical and moral opinion: 'Only exercise of a suitable kind, in moderation, without overindulgence and risk of strain, was considered to enhance the health of women and their potential to conceive healthy children' (Hargreaves, 2002: 57).<sup>18</sup> Further, women's exclusion from more visible forms of sport was also a reflection of Victorian sexual constraint and the 'proper' demeanour and bodily displays of women (Hargreaves, 2002: 58).

As we can see, the history of modern sport in the West has been closely associated with particular class and race-based ideals of masculinity and femininity; 'although sport was seemingly based in natural physical endowments, it was socially constructed out of the gender, race, and class-based stratification systems of Europe' (Dworkin and Messner, 2002: 17). Sport as a 'male preserve' is seen to embody particularly masculine characteristics of competition, aggression and violence. From this perspective the gendered social order in sport emphasises hegemonic heterosexual masculine domination over the feminine seen as unathletic: 'clearly, for at least the past 100 years, the dominant cultural meanings surrounding athletic masculinity have served mostly to stabilise hegemonic masculinity in the face of challenges by women, working-class men, men of colour, and immigrants' (Dworkin and Messner, 2002: 18).

Recent decades have seen a proliferation in approaches and analyses of the relationship between gender and sport particularly from that of feminists that largely mirrors those debates in relation to gender and development. For some feminists sport is a crucial site for political challenges to gendered inequalities: 'Sport is a powerful institution through which male hegemony is constructed and reconstructed and it is only through understanding

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<sup>18</sup> See Cahn (1994) for a similar discussion of medical and psychological claims on the detrimental consequences for the health of women participating in sports.

and confronting these processes that we can hope to break this domination' (Bryson, 1994: 47). Since the 1970s work on the place of women and girls in sports has predominantly emanated from Europe and North America. Liberal feminists have been concerned with expanding access and opportunities for women in sports, and as such approach gender and sport from the perspective of women's greater inclusion and integration through removing the barriers and obstacles to women's participation (Birrell, 2000: 65). On the other side of the debate, radical feminists are critical of the latter approach for ignoring the fundamental role of patriarchal oppression in structuring society through ideologies, institutions and relationships (Messner and Sabo, 1990: 2). Instead they emphasise the importance of transforming the structures of patriarchal oppression and even establishing a separate space for women's participation in sport (Birrell, 2000: 65). From this latter perspective, greater integration into sporting activities serves to perpetuate structures of oppression. Both liberal and radical approaches have been criticised for universalising and essentialising women's experience and treating 'women' in an undifferentiated way (Scruton and Flintoff, 2002: 33). A third perspective comes from socialist feminists who have highlighted the role of capitalism in shaping patriarchal relations, especially in terms of gendering the public and private realms and how these processes continue to reproduce gender inequalities in sport (Messner and Sabo, 1990: 4). However, this view has struggled in theorising the relationship between class and gender and has been criticised for relying on economic determinacy (Scruton and Flintoff, 2002: 36).

A significant body of critical feminist scholarship on gender and sport has developed in recent decades influenced by feminist and postmodernist attempts, to recognise the diversity of women's experiences, and deconstruct the norms and values that underpin notions of femininity and masculinity (Bryson, 1994; Hall, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994; Theberge, 1985). Dworkin and Messner note the irony that sport as 'an institution that has continued to contribute to the reconstruction of hegemonic masculinity throughout the twentieth century has become a key site for the development of a critical feminist scholarship on gender' (2002: 17). Bryson has identified two important aspects of the relationship between sport and masculine hegemony through linking maleness to: i) 'highly valued and visible skills; and ii) the 'positively sanctioned use of violence'. The strength of this relationship leads to the implication of females as possessing inherently oppositional characteristics and therefore 'Negative evaluations of women's capabilities are implicit in the masculine hegemony in which sport is embedded [...] sport crucially privileges males and inferiorises women' who are 'unable to do things that are skilful and valued highly' (Bryson, 1994: 48).

One of the most important contributions to debates on gender and sport is Messner's conceptualisation of sport as 'contested ideological terrain'. In a seminal article he argued:

[w]omen's movement into sport represents a genuine quest by women for equality, control of their bodies, and self-definition, and as such it represents a challenge to the ideological basis of male domination ... this quest for equality is not without contradictions and ambiguities. The social meanings surrounding the physiological differences between the sexes in the male-defined institution of organised sports and the framing of the female athlete by the sports media threaten to subvert any counter-hegemonic potential posed by women athletes. In short, the female athlete – and her body – has become a contested ideological terrain (Messner, 1994: 66).

Despite women's increasing involvement, sport continues to be defined and controlled by men, and either ignored or trivialised by the media, thus, it is argued, maintaining masculine hegemony in sports (Dworkin and Messner, 2002: 20; Bryson, 1994: 51–57; Theberge, 1985: 194). As Willis points out, more participation does not necessarily alter the perspective and power of patriarchal ideology and how sport is viewed by the wider society, which maintains female athletes in the popular consciousness as entirely contrary to male athletes and the male experience of sport, so much so, that, 'To succeed as an athlete can be to fail as a woman, because she has, in certain profound symbolic ways, become a "man"' (1994: 36). Messner argues it is the reliance of patriarchal power on the 'naturalness' of differences between the sexes that makes sport, seen as a site to practise 'natural' skills, 'a potentially powerful public arena for the perpetuation of the ideology of male superiority and dominance' (1994: 68). Messner's concern is to show the relationship between historical ideological meaning and male power through sport. He argues that during periods of masculine crisis, especially when there were significant changes to men's role in the workplace and the family, and during particularly important manifestations of the feminist movement, 'sport has been a crucial arena of struggle over basic social conceptions of masculinity and femininity, and as such has become a fundamental arena of ideological contest in terms of power relations between men and women' (Messner, 1994: 67). Moreover, sport can be a site to contest a number of social inequalities: 'Sport emerges as a primary site for the reproduction of gender relations and hegemonic sexualities as well as a contended space of contradictions and struggles contained in multiple expressions and representations of embodied experience that are marked by sexuality, class, race, ethnicity, (dis)ability, age, nationality, and postcolonial position' (Saavedra, 2009: 438).

Messner's approach then avoids overly idealistic or deterministic understandings of gender and sport that represent either the freedom from social and historical constraint, or domination by cultural ideology. It is a critique therefore to some extent of liberal, radical and socialist feminist approaches, or at least the most polarised aspects of these viewpoints. For Messner, these overly deterministic, idealist and functional approaches fail to grasp,

‘how sport reflects capitalist relations’, while the structuralists’ perspective represents a too ‘simplistic and non-dialectical functionalism’ which views people as passive objects (Messner, 1994: 66).

For Dworkin and Messner, analyses of gender and sport should avoid uncritical, undifferentiated, universalising and essentialising categories of ‘men’ and ‘women’:

Different groups of men and women disproportionately benefit from and pay the costs of the current social organisation of sport. We need an analytical framework that appreciates the importance of class, racial, and sexual differences among both men and women while retaining the feminist impulse that places the need to empower the disadvantaged in the foreground (Dworkin and Messner, 2002: 25).

More recently the theoretical concern with difference and diversity has also come to bear on approaches to gender and sport and led to questions concerning ‘gendered sporting bodies, diverse and fluid identities and the potential of sport to transgress the traditional boundaries of femininity and masculinity’ (Scraton and Flintoff, 2002: 31). Moreover, approaches have sought to deconstruct dichotomous categories of femininity and masculinity and destabilise binary logics to reveal the diversity of women’s subjectivities and identities (Butler, 1990: 23). The centrality of the body to the practice of sport has lent it a particularly important position in the analysis of the ways in which gender and sex operate (Saavedra, 2009: 437). An analysis of gender and sport allows a consideration of the ways in which the body relates to social, cultural, political, and historical factors; ‘In fact, it is the very centrality of the body in sport practice and ideology that provides an opportunity to examine critically and illuminate the social construction of gender’ (Dworkin and Messner, 2002: 17). Through the practice of sport ‘the varied social practices that rest on beliefs and assumptions about physical possibilities, including those of sexual difference, are magnified’ (Saavedra, 2009: 437). However, many feminists still view sport as ‘an embodied practice which can liberate girls and women from a constraining hegemonic feminine ideal’ (Saavedra, 2009: 437).

Theoretical attempts to destabilise binary oppositions have resulted in interesting new directions that have revealed the multiplicity of identities and diversity of experience for women and for men in sport.<sup>19</sup> One outcome of these new directions has been to uncover a key aspect of the maintenance of hegemonic masculinity in sport as the ideology of compulsory heterosexuality. The female sporting image is understood in contrast to that of the strong, aggressive and muscular male. For this reason, Hargreaves argues, women who play traditional male sports face most hostility and suspicion over their sexuality, especially those that express images of physical power and masculinity: ‘The implications that athletes

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<sup>19</sup> Research on female bodybuilders, for instance, has thrown up interesting debates as to the implications for the boundaries of femininity and the transgressive potential of such an activity (see Bolin, 1992; Bordo, 1993).

may be ‘pseudo-men’, ‘unfeminine’, ‘gay’, ‘masculine’, ‘mannish’, ‘butch’, ‘dykes’, or ‘lesbians’ put pressure on heterosexual sportswomen to play the ‘femininity game’ and stigmatise homosexuality’ (1994: 171). Though as Saavedra asserts, the hegemonic social order ‘leaks’ and ‘deviance, resistance and subversion abound’; however, the order responds through attempts to control, disempower and contain the ‘leaks’ (2009: 444). One form of control is to question female athletes’ sexuality as ‘lesbians represent a conscious rejection of the superiority and privilege of men, and thus constitute a threat’ (Saavedra, 2009: 445). The stigmatising effect of the label is a powerful social control that affects all women regardless of their sexuality. However, it is important to remember, as Saavedra asserts that notions of ‘sport-as-male’ and the ‘female-athlete-as-transgressor’ may not have the same power or effects in different historical and cultural settings. For instance, in the mid-twentieth century in African American communities female athleticism was much more positively received than in white middle-class communities (Saavedra, 2009: 445; Cahn, 1994). Saavedra’s own research on women’s basketball in Senegal found questions over women’s physicality related more to economic and social status than sexuality, with the dominant ‘competing femininities’ reflecting the physical hard labour of rural women versus the privileged, urban woman (Saavedra, 2009: 448). Culturally-specific analyses are therefore crucial in understanding the relationship between sport and gender with socially constructed perceptions of femininity and masculinity.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined approaches to gender, youth, and sport in the social sciences in order to situate this study in the broader context of theoretical developments and debates, and to provide a conceptual framework for the subsequent chapters. Feminist and postmodernist contributions have challenged rigid and undifferentiated approaches to gender and identity, and represent an important framework in which to analyse the complexity, diversity and multifaceted nature of young women’s lives. Furthermore, such approaches have been mirrored by theoretical developments in the areas of gender, youth, and gender and sport. The important contribution of feminist scholarship has been to recognise the validity of alternate viewpoints and of centralising their experience. Postmodernist critiques have revealed the essentialising and homogenising conceptions of women as passive victims of wider socio-economic processes that underpin gender and development approaches. These assumptions serve to obscure the differential consequences of these processes amongst and between women and men. Further, they undermine our ability to recognise the ways in which women are not passive in these processes but actively resist.

Through a conception of young people as social actors in their own right and an approach that centralises the previously marginalised voice of young women, the subsequent chapters will demonstrate how such a perspective reveals much about the operations of gender constructs in their lives. Gender identity in Latin America is both fluid and dynamic and historically and culturally specific, however, as this chapter has argued, gendered notions of appropriate spaces and activity for men and women are pervasive in people's lives. Through a close analysis of the everyday lives of a group of young women footballers, I will demonstrate, that even though gender ideologies of appropriate behaviour persist in Nicaragua and gender relations continue to be unequal, these are not uniform and young women also negotiate and resist.

## Methodology

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This chapter presents the methodology of the fieldwork process which was conducted in two phases; between April and July 2007, and between February and September of 2008. The majority of the research took place during training sessions, matches and home visits with the CFF León women's football team. I also carried out interviews with teams in other cities around the country. In addition, I interviewed coaches and FENIFUT representatives, local government officials, academics, students and organisations working with young people such as the *Movimiento Comunal* (MC) that ran a sports social project in a barrio on the outskirts of León. As such it was not a study located in one particular geographical area but spread across and beyond the city of León which fitted my objective to focus on the everyday lives of the players and the similarities and differences between their experiences, rather than the dynamics of a particular location. Pseudonyms are employed throughout to ensure the privacy of research participants except in the cases of official representatives and members of the coaching staff of teams, a subject which will be discussed in greater detail in the section on 'Ethics'.<sup>20</sup>

In the differing contexts I encountered a variety of issues and challenges, some of which I could learn from and negotiate, while others had interesting impacts on the direction of the research. Issues of access were often unique to particular situations and contexts and required a variety of strategies through which to gain the confidence and trust of research participants. Often these strategies were elaborated during the research process and were employed in other contexts. In the following discussion I will address some of these issues and challenges using examples in order to explain how the research process unfolded. Given the subject matter and focus, I want to show just how the complexity of the young women's lives was reflected and affected the research process and my experience.

Following the conceptual approach to this thesis outlined in Chapter Two, the methodological approach of the research was informed by feminist and postmodern theoretical contributions. Feminist theorising in particular has been extremely influential to

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<sup>20</sup> All of the participants were asked if they wished to remain anonymous. While many of the players were unconcerned about the use of their names I felt it was important to ensure their identities remained private.



the research process of this study and in determining the focus and questions of the research.<sup>21</sup> Feminist methodology has been the subject of a great deal of theorising and debate (see for example, Stanley and Wise, 1990; Ribbens and Edwards, 1997; Maynard and Purvis, 1994). Such debates have considered not only research techniques and implementation, but also wider practical, political, and ethical considerations (Maynard and Purvis, 1994: 2; Birch *et al.*, 2002). One fundamental question under consideration in these debates is: what is meant by ‘doing feminist research?’ While there is a consensus as to the existence of feminist modes of enquiry there is no agreement as to a ‘right’ way of doing feminist research or as to what feminist research should constitute (Maynard, 1994: 10). As Kelly *et al.* point out feminist methods of in-depth interviews, grounded theory, ethnography, action research and reflexivity were not created by feminism nor are they exclusive to a feminist approach and instead seems to suggest that ‘what makes research ‘feminist’ is not the methods as such, but the framework within which they are located, and the particular ways in which they are deployed’ (1994: 46). From this perspective this chapter is concerned with exploring the practical experience of ‘doing research’: how data was gathered and how it was analysed. Theory and approaches both shape and are shaped by the realities they attempt to understand and explain (Redclift, 1997: 223). The convergence of postmodern and feminist approaches allows both the deconstruction of norms and assumptions and attention to the diversity and multiplicity of ‘truths’ that exist. Critical perspectives of feminist theorising are especially important in placing female subjectivity at the centre of the analysis and highlights the power dynamics of the research process that include the intrinsic role of the researcher (Maynard, 1994).

The chapter begins with a reflection on the ways in which my own experiences, perspectives and motivations have influenced the approach of this research. I then discuss how I decided which information to gather, the methods I thought were appropriate and the problems I encountered along the way. In particular I examine how research is a dynamic process that requires reflection and re-evaluation and sometimes a complete change in direction. Following this I move on to a discussion of the crucial but also often difficult relationship between the researcher and gatekeeper. In a section on positionality I look more closely at the steps I took to try to ensure I was accepted as a ‘player’ while also mindful of the inevitable differences between myself and those I researched. In a final section on ethics I consider a number of occasions when I was caused to question my ethical position as a researcher and also as a friend to the players, and the difficulties I had in overcoming these differing roles.

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<sup>21</sup> My perspective is to recognise the diversity of feminist standpoints that exist in both theory and practice. However, this research shares the broad concern of feminist theory with placing women’s experience at the centre of the research process (Lengermann and Nebrugge, 1996: 299).

## Reflexivity

Reflexivity is essential to overcoming the preconceptions of the researcher (Davis, 1998: 331). In my case this led me to alter to some extent my research questions. Before embarking on the PhD I had worked for two years in the UK as a youth worker and this experience informed to an extent my choice of subject and methods for the research. With most of the young people I had met as a youth worker it took time to build trust and establish a relationship which gave them the confidence to be open and honest. The only way of achieving this was to spend time with them, listen and show interest in their lives. Through this knowledge I decided that the most productive approach to working with the young women footballers would be to just simply spend time with them, in this case on the football field, travelling to matches and a little later, during visits to their homes. I felt beginning the research by interviewing the girls would be less productive without this closeness. It would also have been unproductive in the sense that I would not have been able to build up a picture of their lives.

As a white English woman in my early 30s I was, in many ways, an 'outsider' to the particular social group I was studying. Apart from cultural and language differences studying young people when one is not young, brings particular problems and barriers to establishing common ground.

I had played football in the UK since the age of eight or nine for local and regional teams and had continued playing at least twice a week until my late teens. Football was a huge part of my life and I had even (unsuccessfully) tried to obtain a scholarship to study and play in the US, however, once I reached my 20s other commitments and interests took over and as is the case with many young people, I gave up playing. It was only when I began the PhD that I started playing again with a local 5-a-side team in Liverpool and realised how much I still enjoyed the game. I had no idea at this point how pivotal this part of my life would be to my research. My experience of working with young people began at undergraduate level when I researched reproductive health and rights and youth in Bolivia for my BA dissertation. After finishing my BA I began working as a volunteer in a youth charity and after a few months got a job as youth worker which lasted two years. Clearly the focus of my research was closely tied and also importantly, coloured, by my personal history.

## Developing a methodology

The questions for the research centred on the importance of the team and football in the young women's lives and my aim was to represent the young women's particular social, economic and political world views. With the subject of my research in mind I then set about selecting an appropriate methodological approach (Deacon, 1999). Given that the subject I wished to investigate concerned the behaviours, attitudes and experiences of the players, I felt qualitative methods were appropriate, especially participant observation and unstructured or semi-structured interviews. I wanted to study the young women's everyday lives, what they did, what they chose to do and what they felt were important aspects of their lives. What was revealed through observation and conversation with the players was the importance of their homes, education and work, as well as the dynamics of the relationships within and between these areas of their lives. Also occupying a place of central importance in their lives was football. By focussing on their daily activities I was able to gain an insight into the issues of importance for them. It also allowed me to study what they did, as well as what they said. These observable practices might not be conscious actions on the part of the women; they were however meaningful to me as they furthered my understanding of the power structures that shape young women's lives and their responses (Geertz, 1972).

I was concerned with how the players, their families, and the wider society understood notions of appropriate gendered behaviour for young women and examined this in a variety of contexts the players identified as important: the football field, the home, work and in education. Meanings and interpretations often are expressed most openly in circumstances when people feel most comfortable and around people they feel comfortable with. Therefore, I understood my biggest challenge would be to become accepted by the group of players so that they would talk openly and willingly. A qualitative approach was chosen as I felt it would allow a greater understanding of the social and cultural processes at work and how they related to gender and youth. I decided a particularly fruitful and enjoyable strategy to build relationships and trust with the team members would be to train and play with the team. This particular ethnographic approach to look at young sportswomen's lives can be described as sport ethnography or 'ethnographic fieldwork that is primarily carried out through active participation in some kind of 'sport'' (Hargreaves, 2006:243). Taking young women footballers as its focus this thesis contributes to a small but growing body of research that emphasises the lives and experiences of sportswomen who have been largely marginalised from mainstream accounts (see Hargreaves, 2006; Bolin and Granskog, 2003). Later in the research I felt it would be appropriate to incorporate unstructured interviews so that I would focus on topics which were perhaps more sensitive or personal to be discussed

in other scenarios. The meanings and values the players and others attach to their lives as young women are complex and require sophisticated theoretical and practical approaches; therefore my research employed a variety of methods.

### Details of those studied:

Full details of those interviewed for this study are available in Appendix One. As not all participants studied were interviewed, here I shall provide details of how many people from different categories took part in this research. From CFF León there were 21 squad players some of whom were interviewed but all of whom, at some point and to different degrees, were part of this research. For the 2008 season there were eight teams with a potential of up to 180 players involved in matches throughout the season. Five officials were studied including FENIFUT representatives and team coaches. Nineteen relatives and friends were studied, including sisters, brothers, partners, and by far the largest category, mothers. Whilst in Mexico for the Under-20 World Cup Qualifying Competition, I specifically studied three of the competing teams: Cuba, Canada and Mexico, including interviews with each of the coaches and seven players in total from the three teams. I also accompanied the Nicaragua squad, which included 21 players and a technical team of four, to each of their matches. Two representatives from the Alcaldía de León (León local government) were included in the research.

### Playing football and talking to the players

Participant observation is an oxymoron...Participation implies being a part of the events one is studying; observation implies detachment, even invisibility. As a foreigner at least one head taller and several shades paler than most *norestinos*, or north-easterners, I was especially visible. (Hecht, 1998:6)

Like Hecht I struggled with the notion of the participant observer as somehow impartial and invisible. As a regular player on the team I was an extremely active participant with a common bond to the players. However, with my red hair, pale skin and – even at 5'3" – relatively tall stature, compared to the majority of the other players there was little chance of my identity blending with those of the others and being 'invisible'. Playing football with the young women was a great way of building a relationship with them and being 'accepted' but it was physically exhausting and certainly not a mode of enquiry I could sustain for many more years! But being part of the team gave me the opportunity to observe at close quarters just how committed the players were to each tackle, block or pass. Hecht's experience of researching street children in Recife, Brazil, is one shared in my own experience with the football team.

My research was primarily centred on the lives of my teammates who were geographically located in different areas of León, or even from outside of León, in Corinto and Managua. The research sites were the training pitch or at matches, and in the players' homes and neighbourhoods. Matches took me to cities and towns throughout the Northern Pacific side of the country. I also met players from other teams usually at their training sessions. Part of the research took me to Mexico where I interviewed players from other nations. I spent time at the headquarters of the Nicaraguan Football Federation in Managua and with local government officials in León. The research was spread throughout a national and international network and therefore took a 'multi-sited' approach to gathering data. As Gupta and Ferguson argue, the 'field' is no longer bounded and arguably never was (1997: 3). Processes of globalisation and development extend across territories and cultures and a multi-sited approach allows for a more fluid and relevant approach to understanding these influences in people's lives. In addition, it is important to recognise that the lives of those researched similarly crossed boundaries. Processes of development and economic restructuring have impacted on the players' lives and those of Nicaraguans generally. Migration had had fundamental effects on each of the households I entered both economically and socially.

## **The dynamics of the research process**

The research objectives for the first phase of fieldwork were centred on investigating young peoples' political participation in civil society organisations. Given the large proportion of young people in Nicaragua and the centrality of this section of the population to the country's development, I was interested in understanding whether, where and how young people participated in political decision-making. I decided to focus my research in León, Nicaragua's second city, as research on young people tended to focus on the capital Managua. León has a strong political history and with seven universities it has a young population. During this four month period I contacted political parties, community groups, NGOs, universities, and more by chance than design, local sports teams. I carried out interviews with youth representatives from the two most popular political parties in León and nationally: the Sandinista Youth (JS) and the PLC. I attended various meetings organised by the JS, including strategy meetings concerned with '*Yo Si Puedo*' the recent national literacy campaign that the JS was supporting. I made contacts with community groups, such as the MC, and NGOs concerned with youth and participation. Through these groups I was able to gain access to other civil society organisations and gain a broad picture of civil society organisations that engaged with or represented young people. Though my research changed dramatically to looking at the women's football team, these different

organisations and the contacts I was able to make were important throughout my fieldwork. I was able to use my knowledge of the civil society networks and contacts at the MC and research one of their community sports projects.

Following this preliminary research trip it had become obvious that formal organisations for young people, such as political groups, community groups and NGOs, were less relevant to the majority of Nicaraguan youth in terms of the numbers participating in such groups. Instead, what was most interesting in this first phase of fieldwork was my contact with the women's football team. I had met the coach by chance in a hotel bar in the city and began training with the team most afternoons but I was not able to play in matches as I was awaiting international clearance – a situation which gave me an interesting insight into the painfully slow progress and action or rather inaction of FENIFUT. The transfer did not happen on this first trip but I watched the matches, home and away. The crowded journey in the minibus to away matches with 17 or 18 people crammed into what was a 15-seater bus, certainly allowed me intimate access to the players' banter, chat, their musical tastes and the regular seating arrangements which I learnt reflected the friendship groups on the team. Gradually I felt they began to become accustomed to me, I was becoming less of a stranger. I also put together a revised research proposal. Those initial three to four months represented a period of huge uncertainty for my research and I began to look around for other projects should the league be cancelled and the team therefore fall apart. Personally, it also represented a period of great stress as I worried about the progress of my project and having to – as it seemed to me at the time – start all over again. On reflection, during this period I made interesting and varied contacts and friends that augmented my research topic as I will discuss further below.

The choice of case study came about through a combination of chance and the realisation of a unique and interesting opportunity to access a group of young women who would ordinarily often be overlooked in academic research. Research on youth in Latin America, until more recently, has tended to focus on the more spectacular and visible manifestations of their experiences and behaviour, such as gangs and street children. This group of young women shared many of the challenges common to young people more generally in Nicaragua in terms of reproductive and productive responsibilities and the opportunities available to them in education and paid work. Their participation on the football team allowed an analysis of a leisure pursuit uncommon and less accepted generally in Nicaraguan society for young women and potentially challenging to notions of appropriate gendered behaviour. Secondly, I recognised that my own interest in the sport represented an effective way of establishing a common bond and to therefore build relationships with the players. Though the initial contact with the players was predominantly

on the football field, as time went on and relationship bonds grew stronger, I increasingly had opportunities to access other areas of their everyday lives, at home and at work to build a more general picture of their everyday lives.

The pace of my research I felt was often dictated by external influences. My intention upon arrival in February 2008 had been to use my position as a team member to research the players' lives. I hoped that at training sessions and matches I would gradually be able to build relationships and trust with the team members, which would allow me access to other areas of their lives, such as home, work, friendships, socialising. However, the first three months of the research were a period of increasing frustration as the start of the league competition was delayed repeatedly by FENIFUT as they prepared to take the national team to Mexico, and deliberated whether or not to have a league competition that year. Each week different messages came out of Managua, some demanding that teams formalise their paperwork to register for the new season and others hinting that the league would be scrapped altogether. The León team continued to train, but intermittently, and numbers, as well as enthusiasm were low. This made my work of settling in with the players extremely difficult. Additionally in March, there was a nationwide transport strike for nearly two weeks which was closely followed by the Easter holidays when each year the whole country stops for holy week. These logistical issues were frustrating and worrying, as I began to think that the league would not take place and I would have to change my research project entirely.

During the research the majority of contact with the players came at training sessions. The team trained four afternoons a week and these sessions were useful for observing their level of enjoyment, dedication and engagement on a daily basis with playing football. There were occasions during the sessions that arguments arose between the players or between the players and the coach which were again instructive. When training was moved to the university sports ground, there were a number of opportunities to take note of public attitude to women footballers as local boys would sit and watch quietly or on occasion shout various comments on the abilities of the players. But perhaps the most fruitful periods of the training sessions for insights into the players' thoughts and lives was the time before and after the sessions when we would sit together under the shade of a tree and change into our football boots ready to begin. At these points the players would catch up on their day's activities, events and happenings. After the sessions the players would linger and chat before walking home together.

I visited the players in their homes in León, and further away in Corinto and Managua. Not only did this help me understand how they lived and to become more familiar

with their lives, just as importantly, I became more familiar to them. I soon realised that by consistently making an effort to be part of their lives was something that brought us closer. This was first noticeable when I had returned for the second phase of the research. I had worried that making two trips to the field may undermine the relationships I had built, but on returning for the second trip I realised that the players really appreciated that I had come back and we immediately picked up friendships again.

One particular player, Claudia, had decided to leave the team to look for full-time work. She was one of the older players in the squad and I think this had helped us to become closer quicker than with some of the others. When she left the team I was worried it would be difficult to maintain contact but instead we became closer and she was a regular visitor to my house. I was even able to pay her for some transcription work while she was in between jobs. She became one of my best resources for information and clarification on issues to do with the team and the players. But this also caused me to feel uncomfortable with this situation and I felt that in some ways our friendship was based on unequal terms, that I was using her for information, information that I would use for my career but which would not necessarily aid her own interests or progress. Perhaps this was one of the reasons why when I left I decided to offer Claudia funding for her university studies. She had spoken of her intention to go to university and she was trying to get the money together through her work, but as the pay was so poor it would be a very slow process. When I left I offered to pay for her to take the entrance exam and pay living costs on a monthly basis.

Once I had got to know the players well at training and through visits to their homes I decided to spend time with them individually in order to focus on more personal topics and particular areas of their lives. I decided that I could not capture their voices and the impact of their words sufficiently through note-taking alone, and towards the latter stages of the research began meeting the players individually and recording our conversations. As my objective was to build up a detailed picture of the similarities and differences between the player's experiences and attitudes I used the interviews to focus on particular themes. There were a number of problems trying to meet the players. Some found it difficult to find time away from their other responsibilities at home, work or to their studies. Commonly I would arrange to meet them at the training ground before the session. Meeting them in their homes created problems as it was often difficult to find a space where we were not interrupted or overheard by other members of the families, which meant it was difficult to discuss more sensitive issues. The training ground became the best location for meeting the girls because meeting in the city meant they would have to make a special trip and they had little funds to afford the bus fare. On the few occasions I met players in cafes in the centre the noise of buses and cars passing by outside often literally drowned out their voices. On the football



field there was little disturbance and our presence went unnoticed by the other students going to and from classes. I made the interview location and setting as accessible to the players as possible.

Whilst in Mexico for the Under-20 World Cup qualifying tournament I carried out interviews with coaches and players from Mexico, Cuba and Canada. None of the interviews had been arranged before the tournament so I relied on approaching the team coaches directly to explain my project and secure their co-operation, which they were all happy to do. Except for the Canada team all the interviews were on the spot which meant working under pressure to get the most out of the opportunity. For instance, the interview with the Mexican team coach was carried out on the team bus as they travelled back to their hotel. The players interviewed were selected either by the coaches or simply according to who was available. Over a four day period I managed to complete twelve interviews with players and coaches either in hotel receptions or in their rooms.

The approach to interviewing the players was to put their experiences at the centre of enquiry. My aims were to investigate the meanings young women attach to playing football and also understand the challenges and opportunities of other areas of their lives. For them to talk freely about their experiences I felt it was important to keep the questions as open as possible and framed the discussion around broad subject areas. When talking about potentially sensitive topics such as sexuality the subject was proposed indirectly allowing the interviewee to discuss their own experiences or those of others. Of course, it is not always clear what topics people will find sensitive but by paying close attention to body language and responses it is possible to adjust the subject where necessary.

## Access and gatekeepers

My gatekeeper and access point to the team was the team coach, and managing my relationship with him was a constant negotiation. I was aware that his position in the team and the relationship he had with the players was often one of conflict. For me to gain the respect and trust of the players it was essential that they did not perceive me as part of the coaching hierarchy of the team or as the Coach's ally (in a sense). Instead I attempted to distance myself from the coach and integrate as one of the team members. My strategy in achieving this was to follow the players' behaviour and actions, to 'hang around' after training when they did so, for instance, and to involve myself in the practice as they did. I realised the strategy was successful when the players would complain to me about the Coach's actions and decisions and at that point I knew I had gained their trust.

The *Movimiento Comunal* is a community based organisation that runs a variety of projects with people of all ages, but especially with young people. They run the largest (in terms of numbers of participants) projects for young people in the department of León and in the city. Of particular interest was a sports project in a relatively new barrio on the outskirts of the city. Two of the players (Lizbet and Susana) lived in the barrio and had begun their football careers playing in the league - the only female players to have done so. Matches were played every evening and on a number of occasions I went along to watch and talk to some of the players involved. However, because of safety concerns of the organiser of the league, Walter, I always had to be escorted by Walter's son. He and his son represented both gatekeeper and escort and I felt this possibly gave me a skewed picture of people's opinions of the sports project and the MC. In order to negotiate this issue I asked Susana to meet me on a day I knew the organisers would not be present and she was able to introduce me to a number of the young men who were watching and playing.

## **Positionality**

When I arrived for the second phase of fieldwork I immediately made contact with the manager of CFF León and began training with the team. However, during the initial three months of the research there were doubts over whether the league would take place at all and consequently also put my research into question. During this time training continued but with six members of the team absent as they were training with the Under-20 national squad in Managua. Additionally, *Semana Santa* followed by a national transport strike caused further disruption and attendance at training continued to be low. These set-backs had a fundamental effect on my approach and I began to recognise that it was those players who were able to attend most regularly that would be the focus of my research. Very simply, they were the players that I was able to build the closest relationships with. This situation changed and I was able to spend more time with the rest of the team once the league got underway in May, but the players I initially started with on the team remained those I was most familiar and had a closer relationship with. In this sense, the research process was dictated by 'outside' influences, but those influences were the same as those affecting the everyday lives of the players, they too were pushed into closer relations with those around them by broader circumstances.

Sport ethnography is a small and specialised area of research usually requiring particular sporting expertise, but it does offer unique opportunities and challenges for the researcher. The common goal you share with those you are researching can offer unprecedented levels of access and intimacy with those you research. Unlike common

ethnographic methods of observation, sport ethnography for the researcher is an intensely personal experience:

...one of the unique features of sport ethnography is that, within the microcosmic structure of the game, the anthropologist is as much a 'player' as everyone else. She has a stake in the outcome, and the other players have a stake in her performance. This situation is rare in ethnographic fieldwork, where it is more likely that the anthropologist is an alienated observer who pops in to extract enough 'data' to build a professional career, and then returns home to exploit it (Brownell, 2006:251).

While I agree with Brownell that having a 'stake' in the game does mean a greater personal investment by the researcher and between the researcher and those studied, in my own research I felt uneasy that even though or even because of a greater level of trust and bond with the players, it meant my research was even more exploitative of their lives. I am still uneasy with the idea that a greater level of intimacy with those studied in some way is more legitimate than other more distant relations.

Conversely, as Brownell points out, because of the personal investment of being a 'player' there is the risk that the researcher is less objective and unable to distance themselves, 'Sports participation, especially at a high level, demands that the participant live very much within the moment. To convert this into social scientific analysis involves an almost painful process of detachment.' (2006:252). In my research there were moments when my feelings and emotions converged with those of my team mates but also times when I was too involved and too emotionally and physically charged to observe and analyse the situation around me.

There were obvious differences between my identity and those of the players which no matter how involved in the lives of the players or how much we shared a common goal could be made less visible. I was at least ten years older than most of the players, though I look younger which did help to bridge this gap to an extent. But I am pale skinned, red haired and was assumed by most strangers to be North American. In fact, I realised that many of the players on the team had supposed I was German. I discovered this by chance when the coach, angry about some particular exercise in a training session began to shout crossly in German. One of the players turned to me and asked what he was saying and I explained I did not speak German; amazingly this was some four or five months into the research. Partly the misunderstanding was due to the fact that there had been at least one

woman from Germany who had played for the team in the past; it also reflected the lack of consideration on the part of the players as to my nationality and identity.<sup>22</sup>

A more subtle and yet constant reminder of difference was the comments my teammates would often make on the clothes I wore, or the trainers I used to practice in. They were not expensive for the UK but they were not available in Nicaragua so the players assumed they must be more fashionable and expensive. I would usually explain that they were old (which they were) or not so fashionable in England and complement the fashion in Nicaragua. But on reflection this was an example of the differences the players noticed between themselves and me. On one occasion at a *futsal* tournament I arrived wearing a cap – essential in the harsh tropical heat – and Abril commented a number of times that she really liked it and it was unusual. The next occasion she wanted to try it and I decided to give it to her as a gift. When she turned up for the match on the following Sunday she was wearing the cap proudly and it was passed around the bus for others to try.

The distance in wealth restricted the ways the players socialised with each other and also the opportunities I had to socialise with them. Bars and cafes were beyond their means except on rare occasions. In addition, public spaces in Nicaragua are highly gendered and bars are predominantly masculine environments. If I wanted to meet them away from their homes or football I would offer to buy them coffee or lunch, but I was never sure whether they were comfortable with this. I decided that meeting them at the football field before or after training was where they felt most comfortable talking one-to-one.

## **Ethics**

My own identity as a white, female, western, older, bisexual woman raised a number of ethical considerations in relation to my research approach and my relationships with those I worked with. A few examples will help explain how this was manifested. Firstly, even though a PhD student could not be said to be well off by any stretch of the imagination, my funding did mean that I was much wealthier than those I played alongside in the team. Towards the end of the research Verónica had seemed upset and anxious at training and explained that she did not have the funds to pay for her course tuition fees. She had missed classes through illness and had lost her job for the same reason; with only a few months of the course left she had been told by the college that unless she paid she would have to repeat the year, which also meant finding funding for another year. The amount she needed was

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<sup>22</sup> By this I do not wish to imply that the players should have been more concerned about my background - indeed some players were curious about the details of my life. Instead it possibly reflected the players' undifferentiated view of *extranjeras* or foreigners.

around £40 - £50 and I offered to pay the fees for her. She insisted she would pay me back and in the end I agreed she could pay me in instalments, although I had no intention of asking for the money. I had considered that giving her the money might mean other players might ask but as I was at the end of the fieldwork and just a few weeks from leaving, I decided it would not be too much of a problem or affect my relationship with them or the other players. In fact, just a week later Rosa came to me for money so that she could travel back to Estelí. The amount was tiny, just a few dollars, and she promised to pay me back but again I did not expect her too. Had it have been earlier in the research I would have been placed in a much more awkward position. It would have been difficult to not help with the fees but I would have been worried about how I was perceived by the players.

Throughout the research I was aware that some of the players on the team, though not self-identified or identified to me, were lesbians and this often caused me to consider whether it would be appropriate to explain and be open about my own sexuality. I felt that perhaps by being open with the players they might feel more comfortable to speak openly themselves. Sharing such intimate knowledge may have deepened our friendships and allowed them the opportunity to express themselves more freely. But such positive consequences were tempered by a number of doubts. I feared that being open might affect my relationship with the players and therefore my research but to prioritise the success of my research over such an important topic seemed cowardly to me. I decided the best way to progress would be to allow the players themselves to dictate the knowledge they wished to share as I had in my general approach to the research. One incident proved my fears when a parent threatened to withdraw her daughter from the team because of her friendship with another player she said was a lesbian. The level of fear and homophobia was reinforced during my interview with a representative from FENIFUT. She explained that there had been numerous cases of parents removing their daughters from the *concentraciones*, or national team training camps, because they thought they were being 'preyed' upon by lesbians in the national squads. It is a strange and uncomfortable experience to have to hide certain important parts of your life - to the point of having to lie about the gender of your partner - to people you respect and trust. Had I not been researching the players as well as building friendships then I would not have hidden such an important aspect of my life.

The choice of a case study focussed research and the use of in-depth unstructured interviews were essential in this thesis to understand the subjective meanings and experiences of the players involved. Furthermore, such a methodological strategy was necessary to reveal a more holistic picture of everyday life for these young women often overlooked in social science research, 'Attention to narratives within research can be understood as congruent with a wish to develop methodologies that give a voice to the most

marginalised groups within society' (Elliott, 2005: 144). One of the key ethical issues in social science research is the problem of preserving individuals' anonymity or confidentiality and it is likely that in case-study research, even when pseudonyms are used and some details are changed, individuals will be able to recognise themselves and will be recognised by friends and family (Elliott, 2005: 142). In-depth interviews encourage individuals to provide personal, detailed narratives of their lives and therefore entail more ethical considerations than other research methods. The use of pseudonyms for the players and the players' families in this research is a reflection of one strategy I employed to solve the problem of confidentiality, however given the details they provided it is possible that they could be identified by themselves and others close to them. Before beginning the research and carrying out interviews I was careful to ensure that the participants were fully aware, in terms meaningful to them, of the implications of their participation and the purpose of the research. Furthermore, as the research progressed I constantly reflected on the information I was gathering and made choices as to what data should be included or omitted in order to preserve the confidentiality of the participants. Feminist research emphasises the importance of context when considering moral choices and points out that ethical dilemmas cannot all be anticipated:

Ethical dilemmas in fieldwork seem less to do with informed consent and more to do with overlapping roles, relationships and the interests, expectations, allegiances and loyalties of parties concerned. In the immediacy of personal involvement in a particular ethical dilemma, situational or contextual, personal elements come into play (values, ideals, moral, professional and personal standards, intuition and feelings) (delaine, 2000: 17).

I realised that though informed consent was an essential starting point in gathering data for this research, my responsibility to the participants had to involve a continual process of understanding and reflection, both of my own personal feelings and attitudes as well as those of the players, their families and all those who participated.

## **Conclusion**

This chapter has examined the methodological approach of the fieldwork process. As such I have outlined the opportunities and obstacles I encountered and the negotiations and flexibility that are a necessary part of the research process. I have highlighted the importance of recognising the role of my own identity, experiences and value-systems as well as those of the research participants. Understanding differences amongst young women and the differential ways in which they interpret their lives is integral to the approach of this. Bearing in mind the complexity of people's lives and the influence of the researcher's own

perspective the following chapters are not an attempt to generalise gendered meanings and experiences, but instead to offer greater insight into the diversity of young women's realities.

## From Sandinismo to Danielismo: Examining political and economic change in Nicaragua

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[W]e were learning how to develop ourselves, learning to recognize our rights, to know that we women, we mothers aren't only some object, that we serve not only for working in the house making tortillas, washing, ironing, or for our husbands telling us when we could come and go, if they think well of us, if we can organise ourselves or not...[We organise]...so that a women won't be so dependent on her husband...[W]e help [members]...so that they understand that they are important, so that they understand that they are human beings, that they are equal to men, that we can struggle with our heads held high so that some man doesn't tell us what we should do (Interview, Doña Esperanza Committee member of Mothers of Matagalpa in Bayard De Volo, 2003: 103).

Above all, according to the general perspective that exists, it's the woman that was born only to be in the house, to be the housewife, to be the cleaner of your house. That you have to cook, you have to look after the children, that you have to wash the clothes, you have to iron...this. It's like, above all, the woman has been conditioned for this. But me no, I don't think like that, really, it is how one lives in this society, that the woman doesn't have any space, that the woman can't speak. It's the man who always has to say. So, I don't like this, but I can't go against everyone (Interview. Rosa, age 21, CUUN Leon player, 31.07.08).<sup>23</sup>

This chapter will examine the economic and political situation in Nicaragua from the dynastic rule of the Somozas, followed by revolutionary success and failure, the subsequent shift to a neoliberal agenda and the return of Daniel Ortega. Particular attention will be paid to gender policy both during the Sandinista period and afterwards, as well as assessing women's economic opportunities in contemporary Nicaragua, and the ways in which they are circumscribed by notions of appropriate gender roles. As the two quotes above demonstrate, what was, and is, at stake for women in Nicaragua, is a battle against deeply entrenched and widely held perceptions of appropriate gender roles that have concrete material, social and emotional consequences for women of all ages. Both women stress the importance of expanding the space available to them beyond the boundaries of domestic responsibilities and reject the idea that they should not be able to make decisions for themselves on an equal footing with men. However, it is hard to ignore Rosa's resignation at her inability to challenge the role she perceives Nicaraguan society has established for her; hers really does sound like a lonely voice, aware of the restrictions she faces, but also unable to alter them. Contrast this with the strength Doña Esperanza clearly derives from the

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<sup>23</sup> Más que todo, según pues desde la perspectiva que hay es que la mujer nació solo para estar en la casa, para ser ama de casa, para ser la empleada de tu casa. De que tenés que cocinar, tenés que cuidar los hijos, de que tenés que lavar las ropas, tenés que planchar...eso. O sea, más que todo, la mujer como sea condicionada para eso. Pero yo no, o sea, no pienso así, realmente es así como se vive en esa sociedad, como que la mujer no tiene tanto espacio, como que la mujer no puede hablar. Es el hombre quien siempre tiene que decir, entonces no me gusta eso, pero yo no puedo ir en contra de todo el pueblo (Interview, Rosa, CFF León player, 31.07.08). ('tenés' is local dialect for 'you have').



knowledge that she is part of an organisation with common perceptions and goals, and the positive feeling of having achieved at least some of those objectives. Experience of revolutionary mobilisation did alter perceptions of gender for many women and men, but young women in Nicaragua today still face many of the same restrictions the women's movement sought to undermine. Gendered power relations remain unequal. However, young women today are aware of the challenges they face and have developed strategies to contest or even circumvent, the structures that would limit their hopes and expectations. In this chapter I will provide a context for the thesis through an analysis of economic and political change in Nicaragua over the last thirty years, with particular attention to the gendered implications of policy and employment opportunities for women.

This chapter has two main objectives: i) to give an overview of economic and political change in Nicaragua since the 1930s and therefore provide a historical and contextual backdrop for the theoretical and empirical analysis of the thesis; and ii) to examine gender policy in the revolutionary and post-revolutionary periods, with particular attention to women's employment opportunities.

## **US intervention, Sandino and Somocismo**

Economically and politically, the US played a key role in Nicaragua and US military operations in the small Central American nation were central to the success of Somocismo. First with Zelaya in 1909, and then with Sandino in 1927-1933, US intervention effectively destroyed any national movement that could have changed the political landscape in Nicaragua, 'By 1934, the only political actors left in the country were those sections of the Liberal and Conservative oligarchy who had collaborated with the US' (Baracco, 2005: 56). According to Paige, US intervention to oust Zelaya had three long-term consequences for Nicaragua: i) unsuccessful attempts to ensure regimes friendly to US interests and opposed to Zelayist Liberals, which in practice meant support for Conservatives who had little backing from the general population; ii) an emphasis on taking control of key parts of the economy away from the Nicaraguan government, and the Liberal coffee elite and into the hands of US bankers; and iii) the creation of 'a new constabulary, the Nicaraguan National Guard, organised and initially officered by United States Marines. Eventually these three initiatives became institutionalised in the Somoza dictatorship' (Paige, 1997: 165). Also emphasising the role of the US, Baracco points out that much of the state-building undertaken during the 1940s and 1950s was US-sponsored: 'from the National Guard, to the reformed banking system, to new electoral laws and the bi-cameral structures of the Nicaraguan Congress and the developmental agencies of the 1960s' (2005: 57).

Under the Presidency of José Santos Zelaya, the leader of the Liberal party in Nicaragua between 1893 and 1909, coffee exports - the country's most important commodity - doubled. Zelaya had stepped-up development of the coffee agro-export economy through cash subsidies to growers, free shipment on the country's railways, and through a system of forced labour and debt servitude (Paige, 1997: 157). The result of this strategy was the increasing concentration of wealth and lands predominantly amongst Liberal and Conservative elite families and the exploitation of a dependent labour force, 'The Liberal reforms created the pattern of monocultural agro-export production by large landed estates dependent on impoverished wage labourers that was a characteristic feature of twentieth century Nicaraguan agriculture and a principle cause of the Sandinista revolution in 1979' (Paige, 1997: 157). Zelaya also pursued a policy open to foreign investment, especially the US which led many of those elites with domestic interests to label him a sell-out as he granted concessions to US interests in exchange for developing certain areas of the economy (Paige, 1997: 159). Though Zelaya's relationship with the US came to a head over the formers reluctance to grant the latter rights to build a canal linking the Pacific and Atlantic coasts of Nicaragua, Paige argues it would be wrong to conclude that this strategic issue was the primary motivation for US intervention in 1910. That the US supported militarily the Conservative-led ousting of Zelaya had more to do with the former Presidents reluctance to concede whole-heartedly to US economic interests and demands, 'while the United States was concerned about its military and political dominance in the region and the defence of the canal, these concerns were inextricably tied with its emerging economic power' (Paige, 1997: 165).

Economic power was cemented through the US strategy of 'dollar diplomacy', an approach to foreign policy that aimed to replace bullets with bank notes and ensure US political and economic hegemony (Paige, 1997: 166). In order to maintain the support of the US the anti-Zelayists agreed to accept loans from American banks part of which was to be used to set up a National Bank controlled by North American Bankers. This arrangement also gave them control of the sale of coffee exports and loans to coffee growers, essentially 'the North Americans gained complete control over Nicaragua's principal export'. The crisis of the 1930s had removed the power of direct rule from the coffee elites and transferred it to a dynastic dictatorship in Nicaragua (Paige, 1997: 180).

Between 1927 and 1937 Augusto César Sandino led a guerrilla campaign to force the withdrawal of US military from Nicaragua (Walker, 1991b: 7). Sandino at first joined, and then became leader of, the Liberal insurrection. Above all he was a nationalist and anti-imperialist who mobilised not against capitalism but North American capitalism with an

ideology based on 'anti-Yankee nationalism' (Paige, 1997: 172). Sandino was effective in eventually forcing the complete withdrawal of marines in 1933, following the realisation in the US that the 'Marines themselves became the single most important stimulus to the movement they were sent to end' (Paige, 1997: 174). An ironic consequence of Sandino's success was to force the US to rethink their strategy towards achieving regional hegemony. Rather than direct military intervention, regional dominance would be the result of 'the centralisation and rationalisation of state institutions, increasing their overall administrative and coercive capacity ... Somocismo was to preside over this process ... At times a benevolent, at times murderous, the over-riding objective of Somozismo remained the serving of US interests in the region' (Baracco, 2005: 59).

In elections overseen by the US in 1932 Sacasa was sworn in as President just days before the last Marines were withdrawn (Walker, 1991: 20). Satisfied that his main objective - the removal of US presence from Nicaragua had been achieved - Sandino signed a peace agreement in February, 1933 and his army of 2,600 laid down their weapons leaving the National Guard, who had been trained by the US and were now led by Anastasio Somoza García, as the only significant military force in the country. Sacasa was viewed as politically inept and could not oppose Somozas pretensions to the presidency. On February 21<sup>st</sup>, 1934 Somoza ordered the killing of Sandino who was taken to the airport in Managua and shot. By January 1937, Somoza had overthrown Sacasa signalling the start of dynastic rule that would last until 1979 (Paige, 1997: 174). Given that his own party, the Liberals, opposed Somozas candidacy and he faced a united opposition of Liberals, Conservatives and the US who supported Leonardo Argüello as the sole presidential candidate, Somoza had little chance of gaining the presidency through constitutional means. Instead he used the force of the National Guard to attack the presidential palace and force the surrender of Sacasa (Baracco, 2005: 53). Satisfied with Somoza's assurances to guarantee their interests the US chose not to intervene. Indeed, Somocismo can be characterised according to Baracco as a 'modernisation process linked to US geo-political interests' (2005: 57).

The Somoza dynasty that would last almost 50 years was assured through the careful cultivation of specific areas of domestic and international support and an 'astute combination of cooptation and repression' (Paige, 1997: 28). The 'formula' developed by Anastasio Somoza García between 1937 and 1956, came to characterise that of the entire dynasty: to 'maintain the support of the guard, cultivate the Americans, and co-opt important domestic power contenders' (Walker, 1991: 26). To this end the National Guard were encouraged to be corrupt and exploitative which would therefore isolate them from the general population, 'rather than being a professional national police and military force, the

guard was a sort of Mafia in uniform, which served simultaneously as the personal bodyguard of the Somoza family' (Walker, 1991: 26).

Somoza García's regime consistently backed US foreign policy and established US military bases in Nicaragua during the Second World War. Despite an emphasis on expanding the family's personal fortune, Somoza was able to maintain the support of domestic elites through his encouragement of economic growth through exports and respect for the human rights and freedoms of at least the privileged few (Walker, 1991: 28). Somoza reformed the political system to make it more favourable to the Liberal party but also ensured the Conservatives were represented and would therefore act as a 'loyal opposition' (Baracco, 2005: 53). Somoza brought municipal and national government institutions under presidential control and reorganised ministries so that the state played a greater role in the regulation of the economy however, 'the administrative-regulatory capacity of the state continued to be limited by political factors. Patronage was still extensive in the public sector, with family ties and political affiliations being as important as professional competence in the allocation of posts' (Baracco, 2005: 54). By 1956 he had amassed a fortune in the region of US\$50 million but the reliance on the exploitation of the general population led to growing resentment that culminated in his assassination by the young poet Rigoberto López Pérez (Walker, 1991: 27). Rather than signalling an opportunity for political parties to play a stronger role in Nicaraguan politics, it was instead Somoza García's eldest son Luis who took over from his father, while the youngest son continued as head of the National Guard, suppressing any possible opposition to the dynastic handover (Walker, 1991: 28). Luis' decade of power, between 1957 and 1967, is described by Walker as an 'era of cosmetic liberalisation' (1991: 29). Luis made pretensions to 'democratic politics' and attempted to modernise the Liberal party upon which he relied far more heavily than his predecessor for support. Similarly, in contrast to his father, he concentrated on consolidating rather than expanding the family business. However, power remained centralised and political parties weak and he maintained power through rigged elections, while attempts at job creation only expanded bureaucracy and concentrated wealth amongst the privileged. Luis died in 1967 of a heart attack and despite his attempts to constitutionally disallow it, his younger brother Anastasio took power through rigged elections and ushered in an altogether more violent and repressive regime (Walker, 1991: 29).

In contrast to his brother Luis, who had to some extent garnered political support and surrounded himself with skilled administrators, Anastasio relied heavily on the military might of the National Guard and a coterie of cronies and allies whom he wished to co-opt, exploiting 'public office for personal enrichment' (Walker, 1991: 30). The consequences of

changes to the agro-export economy of Nicaragua in the 1960s created the particular context through which a successful revolutionary movement would develop. Of Nicaraguan exports during the 1950s and 1960s agricultural and forestry products represented 88 per cent of the total value (Winters, 1964: 501). The expansion of cotton and cattle for export helped to destroy the 'oligarchic-dictatorial' alliance that had sustained the Somoza's exalted position in Nicaragua, 'The coffee export economy created the oligarchic political structure of Central America; cotton and cattle destroyed them' (Paige, 1997: 31). The consequences of economic expansion in cotton and cattle had been devastating for the majority rural population throughout Central America who were forced off the land and displaced to the city to make way for this new expansion of agro-exports and increasing mechanisation, creating a new semi-proletariat and urban informal sector who would be the vanguard of popular insurrection (Paige, 1997: 29). Winters, writing in 1964, identified the concentration of land ownership as one of the major problems facing agricultural production on the country with 42 per cent of farmland owned by just 1.6 per cent of landholders (Winters, 1964: 501). Not only was land concentrated it was also inefficiently utilised with a tendency for urban dwelling commercial or professional men to buy agricultural land about which they had little knowledge or expertise. In contrast, subsistence farmers lacked machinery, credit and sufficient land to produce for a profit (Winters, 1964: 502). Nicaragua was highly dependent on agricultural commodities for development in other sectors and while rising world prices in the early 1950s, meant a boon for the country's principal crops of cotton and coffee, prices fell later in the decade with consequences for the 'overall economic condition of the country' (Winters, 1964: 503). Politically in the country there was little change in policy as consecutive Liberal governments came to power between 1893 till 1979 continuing an exploitative agro-export system. As the landed-elite capitalised on the growing international demand for primary products especially coffee, cotton and cattle the country faced severe class polarisation and exploitation. Under the Somoza's cotton production meant the mass displacement of peasant farmers during the 1950s, leading to increasing impoverishment for the growing population, less food produced for domestic consumption, increasing infant mortality rates, illiteracy rates and low life expectancy (Walker, 1997: 4).

By 1970, Anastasio Somoza's authority and legitimacy appeared fragile as the levels of corruption and repression of the regime became increasingly apparent. The 1972 earthquake in Managua, which devastated the city and killed 10,000, was seized upon by Somoza as yet another opportunity to benefit himself and his cronies. International funds were channelled into his and his allies' bank accounts through the self-awarding of government contracts. Somoza awarded himself 80 per cent of the construction contracts while only a fraction were completed (Rogers, 2008: 106). The National Guard were allowed to sell relief goods on the

black market and loot the commercial sector. With funds embezzled and reconstruction mishandled or even nonexistent, there was mounting criticism and discontent amongst the general population, manifested through strikes and protests. In addition, Somoza was crucially losing the support of the economic elite who had been sidelined from the financial gains through Somoza's own expansion into construction and banking (Walker, 1991: 31).

Somoza's authority was further tested in 1974 when FSLN guerrillas successfully took a group of Managua elite's hostage and negotiated a number of ransom demands including money and the release of prisoners. In retaliation Somoza ordered the National Guard to step up their programme of atrocities and repression in the countryside in search of guerrillas. However, such public failures and atrocities were witnessed and denounced by Catholic Church priests in particular, and human rights violations were condemned by the US and Amnesty International (Walker, 1991: 32).<sup>24</sup> In 1977 Somoza suffered a heart attack and after spending a few months in Miami recovering he returned to Nicaragua to find many of his former allies had been plotting his successor and increasing popular mobilisation and frustration (Walker, 1991: 32).

## The FSLN and popular insurrection

The success of the revolution was a product of the dovetailing of two grassroots movements: one Marxist and the other Catholic (Walker, 1991: 38) The Marxist movement, the FSLN, was formed in 1961 and inspired by the Cuban revolution and Sandino's struggle in the 1930s against US influence and interests in the country (Prevost, 1997: 150). Founded by Carlos Fonseca, Silvio Mayorga, and Tomás Borge, all former members of the pro-Soviet Nicaraguan Socialist Party (PSN) they sought a new direction and new ideology specific to the Nicaraguan context, 'The founders of the FSLN were determined to create an authentically Nicaraguan revolutionary movement, based on the tactics and socio-political objectives of Augusto César Sandino' (Walker, 1991: 39). In contrast to the orthodox view of the PSN that socialist revolution was only possible after the sufficient development of the proletariat, Fonseca maintained revolution could be successful if the armed insurgents could connect with the masses that is, the rural peasantry. Such a position was greatly influenced by the Cuban revolution, 'Fonseca, following the ideas of Ché Guevara, felt that the objective conditions normally identified as providing the basis for a successful socialist revolution could be replaced by the subjective conditions prevailing in each country in

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<sup>24</sup> However, Rogers points out that the US continued to support Somoza in the 1970s and that the Democratic Congress voted to maintain funding for the National Guard. President Carter sent a personal letter to Somoza congratulating him on the human rights situation in Nicaragua even as Somoza continued to carry out aerial bombardments against Nicaraguan civilians (Rogers, 2008: 106).

deciding whether such a revolution were possible' (Baracco, 2005: 63). Initially employing *foco* tactics, inspired by Che Guevara, small groups of insurgents were employed in hit-and-run attacks (Walker, 1991: 39). The tactic of rural guerrilla warfare often met with failure and the movement diversified its work to include mobilising urban populations of workers, students and neighbourhood communities (Prevost, 1997: 150). With Somoza's hold on power still strong, tactical differences within the FSLN led to a three-way split in 1975: The Prolonged Popular War, The Proletarian Tendency, and Insurrectionist (*Terceristas* or Third Force). The Prolonged Popular War faction which included Tomás Borge, continued the original *foco* tactics of rural guerrilla insurgency. The Proletarian tendency, including Jaime Wheelock, emphasised the importance of mobilising the orthodox Marxist-Leninist approach towards the urban working-class and often with students (Walker, 1991: 39). The Third Force, or *Terceristas* which included the brothers Daniel and Humberto Ortega, drew most on the strategy Fonseca had outlined until his death in 1976. The *Terceristas* took a position between the two previous tendencies and promoted the necessity of a 'multiclass alliance' through urban and rural insurrection, and it was this strategy that in the end was the most effective (Prevost, 1997: 150).

Also significant was the role of Catholic Priests informed by Liberation Theology – “the preferential option for the poor”. At a meeting of Latin American Bishops in 1968 this message called for religious personnel to take action and this was manifested in Nicaragua in the form of ‘Christian base communities’ (CEB’s) (Walker, 1991: 40). These groups which discussed social problems were viewed suspiciously by the Somoza regime who attempted to repress them violently which only convinced Catholic members to become involved in the armed struggle. It became a nationalist Marxist movement with progressive Catholic elements which had broad appeal: ‘The Sandinistas’ eclectic revolutionary doctrine was broad enough to include progressive Catholics and anti-Somoza nationalists, as well as exploited workers and peasants’ (Paige, 1997: 32).

By 1978-1979, it was the urban informal sector and students who made up the mass base of insurrections, but also key was bourgeois opposition to Somoza and one particular incident, the assassination of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, editor of *La Prensa* and a member of the Granada conservative elite, crystallised both popular and bourgeois opposition, ‘The revolution was based on an implicit coalition between the FSLN, the aristocratic elite, and the agro-industrial middle bourgeoisie including many coffee and cotton growers’ (Paige, 1997: 40). An outspoken critic of Somoza, after his assassination by the National Guard, Chamorro’s widow Violeta – who would be elected to the presidency in 1990 – organised mass protests and demonstrations that further destabilised the regime (Paige, 1997: 38). Also in 1978, the National Guard had to confront groups of insurrectionary youths in several

important cities, and although the young people were defeated there was a growing popular belief that the regime could be defeated. The FSLN tendencies finally united around the multiclass strategy of the *Terceristas* and the recruits to the FSLN grew quickly. The 'final offensive' in the summer of 1979 saw victories across the country, the eventual march on Managua, the surrender of the National Guard and the escape of Somoza to Miami (Walker, 1997: 7).

The victory of July 1979 was the product of both progressive Catholic and FSLN organising at the grassroots with elite support. The executive Junta that governed in the early part of the revolution 'included both the Conservative Granada aristocrats, the new cotton barons, and FSLN representatives' (Paige, 1997: 40). However, the alliance between elites and Sandinistas began to unravel soon after victory and collapsed by August 1980 following the decision of the Sandinista National Directorate to postpone elections until 1985, leaving the agro-export elites and middle bourgeoisie in the 'political wilderness' (Paige, 1997: 41).

Upon taking power the FSLN began working according to three main principles: a mixed economy, political pluralism, and non-alignment (a foreign policy that emphasised good relations with any government that wished to have cordial relations with Nicaragua) (Prevost, 1997: 153). There were a number of lessons they had observed from the Cuban example in terms of leadership style, economic management, civil liberties and international relations that they aimed to improve on. Above all the aim was to respond to the specific national requirements of Nicaragua at that time in the international climate of that moment, what could be seen as a pragmatic approach to rule. Economically the Sandinistas saw a Soviet-style command economy as little suited to the context of Nicaragua and instead opted to allow much of production to remain in private hands but more heavily regulated (Walker, 1997: 9). By simply nationalising Somoza's holdings, including 21 per cent of agricultural land, the Sandinistas were able to implement a land reform programme without encroaching on private interests (Ricciardi, 1991: 250). The confiscated properties were turned into state farms and cooperatives and at least until the Contra war, Nicaragua did become more self-sufficient. Though the public sector was enlarged it never accounted for more than 40 per cent of total productive capacity of the country (Walker, 1997: 9). However, the economy ran into increasing problems as the Contra War escalated and the US cut-off loans as will be examined in greater detail below. Again taking note of the Cuban example, the Sandinista approach avoided the strongman-type leadership and power was dispersed rather than concentrated as in the case of Castro. They would also avoid the restrictions on civil and political rights that had been imposed in Cuba; the aim was to garner loyalty through respect of the rights of the populace (Walker, 1997: 8).



The oil crisis of the 1980s had caused severe economic problems throughout the region that were compounded in Nicaragua by economic strangulation from the US, as Reagan increased pressure on the Sandinista government. The cost of the war against the Contras was draining resources and the government had resorted to printing money to fund the war only to see inflation spiral out of control. Socially this meant fewer resources for health and literacy campaigns and those working on the campaigns increasingly becoming targets for repression. Grass-roots participation declined in this period as social deprivation meant the population were concerned more with the means of survival than able to participate in community groups. With the FSLN struggling against the Contras and harsh economic conditions there was a tendency to utilise the organisations undermining their autonomy for the general population (Walker, 1997: 13).

Under Reagan the US saw the revolutionary success of the Sandinistas as a 'threatening extension of Soviet-backed communism' and began funding and training the Contras – a counterrevolutionary army largely made up of Somoza's old National Guard. Fighting the Contra war was draining the national purse, and poor economic management had led to hyperinflation. But the costs of the US-backed counterrevolutionary war cannot be underestimated. The Reagan government first overtly funded the Contras, stating the case for military build-up in Central America, primarily Honduras, was a matter of US national security (Walker, 1997: 11). As Congress became sceptical of Reagan's covert war policy, the Reagan administration sought out an 'extra-official' system of funding the Contras by selling arms to Iran and using the money for the Contras. Between 1980 and 1989, 30,865 lives were lost – including soldiers and civilians. As of 1987, production losses due to the Contra war were estimated at \$984.5 million. In fact towards the end of the 80s the Sandinistas were forced to introduce the first austerity measures to reduce inflation and stabilise the economy but with harsh social and economic consequences for the majority population (Walker, 1997:12).

Nonetheless by the end of the decade the Sandinistas had succeeded in some notable achievements despite the obstacles and challenges they faced. By 1990 agrarian reform had affected more than half of the country's arable land and benefitted around 60 per cent of rural families. The Sandinistas had stepped up land redistribution in 1985 and by 1989 'small private producers and cooperatives were responsible for 47 per cent of agricultural production' (Prevost, 1997a: 10). They had stabled a democratic constitutional electoral process: 'The 1987 Constitution, which combined Western liberal democratic norms with a revolutionary social conscience, was the centrepiece of the new political progress' (Prevost, 1997a: 12). The first democratic elections were held in 1984 and followed by a peaceful handover of power in 1990.

Education and health received unprecedented focus and investment from the Sandinistas. The Literacy Crusade was recognised by the UN for its success in reducing illiteracy and the school population grew from 300,000 to one million by 1989 following much greater investment from the Sandinistas, while health care provision tripled (Prevost, 1997a: 12).

By 1990 Nicaragua had been through a Contra war that had cost over 30,000 lives and more than US\$12 billion and the Sandinistas had introduced economic structural adjustment policies to tame inflation and debt (Vanden, 1997: 53). In the context of a war weary nation, struggling to survive, democratic elections took place in 1990. The UNO (National Opposition Union), heavily funded by the US through the NED (National Endowment for Democracy), were a coalition party headed by Violeta Chamorro who took a platform emphasising the need for peace and reconciliation, a popular message in a country exhausted by economic scarcity and civil war. The election result was a complete shock to the Sandinistas, with the UNO winning 55% of the vote, 'Although the socialist revolutionaries destroyed the old order and opened the way for democracy, the ironic outcome of their efforts was the triumph of the agro-industrial bourgeoisie and neoliberalism' (Paige, 1997: 359).

## **The FSLN and gender policy**

This section addresses the performance of the FSLN government during the 1980s in challenging gender inequality. Much of the literature evaluating the FSLN record on gender comes from a feminist standpoint, examining either women's experience in political and economic organisations, or women's position more generally under Sandinismo. Both sets of research tend to conclude that the FSLN failed to challenge prevailing gender ideologies or transform the prevailing gender division of labour. Limited progress in improving women's status occurred (Collinson, 1990; Molyneux, 1985; Perez-Aleman, 1990; Fernandez-Poncela, 1997; Luciak, 2001; Kampwirth, 1996a). Even so, there is a tension in the literature. Some authors focus on the achievement of feminist objectives and in so doing tend to look at those organisations, reforms and policies through a feminist perspective (Randall, 1992; Jaquette, 1989; Alvarez, 1990). A smaller, but significant group of authors, criticise the former approach for ignoring the ways in which women participated in organisations without a feminist agenda, but nonetheless often experienced an increased sense of empowerment and gender consciousness through becoming involved (Bayard De Volo, 2003; Montoya, 2003). Women's experience in collective action has led to a formulation of demands, ranging from those based on domestic and private responsibilities, to rights as citizens. Public activism stimulated a redefinition of the public and private

boundaries of what is perceived as ‘political’ (Safa, 1995b). In the case of Nicaragua, Bayard De Volo argues that women’s engagement in such movements is important, because although it ‘does not change the world in an immediately perceptible way [it] does change the worlds of individuals as well as challenges dominant codes upon which traditional gender relations are based’ (2003: 92). While both approaches are useful in assessing women’s experience of mobilisation, the latter approach has particular relevance for this study. As we shall see, women’s collective engagement outside the domestic sphere created new spaces for shared experiences while simultaneously raising new areas of conflict and resistance in their lives, much as football has for the young players of CFF León. For the players, involvement in the team – their personal friendships, social networks, and sense of fulfilment – has produced profound effects on other areas of their lives and altered their worldview.

A number of key areas are addressed in the following discussion. Firstly, an examination of Molyneux’s gender interest’s model is necessary in order to foreground the debates concerning the FSLN record on challenging gender inequality. Secondly, this is followed by a brief examination of structural changes in Nicaragua that explain women’s substantial participation in revolutionary mobilisation before moving on to a closer analysis of Sandinista gender policy. Thirdly, the discussion addresses how the FSLN was itself divided in terms of the priority it placed on women’s demands that sought to address gender inequalities: Ortega’s recent re-election and decision to support the ban on therapeutic abortion reflects his attitude towards women’s reproductive rights, which he also displayed in the 1980s. Given the hierarchical structure of the FSLN and the Party’s often instrumental approach to AMNLAE, it proved difficult for the main conduit for women’s participation to break from the Party-line. Additionally, Sandinista representations of women’s role in the Revolution were often contradictory, emphasising both ‘traditional mother’ and ‘militant activist’ images. Nicaraguan women sometimes reconciled the contradiction in interesting ways. Fourthly, the political and cultural power of the Catholic Church represented a major obstacle to many of the FSLN’s proposals for reforms aimed at the family and women’s position. The influence of the Church and, more recently, the Evangelical Church, on political decision-making has only become more entrenched in the post-revolutionary era. Finally, it is crucial to recognise the role economic crisis and war played in determining the scope of revolutionary social transformation and in undermining the FSLN’s resources and support.

## Women's interests?

It is useful here to introduce Molyneux's highly influential model of gender interests. Based on research in Nicaragua during the early 1980s, Molyneux argued that while neither equality nor emancipation were achieved in Sandinista Nicaragua, it would be too simplistic to conclude women's interests were not met or represented by the 'patriarchal' revolutionary government. She held that women's subjectivities are too complicated to be analysed as if they are homogenous: 'we need to specify how the various categories of women might be affected differently and act differently on account of the peculiarities of their social positioning and their chosen identities' (2003: 43). Western feminist approaches had universalised women's interests and prioritised gender above class, ethnicity and age, whereas in the Nicaraguan context, these identity variables were key to understanding the real complexity of women's lives. Gender, she pointed out, does not necessarily form the principal identity for which women mobilise; instead she outlined differing strategic and practical interests why women became politicised. Practical gender interests (PGIs) derived from the 'concrete conditions of women's positioning within the gender division of labour', usually comprise a response 'to immediate perceived need' and, additionally, tend not to challenge prevailing forms of gender subordination. Alternatively strategic gender interests (SGIs) develop through an increasing awareness of one's social position and, when combined with the objective to alter existing gender relations, are, therefore, termed 'feminist'.

The 'interests' paradigm is still salient in the literature and analysts have found it useful to modify and expand the model. Alvarez has employed a similar distinction to describe ways in which gender can be politicised, terming them 'feminine organising' (which asserts female rights without challenging prevailing roles) and 'feminist organising' (which seeks to transform gendered roles) (Alvarez, 1990). For Kampwirth, the feminine/feminist distinction refers to two types of strategy rather than activities which are both public and involve women from different classes. Thus the two strategies have differing impacts: either directly or indirectly challenging power inequalities based on gender (Kampwirth, 1998: 260).

The 'interests model' has been criticised for creating a hierarchy that prioritises strategic feminist political objectives over more practical feminine interests, along with the implicit assumption that practical interests should develop into strategic interests. It is also often employed as a dichotomy that creates rigid analytical categories (Craske, 1999). However, Molyneux pointed out to her critics that the 'interests model' should be treated as

a heuristic device and was never meant to be employed in a deterministic fashion (2003: 155).<sup>25</sup> Unintended as its application in this way might be, the interests paradigm has been highly influential to the extent that, for some, there is an exaggerated focus on organisations with ‘strategic’ or ‘feminist’ objectives when analysing organisations’ challenges to gender inequality. When looking at women and processes of revolution or democratisation, the rigid utilisation of the model results in the implicit assumption that organisations without a feminist objective are therefore non-political and unworthy of analysis (Bayard De Volo, 2003: 93). Such a specific focus narrows the political terrain and, therefore, excludes important and unexpected consequences of women’s participation. Nevertheless, for this discussion it will be helpful to utilise the terms to, as Kampwirth puts it, ‘evaluate evolving strategies’ (Kampwirth, 1996a: 137). Rather than see the different interests as a dichotomy or as privileging one form of organising over another for this thesis, Craske’s ‘continuum’ of interests is more appropriate to analysing the players’ experiences and interests. It allows for a more flexible and less categorical analysis, more appropriate to the variety of constraints and opportunities the players confront on a daily basis in different areas of their lives. The continuum, therefore, can possibly encompass more effectively the complexity of individual women’s everyday lives in a variety of situations, as well as the various ways in which they are motivated to participate in women’s organisations (1999: 19).

A number of structural changes in Nicaraguan society help to explain women’s increasing involvement in the anti-Somoza guerrilla movement during the 1960s and 1970s. The economy, based on agro-export production and dominated by the land-owning elite had successfully integrated into the global economy. However, the consequence for most of the rural population was increasing landlessness, less work and lower wages. With fewer work opportunities available in the countryside than for men, many women migrated to the cities in search of work. To a background of rural land concentration, fragmented households and increasing urbanisation, women increasingly turned to paid labour as a strategy for household survival. Between 1950 and 1977, women’s labour force incorporation rose from 14 per cent to 29 per cent in the formal sector, with even higher figures in the informal sector (Pérez-Alemán, 1992: 244).

In this context of political and economic crisis, women who had relocated to the cities began to compare experiences and mobilise in attempts to solve the common problems they faced. Many of these women – often urban single mothers - would form collectives, join CEBs organised around the teaching of liberation theology, and take part in

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<sup>25</sup> See ‘Analysing women’s movements’ in *Women’s Movements in International Perspective*, for Molyneux’s defence (2003).

consciousness raising activities (Kampwirth, 2002).<sup>26</sup> The majority of women who participated as combatants did so to fight primarily for social change, mobilised around class rather than gender interests. Numerous women had been involved in organising to overthrow the Somoza dynasty since the 1960s joining the *Federación Democrática* and the *Alianza Patriótica Nicaraguense*. These groups were made up of socialists and students that would later become recruiting resources for the FSLN. In 1967 the FSLN allowed women to join rural guerrillas as combatants for the first time. However, there was an absence of women in leadership positions and often they were expected to fulfil domestic tasks for the group, such as cleaning and cooking. As one woman combatant described her experience, she had to battle against the government (the Somoza regime) while at the same time struggle against the men in the movement (Luciak, 2001). After victory in 1979, many young women were mobilised to take part in the Literacy Crusade and harvest coffee, among other Sandinista social projects. Women also took up senior cadre roles as ministers, vice-ministers and regional coordinators.

Young women became combatants in the insurrections that led to Somoza's defeat whereas others joined 'revolutionary student organisations, Christian youth groups, the Sandinista Front and guerrilla insurgent units' (Chinchilla, 1994: 178). Women were not only mobilised on the frontline but also as members of the command. The first major victory of the Revolution was the taking of the provincial capital León; five of the seven commanders involved were women (Luciak, 2001). At the time of Somoza's defeat in 1979, women made up 30 per cent of combatants and a higher percentage of leaders (Collinson, 1990, 154; Kampwirth, 1996a: 139).

Despite the large number of young women combatants, what was later emphasised by the FSLN government was women's role as mothers in support of the revolution through their reproductive labour in the household and community; in contrast to the insurrectionary movement, the Contra war became exclusively identified with men (Chinchilla, 1994; Luciak, 2001). However, following their military experience many women were reluctant to return to their pre-combat roles, which they had come to recognise as restrictive: 'Having experienced the relative freedom and equality of combat, which was characterised by the predominance of non-traditional values, many women were reluctant to return to the

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<sup>26</sup> Liberation theology, and its emphasis on a 'preferential treatment for the poor', was highly influential amongst the grassroots Church in Nicaragua. Priests were encouraged to work in local neighbourhoods and communities to help organise groups to raise consciousness on social, economic and increasingly, political issues. As women have traditionally been associated with community organising around household survival, they were more likely to be mobilised by these groups. For more discussion on the influence of liberation theology in Nicaragua, see Lynch, 1991; Foroohar, 1986.

straightjacket of gender inequality imposed by traditional societal norms' (Luciak, 2001: 29). For some women, participation in armed opposition as combatants did serve to alter their perception and consciousness of their position in Nicaraguan society in relation to men, and whilst many increasingly demobilised to work in support of the revolutionary effort, they did so with altered worldviews, becoming increasingly critical of their status (Luciak, 2001).

## Gender interests and AMNLAE

One important outcome of women's involvement in the revolution, it is argued, was their new presence in public life, which opened up unprecedented opportunities to challenge their traditional status in Nicaraguan society associated with the private sphere. Women in Nicaragua had been largely marginalised from political participation, but the Sandinista government encouraged women to assume new roles through policies directed at health, education, housing and welfare (Metoyer, 2000). AMNLAE became the main organ through which women participated and to which most of the women's movements that emerged in the 1990s can trace their origins (Kampwirth, 1996a: 137). I will therefore now turn to an analysis of the activism of AMNLAE during the Revolution, paying special attention to the often conflicting gender interests that arose within the movement.

In September 1979, AMPRONAC, which had existed as a clandestine guerrilla movement in opposition to the Somocista state, became AMNLAE, a public Sandinista affiliated organisation representing women's demands, a transformation from a relationship of antagonism to cooperation with the state (Kampwirth, 1996a: 140).<sup>27</sup> AMNLAE, like the other Sandinista mass base organisations, occupied one of the seats on the nine-member National Directorate that took power in 1979. As such, it was 'parallel in its organisational form, mission, and relationship to the revolutionary party and to other Sandinista-affiliated organisations such as trade unions and peasant organisations' (Chinchilla, 1994: 179). Being the principal organisation for women's participation, through AMNLAE women supported

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<sup>27</sup> Women organised in opposition to Somoza in the 1970s principally through AMPRONAC, a cross-class women's organisation that in its fight for social justice and national sovereignty, had brought women increasingly into the public sphere through public demonstrations and neighbourhood mobilisations. The organisation largely comprised older women and young women with children, reflecting its demands around human rights and the clandestine provisioning of resources for the guerrilla cause. Many key women in AMPRONAC were relatives of the disappeared who publicly demonstrated dissent against the Somoza government (Fernández Poncela, 1997: 38). They had largely been mobilised around their feminine interests in defence of their children, but through participation, 'feminist thinking would sometimes develop' (Kampwirth, 1996a: 139). According to Chinchilla, involvement in AMPRONAC had given women a 'new boldness and confidence[...] insisting that from then on, no one could question their ability or right to participate in politics on an equal basis' (1994: 179).

government programmes in education, health, work brigades and the popular militias. By 1984 AMNLAE had 85,000 members, while women constituted 22 per cent of FSLN membership and 37 per cent of the leadership. Women made up around half of the Sandinista Defence Committees and the militia (Chinchilla, 1994: 179). Its membership base was predominantly among poor, urban, older women: 'housewives, market women, and mothers of combatants or Sandinistas killed in the insurrection', along with health and education workers who had been drawn in through their participation in literacy or community health campaigns (Chinchilla, 1994: 179).

In the first years of Sandinista rule, close ties with the FSLN meant AMNLAE became primarily concerned with supporting government programmes and made no direct challenge to gender inequality (Kampwirth, 1996a: 141). Early on in its organisational history, conflicts emerged between the hierarchical leadership, which tended to follow the party-line, and feminists who perceived a 'lack of dynamism' within the organisation and inaction on issues of gender equality (Chinchilla, 1994: 179). Organisation structure became the most significant cause of conflict inside AMNLAE. Feminists who joined AMNLAE often saw it as more dedicated to Party interests and too dependent on the FSLN hierarchy for guidance. For their part, the AMNLAE leadership criticised the feminists for being too radical and 'out of sync with the needs of women from the popular classes' (Chinchilla, 1994: 179).

AMNLAE allowed the FSLN to take the lead on legal reform and was silent on feminist reforms, especially concerning sexual and reproductive rights – issues that contributed to the splintering of the group post-1990 - and instead prioritised mobilising the mothers of those who had been killed fighting, a tactic the FSLN saw as crucial in maintaining popular support for the conflict (Kampwirth, 1996a: 142). The abortion debate revealed the difficulties the feminist movement encountered in terms of reproductive rights, as well as some of the contradictions of Sandinismo. That the issue of abortion is crucial to gendered power relations is evinced by the 'deeply entrenched resistance' campaigners have encountered. Strong opposition emanated from the Catholic Church, along with parties on the Right given that the former maintained widespread loyalty among the population, any attempts to challenge these influential groups would have required a significant and long-term political campaign: 'Catholic attitudes helped to keep Nicaragua a socially conservative country and the government would have had to allocate substantial resources, time and energy to fund and sustain such campaigns directed at altering attitudes' (Molyneux, 2003: 65). The FSLN chose not to prosecute women for illegal abortions, instead promoting the



use of contraceptives and sex education initiatives, but as stated, these lacked the resources to counter conservative influences in society.

With a lack of consensus within the Party on this issue and on the form women's emancipation overall should take, the FSLN made slow progress on women's rights.<sup>28</sup> Crucially, Molyneux argues that objective as well as subjective conditions need to be taken into account when implementing women's rights. In the Nicaraguan context, structures of unequal power relations that subordinate women mean policy and legal reform will not succeed alone:

The very deep-rootedness of the oppression of women, its tenacious and at times violent defence by men and the often ingrained acquiescence in it by some women, make it something that cannot simply be abolished by decree, but must also be prepared for. Women's emancipation requires a determined challenge to the structures of power – with specific emphasis on gender relations and the Catholic Church, a programme of education amongst women and their mobilisation and organisation in support of reform, and decisive and united action by the revolutionary state (Molyneux, 2003: 74).

By 1983, the FSLN called for defence of the Revolution to be the priority and AMNLAE responded by postponing any specific women's demands, such as women's labour and abortion, that had begun to reach the stage of changes to the legal code (Chinchilla, 1994: 181). Increasingly, the AMNLAE was becoming an instrument to maintain popular support. Chinchilla points to a gulf between the perceptions of the AMNLAE leadership and the popular base over what the hierarchy of AMNLAE perceived as the interests of working-class women. By the 1984 election campaign, AMNLAE was losing support and the debate this trend stimulated identified 'the passivity of leadership, which accepted the FSLN priorities' without consultation of the support base, as the main problem (1994: 181).

While there was a strong commitment to support Nicaraguan women in the early years of the Revolution, it was stymied by the 'combined pressures of economic scarcity, counter-revolution and military threat', which limited the ideals of the Revolution (Molyneux, 2003: 48; Kampwirth, 1996a). In this climate, the AMNLAE moved away from a public feminist agenda and instead 'spoke of the need to promote women's interests in the

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<sup>28</sup> In an attempt to resolve these conflicts the AMNLAE chose to change its organisational structure from a direct-membership entity (like the other mass organisations) to a "political-ideological social movement," a catalyst for building a broad mass movement to promote a women's agenda and women's leadership in all revolutionary institutions and would continue to mobilise public opinion on behalf of reforms and programs for women' (Chinchilla, 1994: 180). The AMNLAE went on to establish women's secretariats in UNAG and the ATC, who campaigned for greater training and leadership roles for women, as well as additional support to reduce the double burden of work and family responsibilities. While such initiatives increased women's political participation, their demands tended to reinforce women's traditional position rather than challenge gender inequality (Metoyer, 2000: 29).

context of the wider political struggle' (2003: 48). For Molyneux, it was inevitable that the emancipatory demands of the women's movement became subordinated to those of the Revolution and its continued survival (2003). Others, however, see the failure of the Revolution as directly related to the FSLN's lack of commitment to feminist objectives. Randall argues the Sandinista socialist project was unsuccessful, precisely because it omitted to include women in its transformative agenda. Revolution needs to be transformed by feminism to succeed at broader social transformation (1992: 48).

Undoubtedly, the FSLN faced crippling economic shortages brought on by war, US pressure, external debt and natural disaster, which limited the scope of all social programmes. By 1984 more than a third of the national budget was spent on defence which clearly had a severe impact on attempts at social revolution (Molyneux, 2003: 51). But economic crisis did not determine the weakness of FSLN attempts to transform the position of women, rather it revealed the ambiguities and contradictions inherent in Sandinista ideology (Bayard De Volo, 2003; Lancaster, 1992; Molyneux, 2003; Montoya, 2003; Kampwirth, 1996a). Firstly, women's emancipation was ambiguously placed amongst the priorities of the FSLN. Policies aimed at emancipation that coincided with the broader goals of social welfare and political mobilisation proved the most successful, enjoying popular support and less opposition. At times, the FSLN's stance towards the demands of the women's movement can be seen as limited and possibly conflictive. Lancaster, for example, describes the revolutionary vision in the areas of gender and sexuality as 'myopic' and points to elements of the Sandinista bloc who were against feminist goals (1991: 21). The 'unhappy marriage' between Marxism and feminism had resembled, according to Heidi Hartmann, 'the marriage of husband and wife depicted in English common law: Marxism and feminism are one, and that one is Marxism' (1979: 1). Echoing Hartmann's analysis, activists within the AMNLAE admitted the organisation had 'too often [...] played the role of the "submissive wife of the FSLN"' (Kampwirth, 1996a: 141). The AMNLAE had increasingly found itself 'devoting tremendous resources to preserving the power and legitimacy of the Sandinista-controlled state', without the presumed outcome of greater emancipation for women (Kampwirth, 1998: 272). The Marxist ideology of the FSLN assumed revolutionary success would emancipate the popular classes, including women. While the Contra war restricted the FSLN's social programmes and revolutionary efforts, it also 'exposed the contradictions inherent in that assumption' (Kampwirth, 1996a: 141). The hierarchical structure of AMNLAE caused most tension, as a lack of internal democracy was exacerbated by a tightening of Party stranglehold once the Contra war took its toll: 'Fear of military and electoral defeat led more members of the party and the movement to return to

safer, less revolutionary images of gender'.<sup>29</sup> On the other hand, Lancaster concludes that the AMNLAE's decision to place revolutionary goals ahead of other concerns was both a 'pragmatic' and 'realistic' decision, for 'the Sandinista revolution constituted the only imaginable arena where women's social and political demands might be realised' (1992: 99). In fact, many in the FSLN and AMNLAE leadership saw 'mobilisation for the war and deepening feminist consciousness were inherently contradictory' (Chinchilla, 1994: 182).

The Mothers of Heroes and Martyrs (the Mothers) was formed originally as part of the wider struggle to overthrow Somoza and later concentrated on supporting the families of fallen martyrs. Discussion of the Mothers often characterises the organisation in two ways: as an example of FSLN control over AMNLAE activism and objectives, and/or as a hindrance to feminist demands within the organisation, both of which are undoubtedly true. Mobilised around their identity as mothers and often utilised for their symbolic support for the Revolution, the Mothers became a priority of AMNLAE organising at odds with attempts at more progressive representations of women. Much of the research, Bayard De Volo posits, tends to support a dichotomy of women's interests, as feminist or feminine, but women's collective action has more complex outcomes that may both conform to and resist unequal gender relations. By looking at the micro-politics of the Matagalpa branch of this particular organisation, she emphasises how collective action can produce 'profound effects on the lives of participants' (Bayard De Volo, 2003: 93). She focuses on the ways in which individuals are affected by, and effect, gendered social structures and analyses specific contexts to avoid monolithic understandings of men and women's motivations and experiences.

The Mothers comprised a high-profile organisation for the FSLN, with over 15,000 members nationwide, but have received scant attention in the literature on women and the Revolution (Bayard De Volo, 2003: 93). The Mothers of Matagalpa were mostly poor, unemployed, middle-aged women, without a male companion and having on average eight children (Bayard De Volo, 2003: 95). These women were situated on the margins, economically and politically, but through their activism many members were empowered in material and less material ways. The Mothers became critical of 'old' expectations concerning women, being accused of 'transgressing gender roles' through their activism they developed new skills that 'led them to question, sometimes explicitly, the power differential between men and women' (Bayard De Volo, 2003: 100). This greater sense of agency grew through increasing control over income, the ability to use their voice in debate

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<sup>29</sup> For instance, the Sandinista Youth held beauty contests and restrictions on media exploitation of women were relaxed (Kampwirth, 1996a: 144).

and discussion, through opposition to the FSLN and interactions with other political actors, to develop political consciousness and a collective identity. However, based as it was on 'natural' and 'traditional' ideas of motherhood, such a collective identity may serve to reinforce stereotypical representations of women (Bayard De Volo, 2003: 102-108). Ultimately, the women's activism, though not feminist, did generate a greater sense of agency and lead the women to question the power dynamics of gender relations.

The FSLN's contradictory ideology surrounding womanhood, of wife/mother/activist, created oppositional and conflicting roles for women (Chinchilla, 1994: 184) - active revolutionary participation versus domestic obligations and commitments, which the Mothers had to reconcile. Often these contradictory ideologies led members to leave the collective, or to separate from their partner (Bayard De Volo, 2003: 100).

Montoya looks at the ways Sandinista ideology played out in the realities of men and women's everyday lives in El Tule, a small town in northwestern Rivas, of between 300 to 400 people (2003: 66). In El Tule, women's mobility which had been restricted largely to the home, expanded during the Revolution as schools, health centres and roads were constructed. Montoya argues, however, that despite increased opportunities for mobility, possibilities remained structured by gender ideologies that associated women's 'good' reputations with the domestic and the household and 'bad' reputations with the street. In this way, women continued to be subject to ideological constructions based on a specific sexual/moral economy that subordinated them to men: 'Like the concept of "the house", "the street" was more than a geographic location; it was a culturally constructed concept that stood for all practices related to sexual conquest' (Montoya, 2003: 69).

Montoya's attention to the specific cultural and historical context avoids generalising the motivations for male opposition and the obstacles women faced in attempts at challenging gender inequality. Her article highlights the 'ambiguities of Sandinista ideology', which served to legitimise men's sustained power over women's sexuality, and economic and social position, but allowed women through their class status, to 'destabilise some forms of local patriarchy' (2003: 66). Conceptions of traditional 'male' and 'female' roles at a local level and in government programmes meant women's and men's participation in El Tule was segregated between agricultural cooperatives (male) and horticultural collectives (female). She concludes: 'This segregation had a host of symbolic and material effects that confirmed and further strengthened patriarchal households' (Montoya, 2003: 73). In effect, the government had encouraged women to work in the rural economy, but in a supportive role to the male breadwinner. The FSLN prioritised funding to cooperatives and collectives run by the AMNLAE, while other women's secretariats had to

look for funding from NGOs, which were allocated less land than the cooperatives. Men were seen as household heads and so received land titling, even for collective land (Montoya, 2003: 74). The privileging of the male position can be seen as part of the Sandinista attempt to promote the stability of the nation based on the nuclear family, with male authority, as well as the need to maintain male support for the Revolution (Montoya, 2003: 73).

Montoya's contribution is important because she shows, on the one hand, how by looking at 'specific gender relations' in particular contexts - in this case through two women's collectives - the ambiguities of Sandinista ideology enabled male opposition to women's participation and, on the other, how women's incorporation into the nation-building project as class subjects had the potential to 'destabilise' local patriarchies (2003: 62). Moving away from the majority of other analyses that focus on structural features of gender inequality, her approach has two aims: i) to reveal distinct forms of patriarchy which enables the possibility of unveiling opportunities for social change; and ii) to analyse people as agents who effect and are affected by societal structures and, therefore, theorising how ideology and social position interact.

## Gender and institutional and legal reform

The focus the FSLN placed on women's emancipation was unprecedented in the Americas, 'it was the first political force within a progressive government in the American continent to not only endorse feminism, but also rapidly incorporate women's emancipation into its thinking' (Fernández Poncela, 1997: 39). They introduced a 'broad spectrum' of reforms in the early 1980s aimed at greater equality within the family, media representation, and labour participation (Fernández Poncela, 1997: 39).<sup>30</sup> One important reform for women included the Provision Law, introduced to 'strengthen the (family) institution, promote greater family cohesion and remove the gender inequalities that prevailed' (Molyneux, 2003: 55). In the face of high male desertion rates, migration and polygamy, the number of female headed households in Nicaragua reached 34 per cent, in Managua 60 per cent. The Provision Law made all adults in the family responsible for maintaining the household. The AMNLAE initiated Law sought to transform the traditional patriarchal family structure and reformulate it as 'an institution not of machismo and patriarchy but of equality, responsibility, and reciprocity' (Lancaster, 1992: 17). The diversity of family structures that existed in Nicaragua was also acknowledged in reforms that recognised unions with characteristics of permanence as a civil state of common-law-marriage. Paternal economic and social

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<sup>30</sup> See Fernández Poncela (1997: 39) for a full list of legislation initiated in this early period of FSLN rule.

responsibility for children became recognised in both formal and informal unions (Lancaster, 1992: 18). Health and safety provision for women was improved and rural worker women, not just men, became entitled to their own wage (Molyneux, 2003: 55). Shortly after the FSLN took power in July 1979, the Provisional Media Law was introduced which ‘prohibited commercial exploitation of women’s bodies in advertising as well as degrading or debasing depictions of women in the media’ (Lancaster, 1992: 17). Sex discrimination and equal rights were guaranteed in the Fundamental Statute of Rights and Guarantees (Lancaster, 1992: 17). Domestic labour became a political issue, childcare measures were discussed and large numbers of women mobilised. These legal reforms demonstrate – at least in the first years of the Revolution – the Sandinistas’ commitment to the revolutionary goal of women’s emancipation. They continually faced opposition and criticism from conservative forces describing the new reforms as a ‘communistic attack’ on the ‘sanctity of the family’ (Lancaster, 1992: 18).

However, in reality there was substantively little gender equality (Luciak, 2001: 69). Metoyer questions the ideological commitment of the Sandinista’s to gender equality, arguing that ‘despite the enactment of constitutional and legal guarantees[...]Few concrete public policies were implemented to support women in their new public roles or foster change in the sexual division of labour within the home’ (2000: 24). The Law on Nurture recognised the responsibility of both father and mother (as well as adult relatives) to the ‘economic, social, and cultural well-being’ of children up to the age of 21. The Law also explicitly stated the shared responsibility between parents (where both parents worked) (Lancaster, 1992: 18). However, the Nurture Law was never ratified by the executive branch and a lack of gender equality in the household continually undermined women’s attempts to participate in the revolutionary project on equal terms with men.

As will be discussed in Chapter 6, many of the football players live in female headed households. In a number of cases, given the limited options available to them in a crisis-hit Nicaragua, their fathers were forced to migrate in search of work. Despite the efforts of AMNLAE to stabilise the family unit during the 1980s, given the context of crisis and war, families remained ‘fluid and fragile’ and continue to be so today (Lancaster, 1992: 19).

Metoyer points to the contradictory position the FSLN took on the inclusion of women in the military draft. Despite the new constitution ‘establishing the right of absolute equality between men and women’, the FSLN decided to exclude women from the draft in 1983 (2000: 24). The AMNLAE, for its part, opposed the decision and argued women would be perceived as marginal to the revolutionary movement, but the FSLN, under pressure from the Church and right-wing politicians, resisted the AMNLAE’s demands in the interest, as

they perceived it, of maintaining broad-based support (Chinchilla, 1994). The outcome was compromise: women would be allowed to volunteer for the military. However, given their continued responsibilities in the home, it was often impossible for most to spend weeks away, instead many joined the popular militia, which was part-time and therefore participation could be arranged around other responsibilities (Metoyer, 2000). This issue demonstrates the partial commitment of the FSLN to women's equality. The draft question became politically controversial and the FSLN, concerned to maintain popularity, perceived the inclusion of women in the draft as an unpopular measure. But a lack of commitment to supporting mothers and the household meant domestic responsibilities had to take priority. The FSLN caved in to the demands of more conservative forces due to wider political consideration and would do so again, this time concerning the abortion law. Through the AMNLAE's activism at town meetings in the run-up to the new constitution in 1987, the organisation pushed for a guarantee for a woman's right to abortion. However, after appearing in the working draft, it was absent from the final version of the constitution (Lancaster, 1992: 99).

Though legal reforms and women's mobilisation in the revolutionary movement did represent important attempts at transforming women's position in Nicaraguan society, it was more general objectives of social redistribution that benefited women the most (Molyneux, 2003). These included the literacy campaign (which reduced illiteracy levels from 50 per cent to 13 per cent), expansion of education, better healthcare services and housing (Molyneux, 2003: 56). The Sandinista state transformation that took place starting in 1979 affected women in multiple ways, 'through the expansion of adult and formal education, the opening of state-funded day-care centres, the beginning of a campaign against domestic violence, and the nationalisation of health care' (Kampwirth, 1996a: 140). These policies had the most impact on the lives of the poorest and most vulnerable, predominantly women and children. Fernández Poncela similarly concludes that women's position in society changed the most because, from an already disadvantaged position, they would gain the most from Sandinista advances in health, education and housing (1997: 46). It was the class position of women that primarily made them beneficiaries of government policies, rather than specifically their gender (Molyneux, 2003). Owing to women's position in the sexual division of labour, the policies had the effect of alleviating some of the strain on the household and, therefore, the primary bearers of this responsibility: women.

## The continued strength of the Catholic Church

As already discussed, economic crises and the failure of the FSLN to prioritise women's demands help explain the frustration of revolutionary goals for women's emancipation, but it is important to recognise the role of conservative forces in Nicaraguan society and their opposition to transformative measures. The Catholic Church was politically and socially influential throughout the Revolution and held back many of the more progressive reforms, a position they continue to hold as will be discussed in more detail in relation to abortion law changes in 2006.

What can be viewed as a politically progressive attempt by the Sandinistas to ensure political pluralism, to some degree meant that more conservative forces (such as the Catholic Church - particularly the hierarchy - and the capitalist class), were still able to operate in opposition to the government. With typically traditional attitudes to women's roles, transformative measures in terms of women's rights were often met with strong opposition:

'The commitment to 'pluralism' and to maintaining the support or at least neutrality of the capitalist class had as one of its necessary effects the imposition of certain limits on the transformative capacity of the state in some areas of policy. This was especially clear with regard to the government's programme to improve the position of women' (Molyneux, 2003:52).

Understood in the context of maintaining the support of the capitalist classes during a period of war and failing economy, the sacrifice of the ideals of women's emancipation by the FSLN, she argues, can be interpreted as a pragmatic economic survival strategy (Molyneux, 2003).

Even stronger than the capitalist class, was the ideological power of the conservative wing of the Catholic Church, which maintained a high profile in the media and a large support base within the population: 'Its extensive institutional presence, forms of organisation, access to the media (it had its own radio station) and base within a substantial section of the population made it a formidable opponent. Its impact on slowing reform in the areas directly concerned with women was considerable' (Molyneux, 2003:53). Molyneux highlights the contradictions that an active civil society had in Nicaragua during the Revolution and the conflictive relationship in which the women's movement found itself with the Church, which was able to oppose education and family reforms, along with conscription for women, the reform of divorce law and promotion of birth control, 'and were strong advocates of traditional life and the division of labour which characterises it' (Molyneux, 1985: 243). Policies aimed at emancipating women's position met with strong opposition, as well as a lack of popular backing in many cases. Without a feminist history in



Nicaragua, ‘the Sandinistas had to contend with deeply entrenched *machista* attitudes and considerable hostility among much of the population to the idea of women’s emancipation’ (2003: 53). This identification of the strength of the Church in Nicaragua – in social and political terms - is crucial, as will be argued later in this chapter, to understanding the decision of political parties of the left and right during the run-up to the 2006 elections to enter into a broad alliance with the Catholic and Evangelical Church to abolish therapeutic abortion (abortion when the mother’s life is in danger).

## **Economic structural adjustment, gender and employment**

The 1990 electoral defeat of the FSLN has been explained as almost inevitable given a population weary of war and of economic crisis, while the UNO coalition offered the promise of peace and economic stability. Dunkerley acknowledges the FSLN faced ‘formidable forces’ during the 1990 elections but more importantly, they were over-confident in their ability to defeat the opposition (1990: 34). The economic crisis in Nicaragua was acute. The US economic boycott and world recession, combined with the costs of war and government economic mismanagement, led to hyperinflation and major shortages. In 1988, the FSLN introduced the first of two structural adjustments. Inflation was reduced, but the repercussions were keenly felt by the majority of the FSLN support base, with 50,000 public employees’ sacked and average real wages reduced to 1950s levels (Dunkerley, 1990: 35). Although North American aggression was more important than either of these factors in explaining their electoral failure, Dunkerley points to a lack of recognition of the severity of the problems facing the Party. Popular support for the FSLN had been exhausted to a large extent by the efforts of the Party to secure economic stability, and its development through revolution and civil war had seen it grow organisationally inflexible – a point clearly demonstrated by the divisions amongst members of the AMNLAE. In this unpropitious climate, the US-backed UNO, consisting of representatives from the Left and Right, and headed by Doña Violeta Chamorro (the widow of the respected and popular editor of *La Prensa* who had been murdered by Somoza’s Guards in 1978), represented a non-ideological alternative of hope for peace and an end to shortages that the FSLN were unable to match (Dunkerley, 1990:38).

A large gender gap emerged in the 1990 elections with more women than men supporting the UNO, a situation explained by women’s greater responsibility in the household and, therefore, experiencing greater social hardship (Luciak, 2001). The two candidate’s campaigns took on highly gendered characteristics and a number of elements of the UNO electoral campaign particularly appealed to older Nicaraguan women. Especially

important was the utilisation of traditional gender imagery by both parties but most successfully as personified in the coalition leader, Violeta Chamorro. Chamorro presented herself as an exemplary wife/widow/mother, campaigning for traditional family values and even though a public figure, 'she was presented as symbolic of the private woman, the traditional mother' (Kampwirth, 1996b: 67). In campaign speeches she repeatedly distanced herself from the emancipatory goals of the Revolution, rejected feminist objectives and recognised women's position as subordinate to men: "I am not a feminist nor do I wish to be one. I am a woman dedicated to my home, as Pedro taught me" (cited in Kampwirth, 1996b: 69). Throughout her campaign, Chamorro dressed in white as a 'symbol of purity, in this case of her freedom from the taint of politics' and also as the opposite of the Sandinista woman guerrilla (Kampwirth, 1996b: 71). The UNO was presented as the Party which would reunify Nicaraguans and end the suffering of mothers, like Violeta Chamorro. Such antifeminist strategies resonated powerfully amongst older women, who voted in greater numbers for the UNO than any other sector of the electorate (Kampwirth, 1996b: 72; Metoyer, 2000: 48).<sup>31</sup> Although young women took advantage of reforms to labour, childcare, education, welfare and the family, older women had crucially felt loss and hardship, including the 'erosion of the limited privilege that age had given them in traditional family life' (Kampwirth, 1996b: 70). The family Provision Law had spread responsibility for household maintenance throughout all adult members, so older women who may have expected to be financially supported by their relatives as they grew older, faced a future of possible uncertainty.

The hold of the FSLN over AMNLAE was demonstrated once again during the 1990 election. Chinchilla describes what was effectively a 'coup d'état' of the AMNLAE leadership in 1989, when it was taken over by selected FSLN leaders in order to campaign for women's votes at the expense of goals aimed at altering women's position (1994: 186). As a consequence, the women's movement remained 'silent' during the 1990 ballot (Kampwirth, 1998: 269). By using the AMNLAE as a vehicle to mobilise the popular support of mothers of combatants, they had emphasised an image of women as suffering mothers and reinforced their traditional roles. The UNO also utilised this representation to great effect: 'Ironically, measures that were taken to ensure the longevity of the FSLN may ultimately have contributed to its electoral loss' (Kampwirth, 1996a: 141).

For his part, Ortega chose a rather confused gendered image, of father, sex-symbol and anti-imperialist. Kampwirth points out that to a certain degree the FSLN were complicit

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<sup>31</sup> According to Metoyer in one post-election survey, 52.4 per cent of homemakers voted UNO and 33.2 per cent voted FSLN (2000: 48).

in their failure at the ballot box (1996a: 141). Such an approach, according to Raby, was part of a growing tendency within the FSLN to personify the popular image of the Party in Ortega, resulting in the decision to 'adopt a bourgeois campaigning style which privileged Ortega's personality much more than ever before' (2006: 213). This development became almost inevitable once the decision had been taken in 1984 to exclude mass base representation from the National Assembly and switch to a liberal democratic model. Raby argues that had the popular organisations still enjoyed direct democratic representation, they would have been able to oppose the structural adjustment measures the Sandinistas instigated in 1987-1989 and thus maintain popular support for the Party (2006: 210). However, the collective charisma and appeal represented by revolutionary leaders of mass base organisations had been extinguished with the return to a formal Party structure with Ortega as the leader.

## Gender and employment

As previously discussed, women participated increasingly in public life during the 1980s, including an increased labour force participation. The Sandinista government encouraged women to take up new roles through policies directed at health, education, housing and welfare. With large numbers of men at the frontline, women increasingly had to seek employment to support the household. Additionally, socio-economic factors of economic hardship and labour shortages meant that many women had to combine domestic responsibilities with paid work, as well as supporting community initiatives. Women's labour activity rose from 26.7 per cent in 1977 to 32 per cent in 1985 (Metoyer, 2000:33). Their greater visibility in the labour force, especially in industry and agriculture, represented a challenge to the gendered division of labour to some extent. But women's participation in public life came with contradictions because gendered inequalities and societal perceptions of appropriate roles for men and women affected the type of work women undertook and their earnings, 'a rigid gender division of labour persisted in which women were considered primarily responsible for reproductive work' (Metoyer, 2000:33). Sandinismo, based as it was in Marxist ideology, linked gender oppression to class oppression, and measures promoted by the Sandinistas to remove obstacles to women's emancipation often fell short of their objectives because class was prioritised above gender. For instance, measures were introduced to increase women's participation in the labour market, which resulted in a greater number of female workers, but the type of employment they were involved in remained fairly gender specific and did not challenge traditional roles (Molyneux, 2003). Women were paid less than men and tended to work in stereotypically gendered jobs with less decision-making power. Moreover, labour activity in agriculture and industry witnessed

a re-masculinisation following military demobilisation and economic crisis, further restricting the participation of women (Fernández Poncela, 1996: 52).

Following economic adjustment policies by the Sandinistas in the late 1980s and the UNO government in the early 1990s, public sector employment was badly hit by job-cuts and with 49 per cent of public administration and 51 per cent of service sector positions occupied by women, theirs was the worst hit social sector (Fernández Poncela, 1997: 43). By 1992 women made up 73 per cent of the informal sector, while 65 per cent of urban families and 82 per cent of rural families were headed by women (Fernández Poncela, 1997: 47). Structural adjustment programmes were introduced throughout Latin America in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Neoliberal economic restructuring began later in Nicaragua, but as elsewhere in the region, had particularly negative social consequences for women (Babb, 1996; Fernández Poncela, 1996; Perez-Aleman, 1992). The first of Nicaragua's structural adjustment policies (SAPs) were introduced in the late 1980s by the Sandinistas in an attempt to cope with the combined pressures of debt servicing, a huge deficit in the balance of payments, and an inflation rate of almost 5000 per cent. Real wages for those in the formal sector had dropped 54 per cent by 1985, and absolute poverty had increased from two-thirds of the population in 1980, to 80 per cent in 1988. The first of two SAPs, introduced in 1988, devalued the Cordoba by 3000 per cent in an attempt to reduce spiralling inflation due to cost of war and welfare spending. Following this, in 1989, with the country still facing a major economic crisis the Sandinistas introduced a second SAP, eliminating economic subsidies, reducing social spending and cutting 30,000 public sector jobs (Perez-Aleman, 1992: 242). This last measure of massive job-cuts was disproportionately felt by women who occupied many public sector jobs created by the Sandinistas in health, education and welfare. In Nicaragua, as elsewhere in Latin America, it has been the popular sectors and women in particular who have been worst affected by stabilisation programmes (Fernández Poncela, 1996). Social budgets decreased while poverty increased, resulting in an overwhelming demand on services with women taking up the burden of provision.

The UNO pursued a policy of structural reform, opening the economy to trade liberalisation, especially export-oriented manufacturing, while at the same time reducing the role of the state and increasing privatisation. By 1993 inflation had been brought under control, the economy had been stabilised and new initiatives towards maquila production and non-traditional exports accounted for 43.5 per cent of all exports. However, sustained economic improvement had not been achieved and unemployment and poverty had increased (Cupples, 2005a: 308). The pace of neoliberal reform was particularly crushing for those most economically vulnerable: women and children (Metoyer, 2000). The

implementation of neoliberal reforms in Nicaragua had particularly dramatic consequences given the previous years of war that had left the country economically devastated (Cupples, 2005a: 305). Cupples identifies a number of existing economic, social, political and cultural factors in Nicaragua in 1990 that 'coincided with neoliberalism to produce new configurations of gender roles, relations, and identities, or accelerated processes that were already taking place prior to 1990' (Cupples, 2005a: 312). Neoliberal structural adjustment coincided with the demobilisation of 70,000 soldiers who struggled to find employment in the climate of severe economic austerity and were also unwilling to engage in reproductive responsibilities which encouraged many women to adopt single motherhood as a long-term strategy (Cupples, 2005a: 313). A further issue was the high levels of domestic violence, with the IDB estimating that in 1997 52 per cent of women had experienced psychological, physical or sexual abuse in their homes (Pearce, 1998: 591).

The economic program introduced in March 1991 by the UNO resulted in a crippling shortfall between increasing prices and falling real wages (Babb, 1996). Furthermore, a number of authors argue that the Chamorro administration and its supporters, disturbed by women's new-found role as paid workers, introduced policy to actively curtail their involvement and 'allow them to return home to care for their families' (Kampwirth, 1996: 74; Babb, 1996; Cupples, 2005a). The *Plan de Conversión Ocupacional* (Occupation Conversion Plan, henceforth PCO), designed and introduced by the Chamorro government in 1991, aimed to cut public sector employment and invest in the private sector. Lay-offs were predominantly made in areas associated with female labour: cooperatives and factories (textiles, food, crafts) and health and education programmes (Fernández Poncela, 1996: 52). State employees were encouraged to leave their jobs through the offer of a cash payment of up to US\$2000, the equivalent of around 20 months pay, which they could invest in starting their own business often from their homes selling food and household items. Despite a climate of continued economic crisis the plan was supported by the US and multilateral funding institutions with a disproportionate number of women taking up the cash incentives. Many women invested in freezers and sold ice creams and soft drinks from their homes but many struggled in an already saturated area of the economy (Babb, 1996: 33). Kampwirth argues that the gendered consequences of the PCO were consistent with the UNO's emphasis on women's traditional role as mothers and housewives (1996: 74). By 1992, Nicaragua was experiencing the worst depression of its history: between 1990-1992 formal sector employment, predominantly in education, health and public services, reduced by 18 per cent; underemployment reached 45 per cent and unemployment 19 per cent (Babb, 1996: 32). Due to the uneven gendered effects of state policy women in Nicaragua during the 1990s felt a rapid decline in their economic base (Babb, 1996: 33).

As a consequence of economic crisis and structural adjustment, unemployment, underemployment, and the precariousness of work increased significantly; an estimated 40 per cent to 58 per cent of the economically active population were unemployed in 1992 (Fernández Poncela, 1996: 51). The most significant consequence for women of economic restructuring was their growing integration into the informal sector (Perez-Aleman, 1992). Fernández Poncela's fieldwork questionnaire revealed that in the department of León, women constituted 70.62 per cent of the informal sector in 1990, working as domestics and traders, while in the same year men made up 59.2 per cent of formal sector employment (1996: 52). As Fernández Poncela concludes, the informal sector is, 'the employer of last resort par excellence of workers considered "secondary", traditionally women and those on the margins of society' (1996: 52). The informal sector is particularly attractive to women because they can combine work with domestic responsibilities (Perez-Aleman, 1992; Fernández Poncela, 1996). Informal sector work can be scheduled around reproductive responsibilities and in many cases replicates the same activities. However, jobs are low-skilled and therefore poorly paid and come without the contractual benefits of formal sector employment.

Metoyer argues that the Sandinistas attempted to address unequal power relations in Nicaraguan society by explicitly supporting an ideology of equality and a greater public role for women (2000).<sup>32</sup> However, the conflicting identities and roles Nicaraguan women were encouraged to adopt met with socially and culturally embedded assumptions that were resistant to change:

The contradictory ways in which motherhood is socially constructed in Nicaragua both celebrate mothers as heroic and reinforce women's subordination; like other domestic duties, childcare is considered to be a female responsibility. Thus, women who work outside the home experience an increase in their workload because domestic duties remain their responsibility (Metoyer, 2000:34).

These gendered assumptions of men and women's appropriate roles were a central feature of Chamorro's victory in 1990. Following victory, the UNO immediately implemented policies that emphasised women's traditional role at home with the family, such as the PCO. Indeed, in the first year of government the UNO and USAID produced textbooks for schools representing the traditional roles of men and women as breadwinner and housewife as well as emphasising the importance of legal marriage and opposition to abortion, (Babb, 2001: 59), two key priorities for reform for feminists during the Revolution. Babb argues these

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<sup>32</sup> These reforms included providing childcare, giving women the right to divorce and to inherit property. Rural sector workers were paid on an individual basis rather than to the household potentially giving women more control over earnings. By 1989, women made up 29 per cent of temporary workers and 10 per cent of permanent workers on state farms (Metoyer, 2000:20).

‘Traditional values are invoked to shore up the need for private services provided by women who are increasingly removed from the dominant public culture’ (2001: 59). That the state continues to evoke such images is perhaps indicative of how deeply ingrained and powerful traditional gender constructions remain in Nicaraguan society for both men and women. As many authors have noted, women’s participation in paid employment can also create conflict in the home concerning income expenditure and the partner’s opposition to the woman spending time outside the home (Bradshaw 2002; Chant 2009). The evocation of traditional gender roles has contradictory consequences especially when in the context of economic crisis ‘the inability of most Nicaraguan women to match the ideal of remaining home with family has never been more apparent’ and ironically is largely a result of neoliberal economic restructuring under the UNO government (Babb, 2001: 59).

As Cupples points out, it is also important to remember that motherhood and work in Nicaragua has historically been considered as compatible, ‘[t]he massive integration of Nicaraguan women in the labour market, their concentration in informalised sectors of the economy, and family dependency on women’s multiple income-generating strategies are not specifically features of the neoliberal economy’ (Cupples, 2005a: 311). During the Somoza dictatorship paid work was considered a ‘normal’ part of women’s everyday lives, although some aspects have intensified under neoliberalism (Cupples, 2005a: 312). This is despite the reality that because of early childbirth and high fertility rates, motherhood tends to span a number of decades in Nicaragua and women are mothers for a large proportion of their lives (Cupples, 2005a: 313). What is interesting is that despite the ‘normality’ of women’s paid work, normative understandings of masculinity and femininity still dominate in discourse around gender and work. Cupples argues that processes of neoliberalisation have the potential to not only reinforce and reproduce gender inequalities but also to open up new spaces where normative notions of gender roles can be challenged:

In the Nicaraguan case the promotion of fixed or traditional gender identities for women and by the state clashes with discourses of globalisation, modernisation, and democratisation and these clashes create spaces in which normative understandings surrounding femininity and motherhood can be renegotiated (Cupples, 2005a: 308).

Emphasising the importance of examining the particular context of processes of neoliberalism and paying attention to the intersection between paid and unpaid work, Cupples points out that women who work are not necessarily also responsible for the domestic burden, ‘income-earning women take on more masculine roles and subject positions’ (Cupples, 2005a: 315). In this way, neoliberalism can possibly offer a challenge to traditional gender norms. Furthermore, Cupples data suggests that ‘although work is

economically necessary and central to family survival in Nicaragua, it is also a very important source of identity and self esteem' (Cupples, 2005a: 317).

More recently the expansion of the *maquila* industry and agri-business in Nicaragua has seen a growing number of women taking up employment in these sectors. Both types of employment are characterised by poor working conditions, terms of contract and long hours. Prieto-Carrón's research on banana workers in Nicaragua reveals the low daily wages (around US\$1.20-1.50 in Nicaragua), insecurity of employment and many the common occurrence of health problems associated with skin allergies and cancer due to pesticide exposure (2006: 7). The majority of the women employed in this sector tend to be single mothers and the main breadwinners, however, 'women packing-house workers are being replaced by men with the argument that women are more expensive to employ because of reproductive and maternity responsibilities (Prieto-Carrón, 2006: 7). In the *maquila* industry women's jobs are threatened by increasing closures of factories as companies relocate to other countries where they can pay cheaper wages. In 2008, Nieng Hsing, the largest Taiwanese consortium in Nicaragua announced it was moving its operations to Vietnam for cheaper labour, resulting in the loss of 14,000 jobs (Prieto-Carrón, 2010: 5). The implications of more recent developments in the Nicaraguan economy and the extent to which employment reinforces gender inequalities or offers opportunities to young women to challenge gendered norms of appropriate behaviour will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 6.

## **The FSLN and Danielismo**

The FSLN had been unprepared for their position as the democratic opposition party following defeat in 1990, and the tensions and differences that had caused divisions before revolutionary success, reappeared in the aftermath of defeat. The party had been tainted by corruption scandals post-1990 when large amounts of property were rapidly redistributed to high-ranking members of the FSLN during the transition of power to the UNO. Suspicions were also raised about the disappearance of US\$20 million in party funds and this led many senior party members to criticise the perceived lack of internal democracy of the party (Cupples and Larios, 2005b: 325). Internal debate and divisions continued throughout the first half of the 1990s concerning the direction the party should take and disagreements over tactical alliances with the Chamorro government (Prevost, 1997a: 149). Many prominent Sandinistas were concerned that the FSLN was losing touch with the party's social base and appeared to support unpopular economic policies (Prevost, 1997b: 36). The wider population had become disaffected with politics and increasingly saw the Sandinistas as locating a



position alongside the ‘country’s traditional political elite that had failed to address their fundamental social and economic problems’ (Prevost, 1997a: 149). After failure in 1990, the FSLN publicly recognised the too authoritarian nature of the party hierarchy that had silenced criticism and was ‘undermined by the contrast between the lifestyles of many party officials and the difficult living conditions of most of the population’ that had contributed to their defeat (Cupples and Larios, 2005b: 323).

The main division within the party was between those who were pushing for a renovation of organisation and strategy and those who backed continuity. The renovators pushed for more dialogue with political forces, and were led by Sergio Ramírez and Dora María Tellez. The other faction, led by Daniel Ortega and Tomás Borge, maintained control of the party apparatus and grassroots, and sustained a ‘belligerent opposition’ towards new government (Puig, 2010: 87-88). The former group favoured a move to the democratic centre while Ortega’s group emphasised at least rhetorically, traditional party principles of identifying with the popular sector even though it continued supporting the Chamorro-government policy (Prevost, 1997a: 38). The divisions were not to be mended; following a heated party conference in May 1994 the FSLN splintered with Ramírez and Tellez, amongst other prominent members of the party, leaving to form the *Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista* (MRS) (Prevost, 1997a: 36). This division, argues Puig, marked the beginning of a new stage for the FSLN with the future of the party under the total control of Ortega and his followers. The renovators failure to institutionalise the FSLN and introduce greater internal procedures led to division and ironically, the concentration of power and ‘unrestricted leadership’ of Ortega (Puig, 2010: 89).

In the 1996 presidential elections, the FSLN failed to present themselves as a coherent alternative and were beaten by the PLC led by Arnoldo Alemán (Cupples and Larios, 2005b: 323). Ortega’s aggressive if rhetorical opposition to Chamorro’s implementation of economic adjustment was replaced in 1996, by a strategy of negotiation with the newly elected PLC leader Alemán (1997-2001) (Puig, 2010: 91). The Pact that was signed in 1999 between the FSLN and the PLC effectively consolidated the control of the three main political institutions by the two parties and severely weakened other parties (Cupples and Larios, 2005b: 325).<sup>33</sup> Significantly, the Pact also guaranteed Ortega and Alemán greater impunity amid accusations of sexual abuse against the former and corruption against the latter.

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<sup>33</sup> The Pact also made changes to Nicaragua’s electoral law making it one of the strictest in the region. Strict rules around establishing party leadership across all municipalities as well as needing 4 per cent of the vote in elections, meant only three main parties competed in the 2001 elections (Cupples, 2005b: 326).

## Ortega's re-election

For the presidential election campaign in 2001 there had been little to choose between the programmes of the PLC and the FSLN especially given the lack of manoeuvrability of neoliberal reforms (Cupples and Larios, 2005b: 324). Ortega had been looking healthy in the polls presenting a more feminised, familial and Christian image than previously but his position as leader of the FSLN was highly contested amid a number of issues. Having lost the 1990 and 1996 elections, Ortega had also overseen the splintering of his party with members disillusioned at the lack of internal democracy. Furthermore he was facing accusations of sexual abuse from his stepdaughter, Zoilamérica Narvaéz, although he was impune from prosecution because of his position as a deputy in the National Assembly (Cupples and Larios, 2005b: 318). That he lost the 2001 elections owes more, according to Cupples and Larios, to the ability of domestic political forces following 9/11, to associate Ortega as a friend of terrorists using media campaigns that linked him to Arafat, Gadaffi and Castro and his previous macho, war image associated with revolution. They argue it is important to challenge political rhetoric that fixes Ortega as 'a political adversary of the US rather than as a contradictory self-serving figure who pacts with the right and no longer challenges in any way the neoliberal status quo' (Cupples and Larios, 2005b: 329).

Despite these set-backs, Puig argues that it is precisely because of the adaptation of the FSLN and the centralisation of power with Ortega, that they succeeded in the 2006 elections. Having moved from a position of aggressive opposition to Chamorro's government to that of negotiation with Alemán and the PLC, Ortega continued this strategy with both the Bolaños administration (2002-2006) and the Alemanistas. The FSLN were so successful that they found themselves the key player in Nicaraguan politics when deep divisions began to appear amongst the previously united liberal bloc (Puig, 2010: 91). For the electoral campaign of 2006, Ortega chose to distance himself from the traditional revolutionary colours of red and black associated with the FSLN, and instead portrayed himself on a softer, pink background. The party changed name to the Gran Alianza Nicaragua Triunfa (United Nicaragua Triumphs) and emphasised a discourse of "love, reconciliation, and forgiveness", and perhaps more surprisingly aligned itself with the Catholic Church (Puig, 2010: 91-92).

Ortega's new cabinet gave a powerful role to his wife, Rosario Murillo, and ministers selected were relatively politically weak Sandinistas. Ortega has been praised for reversing the policies towards health and education of the previous governments, making primary and secondary education as well as access to health care and hospitals, free, but has maintained

the macroeconomic policies of the previous administration (Puig, 2010: 93). His government has also overseen the implementation of programmes targeting poverty alleviation such as Hambre Cero (Zero Hunger) and Desempleo Cero (Zero Unemployment) (Puig, 2010: 93). According to a NACLA Report article by Katherine Hoyt on Ortega's anti-poverty programmes, they have been funded through Nicaragua's membership of the ALBA and a subsequent deal to sell Venezuelan (December 2009).<sup>34</sup> In addition, the Ortega government is on the way to achieving the 2012 deadline for the United Nations Millennium Development Goal of almost total school age enrolment (Hoyt, December 2009). However, in a subsequent article also in NACLA, Alejandro Gutiérrez took the opportunity to point out 'the broader political and economic context' in which, he claims, 'the Ortega government, which has aligned itself closely with Nicaraguan big business while aggressively confronting and alienating women's groups, civil society, and non-governmental organizations' (Gutiérrez, January 2010). Furthermore, while admitting there has been some progress towards addressing poverty, he claims that investment in poverty alleviation 'has only been superficially redistributive and has merely been palliative' (Gutiérrez, January 2010). It is difficult to evaluate Ortega's administration given the lack of research available at this point, but the contrast in opinions of the previous authors is perhaps a good indication of the divisive opinions Ortega's return to power has garnered so far.

## Ortega and the Catholic Church

Kampwirth explains Ortega's alignment with the Catholic Church position on abortion, as a result of long-term processes related to transformations in the ideology of the FSLN, divisions within the feminist movement and the strength of what she terms the 'antifeminist' movement (Kampwirth, 2008: 122). The FSLN has undergone an internal revolution during its 16 years in opposition, moving ideologically to the centre and even towards the right on the issue of abortion, and increasingly becoming a one-man political party. The feminist movement has divided over objectives and strategies, while at the same time, in a context of escalating economic crisis, it is struggling to maintain solidarity with the grassroots, whose demands are shaped by practical needs. At this juncture, conservative 'antifeminist' forces mostly associated with the Catholic Church, and possessing strong ties to state ministries in health, education and the family, have become increasingly powerful and influential (Kampwirth, 2008: 128). Given these factors, it is possible to explain how the Church was

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<sup>34</sup> Under the terms of the agreement Nicaragua pays 60 per cent of the price of the oil up front and the remainder is repaid over 25 years at 2 per cent interest (Hoyt, 2009).

able to push the Bill through the Assembly just weeks before national elections, why the FSLN decided to vote for the abortion ban, and the inability of the feminist movement to oppose the decision. The following discussion will elaborate on these points.

The blanket ban on abortion two months before the 2006 national elections has largely been explained as the result of political manoeuvring on the part of Ortega and the FSLN to gain the support of the Catholic and Evangelical Churches. But there is a complexity of factors to consider. The FSLN's position on abortion made little difference to the electoral outcome, as the FSLN was voted in by their traditional voters; their victory had more to do with a divided right (Kampwirth, 2008: 132). Key to understanding the FSLN decision is to recognise the ideological and organisational transformations that had occurred within the Party, changes that began during the latter stages of the Revolution and became entrenched during sixteen years of opposition. The new FSLN of 2006 certainly lacked the emancipatory goals of the 1979 version, '...whether flexible or cynical, the return to the left in Nicaragua does not look very left-wing, at least not from a feminist perspective' (Kampwirth, 2008:132). Rather than an ideological shift by the Party towards the right, Kampwirth views the 2006 decision as something like pragmatic cynicism: '...it was a shift to cynicism. It was part and parcel of the FSLN's long-term evolution from a revolutionary party to one that was often a personal vehicle for Daniel Ortega and his family' (2008: 127). This personalisation of the Party meant that during my fieldwork, people commonly referred to 'Danielismo' in casual conversation, when previously 'Sandinismo' would have described the ideology of the party.

Ortega's re-election was heralded as part of the 'pink tide' sweeping across Latin America, but feminists question the progressiveness of this government in terms of women's reproductive rights compared to other 'pink tide' countries (Bradshaw, 2008; Gago, 2007). Gago also explains the less progressive nature of Ortega's leadership compared to other 'pink tide' countries as a reflection of the legacies of revolution, and the particular historical interaction between the Left, the Right, the Catholic Church, and financial institutions. In her article she speaks to Mónica Baltodano, the ex-Sandinista commander, who explains Ortega's conservative position on abortion as a consequence of the small margin by which he won the election:

Ortega got about 37% of the votes through shady manoeuvres, which is why he is insecure...This makes him even more conservative and excessively diligent in impressing bankers, the church and the United States. The abolition of abortion signals a situation of brutal retrogression...of a political force [the Sandinistas] that has to give more signs of compromise to the reactionary sectors than would any right-wing force that might come to power (Mónica Baltidano, in Gago, 2007: 18).

The timing of the bill to ban even therapeutic abortion is also crucial to understanding its success. Before the vote, the Catholic and Evangelical Churches mobilised large numbers of people in support of the ban; fast-tracked through the Assembly in the run-up to the 2006 elections, it gained the support of four of the five main parties. The pact between Aleman (PLC party) and Ortega (FSLN) established in the 1990s is well known. However, what is less acknowledged in Nicaragua is the third party in the pact, the Church: ‘The Catholic hierarchy has assumed such a prominent position that some in the country have suggested it is difficult to call Nicaragua a secular state’ (Bradshaw, 2008: 69). Church and evangelical leaders purposefully forced the Assembly to decide on the controversial legislation at a time when it seemed crucial to political parties to maintain the support of conservative voters (Getgen, 2008: 41). The timing shows not only the strength of the Church and its influence on political parties, but also the readiness of political parties to use women’s reproductive rights as a ‘bargaining chip’ to win elections (2008: 69). Eventually, of the five parties contesting the election, only the MRS opposed the Bill (Bradshaw, 2008: 80).

Against this backdrop, where conservative forces had seized the initiative, in September 2006 Nicaragua joined a very select club (with Chile, El Salvador and Malta) in banning therapeutic abortion. This means pregnancy in the case of rape, incest or health-threatening pregnancies, have to now go full-term, regardless of the risk to life. The complete abortion ban violates fundamental human rights to life and health (Getgen, 2008). The new law also criminalises health professionals who can be prosecuted and face a jail term if they carry out, assist, or even advise, on abortion. Women who abort may face up to three years in prison and doctors up to two (Getgen, 2008: 155). Any medical treatment advised by a doctor and unrelated to the pregnancy must now be considered in terms of the life of the foetus, not the mother. Amnesty International has condemned the law as ‘gender-discriminatory’, as women and girls may be denied the medical treatment they need and it is only they who will suffer any detrimental physical and mental risks or even lose their lives. And women have lost their lives (Amnesty International, 2009). Advocacy groups estimated that between the enactment of the ban in November 2006 and October 2007, 82 women died (The Guardian, 8 October, 2007).

## The response of the women’s movement

Despite the previously outlined socio-political context, the women’s movement that emerged in the 1990s was diverse, dynamic, nonpartisan, independent, and one of the most important in Latin America (Babb, 2001; Chinchilla, 1994; Randall, 1992; Kampwirth, 1996a). Women’s organisations were active on a number of issues: defending women’s rights,

opposing the impact of neoliberal structural adjustment policy, campaigning around the provision of health, education services, and violence against women. One of its most important features was a new-found autonomy from Party control. Not only did the movement emerge during economically and politically uncertain times, in contrast to experiences of democratic openings in other Latin American countries, Nicaragua's transition started during a socialist regime committed to women's equality. Although the movement faced an adverse political climate, crucially it could build upon more than a decade of experience of revolutionary mobilisation and state support (Kampwirth, 1996a). The Revolution had cultivated an 'organisational capacity' that has been essential to the movement's success post-revolution. The Sandinista Revolution served as feminism's 'incubator, catalyst, and framework' (Chinchilla, 1994: 193).

More recently, the women's movement in Nicaragua has entered an increasingly conflictive period with the state and Catholic Church, with some groups and individuals subject to repression and persecution. For many women involved in the movement (many of whom are or were FSLN members), the FSLN's decision to agree to ban therapeutic abortion represented a major betrayal. Since the decision, the women's movement has focused much of its resources and attention on a strong campaign to decriminalise abortion using legal actions, the media, and street mobilisations. Those campaigning for decriminalisation are trying to focus debate on abortion as a political right rather than a health issue (Lira and Martinez, 2009).

The women's movement has become one of the strongest civil society actors in a context of decreasing economic and participatory democracy, 'there is less *economic* democracy because of the decreasing commitment of a *neoliberal* state to an equitable distribution of wealth and public services, and the increasing privatisation of the market' (Disney, 2003: 535 Italics in original). Increasing poverty and inequality, march hand-in-hand with decreasing democratic rights to dignity, education, health and access to basic resources. Political parties, on the Left and Right, have the upper hand, while civil society is dominated by NGOs. Nicaragua has an entrenched two-party system, underlined by the Pact between the ALN and the FSLN, between the two parties controlling decision-making in institutions of government (Disney, 2003: 549).

This leaves the movement with less opportunity to influence change as political parties monopolise access to power. The result for women's organising is that while there may be greater freedoms and diversity in the movement, there is also less power to effect change at a national level through the state. As a consequence, 'participatory democracy

through state revolutionary mass organisations has been replaced by autonomous organising in “civil society” with both positive and negative consequences’ (Disney, 2003: 537).

Though the movement may have been united in opposition to the ban, it has been divided by ‘personality clashes and disagreements regarding language and symbolism’, particularly regarding decisions over appropriate tactics, whether radical or moderate (Kampwirth, 2008: 127). Babb similarly points out that the diversity of Nicaraguan feminism consisting of intellectuals, NGOs, and a popular base can be both a strength and at times a weakness and ‘a cause for consternation as social class and other differences have been pronounced’ (2001: 207). As the movement developed in the 2000s, these divisions have become more apparent. There has been a divergence in priorities between more practical interests from the grassroots organisations aimed at solving the structural causes of poverty, and the focus of feminist groups on reproductive rights and the politics of poverty. Emphasising sexual and reproductive rights rather than addressing the causes of poverty, has left the movement divided and weak in the face of the rights-based discourse of the state, Church and IFI (International Financial Institution) (Bradshaw, 2008).

Further complicating the issue of abortion is the conflict individuals have to overcome concerning their own religious beliefs and demands over women’s rights, contributing to the lack of agreement on abortion as a right (Bradshaw, 2008: 70). Commonly, the players on the football team stated their support for the ban, but then went on to clarify possible exceptions when abortion might be appropriate. What is apparent from the opinions of the football players is a lack of clarity on what therapeutic abortion means and also disagreement as to when it would be suitable. Here are two responses to exemplify this point:

*En parte estoy de acuerdo, pero no en algunos casos, dependiendo de la situación, por ejemplo abuso sexual a una menor. Pero, en mujeres adultas que saben las consecuencias y sin embargo no se protegen ya sea porque no le gusta al novio, se olvido o simplemente no sabe de que manera protegerse. Muchos casos jóvenes con poca educación sexual. Yo pienso que no es justo quitarle la vida a un ser que no puede defenderse. Aunque muchos dicen que cuando está tan pequeñito no siente, pero para mí, no es así, porque es una nueva vida que crece dentro de mí (Interview Claudia, age 25, 16 July 2008).<sup>35</sup>*

Claudia is in support of the ban but nevertheless still outlines exceptions in the cases of children who have been sexually abused. In her opinion adult women, whether informed or

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<sup>35</sup> I partially agree but not in some cases, depending on the situation, for example, sexual abuse of a child. But for adult women that know the consequences and still don’t protect themselves, maybe because they don’t like their boyfriend, they forgot or simply they don’t know how to protect themselves. Many young people have little sex education. I do not think it is right to take the life of a being that cannot defend itself. Even though many say that when it’s so small it doesn’t feel, but for me, it isn’t like that because it’s a new life growing inside of me.

not on contraceptive methods, should take responsibility for the pregnancy. Her opinion is particularly interesting as she explained on other occasions, just how little sexual and reproductive education young people receive in school and how they have to rely on friends for often limited advice. Another player offered this opinion:

*La mayor parte de las mujeres en Nicaragua no están de acuerdo con la nueva ley, porque es un gran riesgo. Más que todo cuando el bebe muere dentro de barriga de madre y como es prohibido sacarlo aunque esta muerto y hay 99 por ciento de posibilidad que la mama también muera. Para mí, eso no es justo. Porque somos mujeres y más que todo somos humanos que sentimos. Los políticos piensan que eso es normal. ¿En mi opinión no, porque si el bebe esta ya muerto porque no sacarlo de la barriga de la mama si no que esperan hasta que también ella muera? No es justo. Creo que no puedo decirte mucho, es un tema bastante complicado, y hay muchas personas como yo que todavía no entienden porque esta esa ley. Tú sabes que ahora las leyes se hacen sí que la población no lo sepa. Para mí, todo lo que hacen no está correcto (Interview Nina, age 18, 12 May 2008).<sup>36</sup>*

In Nina's opinion, most women in Nicaragua are against the therapeutic abortion ban, although she outlines an example when there is no need to choose between the life of the mother or the baby. It is worth pointing out that these two players are sisters, which highlights how interpretations can differ even within families. Nina admits to not understanding why the law has been introduced pointing to political manoeuvring as an explanation.

*Estoy de acuerdo pero el problema de las personas que sufren de abusos, y de esto quedan embarazada se la desquitan con ellos, los mal tratan, los dañan psicológicamente. En cuanto a los políticos no les importa si abortan o no, ellos se interesan en el que dirán si lo aceptan, para quedar bien con su imagen política. Si ganan más estando de acuerdo a ellos nos le preocupa el maltrato psicológico, verbal, y emocional de estas persona. Es solo quedar bien ante cámaras, periódicos publicidad para su partido (Interview, Verónica, age 23, 16 July 2008).<sup>37</sup>*

Verónica supports the ban but points to exceptions. Like Nina, she notes the motivations of politicians who she believes are unconcerned for the well-being of the mothers or the lives of the babies, but only wish to increase their public image and profile.

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<sup>36</sup> Most women don't agree with the new law because it's a massive risk. Mostly because when a baby dies inside the womb of the mother and even though it's dead it's prohibited to take it out, and there's a 99 per cent possibility that the mother will die as well. For me, it's not right. Because we're women and more than anything we are humans with feelings. The politicians think this is normal. In my opinion no, because if the baby's dead why not take it out of the womb and not wait until the mother dies as well? It's not right. I don't believe I can tell you much, it's a really complicated subject and there are many people like me that still don't understand why there is this law. You know that now the laws are made without the people knowing. For me everything they do isn't right.

<sup>37</sup> I agree but the problem is with people who are abused and then get pregnant that have been abused and then are pregnant. They've been badly treated and damaged psychologically. The politicians aren't bothered whether they abort or not, they are only interested in they will get if it's accepted, in order to keep a good public profile. If they gain more in agreement they are not bothered about the psychological damage, verbal and emotional of people. It's all about a good position in the Political Assembly and in the newspapers for their Party.



Kampwirth found that even among marchers mobilised to pressure the National Assembly to introduce the ban in the run-up to elections in 2006, there was uncertainty as to the applicability of a complete ban and that in certain cases there should possibly exist exceptions, for instance for high-risk pregnancies or when the mother already had children. There was also lack of clarity over the meaning of therapeutic abortion. In interviews carried out in a *barrio* in Managua, informants proved unable to distinguish therapeutic from general abortion and many who expressed opposition to therapeutic abortion were against abortion for social reasons (Kampwirth, 2008: 130). These findings, along with the players' opinions, demonstrate the confusion and conflicting opinions that exist among the general public and which therefore may also be reproduced within the women's movement. Such internal differences obviously complicates any response of the movement to the ban, but finding a way to resolve them, if it is possible, must also be key to generating informed public debate on the topic.

A pro-abortion stance has never been a popular vote-winner in electoral politics across Latin America. Dilma Rousseff, for example, was forced to quickly make her pro-life position clear just a few days before the first round of elections in Brazil in 2010, and clarified again in the run-up to the second round of elections that eventually saw her elected President. In this regard, Kampwirth points to Alvarez's work on Brazilian political parties, where she found that what are perceived as more radical gender issues do not have electoral appeal. Given this situation, the strategy should involve 'promoting progressive gender consciousness and mobilising grass-roots constituencies', as well as pressuring parties and the state for reform (Kampwirth, 1996b: 79). Molyneux (2003) identified the same failings of the women's movement in Nicaragua during the 1980s: and it is evident that such a strategy is extremely difficult to employ, perhaps because many within the movement are themselves divided over the issue.

The women's movement is also regularly criticised for failing to engage a broader range of women. A narrowing of space and lack of co-ordination, as well as the sidelining of young women's issues, are reducing the ability of the women's movement to mobilise in defence of women's rights (Bradshaw, 2008). Interestingly, young women tended to view the abortion issue as something that concerned 'adult women' and was outside their lived realities. Instead they prioritised education and employment, but again not as rights, 'these priorities are not constructed as rights and instead appear to be conceptualised as something outside of the lived reality of young women' (Bradshaw, 2008: 71). This being the case, a shift in focus is required towards emphasising rights that encourage a shared understanding and will facilitate collective action. Within the current situation, young women may grow

increasingly distanced from political involvement as they may 'grow disillusioned with what they see to be an unresponsive women's movement' (Bradshaw, 2008: 72).

## **Conclusion**

The successful defeat of Somoza was achieved through a multi-class alliance led by the FSLN, following decades of marginalisation and increasing poverty for the majority population. The Sandinistas goal of social transformation resulted in significant attempts to alter the position of women in Nicaraguan society. Economic and social change brought new forms of participation and women were encouraged to participate in the public sphere in unprecedented numbers, in ways that redefined the boundaries of what is perceived as political activity. The Sandinistas also made considerable efforts to improve women's socioeconomic position, largely through legal reform that affected the family and workplace. However, where women participated in greater numbers this usually reflected an extension of their traditional domestic role. Women were often mobilised around practical issues relating to the community and family, and in ways that failed to challenge gendered ideologies of appropriate behaviour. An analysis based on women's interests enables us to see that both practical and strategic interests were recognised by the Sandinista government, but that women's interests were largely only pursued where they fitted with broader goals of social transformation and political mobilisation. Strategic objectives more often met with resistance within the AMNLAE, from the Party, and conservative forces.

Economic crisis and the US-backed Contra war significantly undermined the Sandinistas' more progressive attempts at social transformation, but such a context was more significant in revealing the ambiguous and contradictory ideology of Sandinismo that allowed for the persistence of gender inequalities. The FSLN utilised an ambivalent approach to mobilising women, at times emphasising their identity as revolutionary activists, while at others stressing women's role as mothers and wives in support of the Revolution. A crucial failing of the FSLN was to underestimate the strength and influence of the Church and other conservative forces in Nicaraguan politics and society throughout the period discussed. Moreover, Sandinismo failed to alter both the gendered consciousness of Nicaraguan men and women, and household politics in any significant way, resulting in the persistence of gendered norms and behaviours that still shape the lives of young women today. However, there is a tendency in the literature to focus on the achievement of feminist objectives and overlook the more subtle ways in which women's involvement in non-political organisations led to an increased sense of agency, empowerment, and gender consciousness through collective action. Such changes for individuals have the possibility of

destabilising local patriarchies and altering the macro-scale structures that shape women's lives. The introduction of neoliberal reforms since the 1990s have resulted in increasing informal sector participation for women and some authors point to the potential of paid employment to challenge notions of appropriate gendered behaviour. However, given the continued poverty and economic hardship that is characteristic of life for many in Nicaragua, it is important to remain cautious as to the potential such forms of participation hold, to challenge gender inequality.

This chapter has also demonstrated how the FSLN has altered form and ideology almost beyond recognition from a revolutionary party emphasising political pluralism and participation, to a vehicle to concentrate power with Daniel Ortega. Ortega has introduced significant and positive initiatives in education, health and poverty alleviation. Whether his leadership of the party demonstrates necessary pragmatism within the context of economic and political constraints or cynical manoeuvring to retain power, the consequences of the Pact and his support for the ban on therapeutic abortion have had severe political, social and economic consequences for Nicaraguans generally and women in particular.

## Youth, poverty, and the household in León, Nicaragua

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*Por ejemplo, con el gobierno que hay ha caído el clase de empleo, la canasta básica a aumentado en precio y al trabajador le pagan lo mismo. Por ejemplo, supone que C\$1500 le pagan a un trabajadora y la canasta básica es hasta C\$700 entonces no abasto, no aguanta, o sea, no se puede ayudar la familia entonces cuesta en la comida, cuesta en el trabajo o si a veces cuando se enferma y no tenés acceso a la medicina porque tu pago no da gasto para mucho. Y pues si hay mucha pobreza porque hay muchas jóvenes embarazadas, aquí la mayoría de la población es joven, sobre pasa a la cantidad de personas adultas (Interview: Rosa, León, 29 July 2008).<sup>38</sup>*

Rosa explains how food prices have risen beyond the means of many while wages have remained the same, a consequence, as she sees it, of failures of the current Nicaraguan government of President Ortega. In the face of economic shortages families eat less and those who are ill may go without treatment. Interestingly she identifies young mothers as amongst the poorest. The above quote highlights some of the main themes that will be explored in greater detail in this chapter: the effects of economic crisis; how poverty is experienced in the household in terms of meeting daily needs and coping with health issues; and how some groups of the population experience greater hardship than others, especially young mothers.

Nicaragua is an extremely unequal and poor country. To illustrate, nationally 48.3 per cent of the population live in poverty and 17.2 per cent in extreme poverty while 20 per cent of the population account for 47.2 per cent of consumption. Rural poverty is more extensive and severe. In urban areas 6.7 per cent live in extreme poverty and 30.9 per cent in poverty, while these rise to 30.5 per cent and 70.3 per cent respectively in rural areas. Those regions with the greatest incidence of poverty are the Central Rural and Rural Atlantic with

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<sup>38</sup> For example, with this government employment has fallen, la canasta básica [the basic weekly shopping basket] has increased in price and the worker is paid the same. For example, suppose they pay \$C1500 [a month] to a worker and the basic food basket costs \$C700 [a week], it's not enough, it won't support the family because food is expensive. Sometimes when you are ill you can't have medicine because you don't get paid enough. Yes, there is a lot of poverty, there are a lot of young women pregnant; here most of the population is young, more than the number of adults.

between them more than three quarters of the total population living in poverty (INIDE, 2007b: ix).

Given their crucial position as units of socialisation, reproduction and increasingly, production, the 'family' and the 'household' continue to be of central concern to research on gender in Latin America (Chant, 2002).<sup>39</sup> The purpose of this chapter is to examine the everyday experiences of family life and the home for the players of CFF León, within the context of broader economic and political processes. The household has become a primary target for development policy and measures of poverty based on income and consumption. However, generalising the experiences of families and households across histories, cultures and geographies is problematic given the range of forms that exist and the meanings attached to the terms (Laurie, 2008; Chant, 2003). Unequal power relations within the household and secondary poverty are well researched and accepted in analyses of household gender relations but have not become mainstream concepts in poverty debates (Bradshaw, 2002: 17). Moreover, development policy continues to focus on the adverse effects of poverty rather than the causes; the absence of an analysis of the crucial role young women play in the household is a further demonstration of the limited capacity of poverty measures these institutions recommend and employ. This chapter analyses the everyday experiences of the León players in order to elaborate a new perspective of poverty that is able to capture the complex and precarious ways in which household composition and the gendered dynamics of intra-household relations, shape young women's experiences of poverty. The chapter contributes to research that highlights the complexities of relations within the household and especially in relation to young women. Given the centrality of the home and motherhood to women's identity, an analysis of the players' roles and responsibilities within the household is crucial to an overall understanding of the persistence of traditional gender norms in contemporary Nicaraguan society. As the following chapter will demonstrate, what the players and their families have in common is that their lifestyles are precarious; fluctuations in the economy, in health, in employment and in personal reputations can have a profound effect on living standards and hopes and plans for the future.

Additionally, the young women's commitment to football affects their ability to contribute to the household in terms of unpaid and paid labour, often resulting in conflict with other family members. Such conflict points to the persistence of traditional gender roles for young women in Nicaragua. However, the players' continued commitment to the team

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<sup>39</sup> Both the 'household' and the 'family' are contested concepts which here shall be used in the former case as signifying a 'unit of co-residence' and the latter as a 'set of normative (and frequently patriarchal) relations centred on blood and marriage' (Chant with Craske, 2003: 161).

and resistance to family opposition can be understood as a challenge to traditional gender roles.

Processes of economic restructuring have resulted in greater numbers of female headed households and the increasing integration of women into paid employment; consequently young women's work – both reproductive and productive – is increasingly important. This chapter argues that young women's paid and unpaid labour is often crucial to household survival but has been critically overlooked in development policies aimed at the household, and in much of the research on gender. The burden of domestic responsibility and paid work escalates in times of acute economic crisis – in the case of Nicaragua it seems that economic crisis is, to some extent, an almost permanent state for many – or especially when family members are ill. This chapter argues that a scarcity of resources means households are vulnerable to unexpected crises in the form of health issues or 'natural' disasters.<sup>40</sup> Work, remittances and even energy supplies are unreliable and any health problems can be devastating to the household's resources.

The first section of this chapter looks at the relationship between structural adjustment policies and poverty in the household and how economic restructuring disproportionately affects women through the double burden of productive and reproductive responsibilities. It will also explain how, as more women are involved in paid labour, it is female members of the household that take up more responsibilities in the home. The second section looks at household composition and a tendency, especially within female headed households, to incorporate extended family members. By looking at the experiences of the players on the team alongside other research it will be shown that households do not necessarily share resources and therefore measuring household income does not give a picture of how resources are distributed. Further, this section will explore how '*la situación*' and economic scarcity in Nicaragua affect living situations, overcrowding, diet and health. The final section analyses the implications of the *beca* for the players; how receiving the *beca* may possibly legitimise the amount of time they devote to training and playing in matches, and especially time away from the home.

## **Gender and the household in Latin America**

Research on gender inequality in the household has revealed how social welfare cutbacks, declining real wages and the increasing costs of basic goods as a consequence of neoliberal SAPs, have resulted in the increasing participation of women in the workforce and a greater

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<sup>40</sup> A hurricane made land just a few miles north on the coast near León in July of 2008. Most of the city was affected by electric and water cuts; for some of the players they were without water for up to two weeks, for others their houses suffered structural damage.

reproductive burden in the home (Arriagada, 1998; González de la Rocha, 1995; Moser, 1992). Neoliberal economic restructuring has therefore played a significant role in restructuring the Latin American household (Chant, 2003; Radcliffe, 1999; Benería, 1991; Pérez-Alemán, 1992; Metoyer, 2000).

Increasing numbers of men are facing unemployment at the same time as greater numbers of women are entering the labour force, though predominantly in the low-skilled export-oriented manufacturing and service sectors (Safa, 1995a; Chant, 2003: 210). Latin America, as in other parts of the world, has witnessed a greater demand for female labour. In the face of subsidy cutbacks, relaxed price control, increased living costs and decreased real wages there is an increasing supply of women looking to increase the household income through paid employment. Deregulation of labour means employment is likely to be short-term and increasingly precarious. These combined effects have resulted in a situation of heightened financial insecurity which weakens household solidarity, threatens male identity as the breadwinner and increases incidences of domestic violence (González de la Rocha, 1995; Gutmann, 1996; Benería, 1991). However, it is also argued that the changes wrought by neoliberal processes, especially female employment, has resulted in the empowerment of women; with greater financial resources and control over decision-making, female employment represents a challenge to masculine authority in the household: 'while households are often a setting for the emergence of gender division and inequalities, they can also be regarded as spaces for agency, resistance and negotiation' (Chant, 2003: 163; Benería, 1991; Safa, 1995a).

The following discussion will examine in more detail the gendered implications and consequences of economic restructuring for the Latin American household as a consequence of two major trends in the region: women's greater labour force participation and the rise in female headed households.

The household has become a main target of development policy and is seen as a crucial institution through which to provide public policies in a context of decreased access to resources (Chant with Craske, 2003: 166). In Nicaragua, as across the region, there is a great variety of households often composed of extended family, and headed by single-parents.<sup>41</sup> Traditional measures of poverty based on household income and consumption levels assume resources are distributed equally throughout the household and ignore unequal power relations that operate in terms of both gender and age (Bradshaw, 2002). Critics of

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<sup>41</sup> Dore argues that the Latin American family can historically be characterised as heterogeneous, with 19th Century households headed by women as often as men (1997).

income and consumption poverty measures argue such an analysis is only able to describe people's position within society; in order to understand the actual diversity that exists between and within communities and households in how they experience poverty, micro-level approaches and policies are required (Bradshaw, 2002). Bradshaw has brought attention to the multiple levels on which poverty operates: society, community and the household, which are underpinned by gender inequality:

Women's poverty operates on different levels or there exist different sites of women's poverty: at the societal level women's position is influenced by an institutionalised discrimination in both labour markets and political spaces; at the community level gender norms inform the roles and responsibilities men and women assume, and within households unequal gendered power relations serve to reinforce their relative poverty' (Bradshaw, 2002: 1).

Clearly, poverty measures that stop at the household door are inadequate in capturing women's diverse experiences in all areas of their lives, and therefore inadequate in addressing the causes of poverty. What is of crucial relevance to an analysis of poverty, and therefore for designing effective poverty alleviation policy, is the disaggregation of data in terms of age, ethnicity and location (among other variables) as well as gender; 'it is not sufficient to consider only the differences between men and women when discussing gendered poverty, but to consider also differences between women that arise in part from life-course factors, as age interacts with other key events such as childbirth, marriage, divorce and widowhood' (Bradshaw, 2002: 2). Characteristics of poverty do not tell us *why* people are poor just as they do not tell us *who* is affected by poverty. In order to design effective poverty alleviation policies it is essential to know who 'contributes to the survival strategies of the poor ... Unpaid work is not evenly distributed across class and social group' (Benería, 1999: 306). Though the design of effective poverty alleviation policies is not the direct concern of this thesis it is argued that an approach that focuses on young women can improve academic analysis on the 'who' and the 'how' of poverty. Therefore it is important to consider how young women experience poverty, and to understand how the burden of neoliberal economic policy affects the daily lives of low-income young women is of central concern to this thesis.

Mainstream gender and development scholarship and policy-making relies on income per capita and consumption as measures of poverty to provide numeric indicators of people's ability to purchase basic goods. This has been heavily criticised by feminists for homogenising the experience of women in poverty, and failing to recognise the impact of gendered power relations within the household (Bradshaw, 2002: 11; Mohanty, 1991: 23). By focussing on the household, feminists have been able to blur the false separation of the public and private realms and to recognise the household as a key site where this binary



merges. It has also been crucial in highlighting the gendered implications of economic scarcity. As Pitkin and Bedoya point out, the boundaries of the public/private and production/reproduction are not clearly defined and nor are women's roles within them:

Production and reproduction overlap and often occupy the same space in women's lives. This makes women even more vulnerable to outside structural and institutional forces, particularly during economic crisis. The key to understanding women's situation and how the "system" often takes advantage of them lies in the *multiplicity* of their roles. These multiple roles moderate the effect of economic crisis on the household in significant ways. However, because women's adaptive responses have tended to mask the effects of the structural adjustment policies, policymakers may be blind to the extreme social costs of these financial interventions. (1997:47 italics in original).

Women's reproductive and productive roles are essential to the maintenance of the household in the face of economic crisis and structural adjustment (Pérez-Alemán, 1992). In fact the success of SAPs has depended on women's increased participation in paid labour and responsibility in providing social welfare:

At work and in the family, women have often provided the cushion needed when resources are in short supply. Women seek new sources of income, stretch household budgets, and take up the slack by offering services that are no longer provided by the state. Thus, any success that structural adjustment may have in contributing to "productivity" and "efficiency" depends on a longer working day for women, who carry the major responsibility for maintaining their families (Babb, 1996: 33).

Economic stabilization and structural adjustment policies are not gender neutral and disproportionately affect those areas of society where women are predominantly located: the household, small enterprises and the informal sector. Additionally, state cutbacks fall in areas of education, health and rising food prices, while restructuring of the employment sector results in increasing unemployment. Given women's association with the private sphere and domestic activities the burden of household maintenance falls predominantly on their shoulders (Babb, 1996: 29). What the experience of the players will demonstrate is that it is not only women as mothers or heads of household that are responsible for ameliorating the harshest affects of these policies but *all* female family members.

More recently there has been a shift in focus from measures of consumption and resources to alternative approaches to the household that recognise less materially tangible factors that influence household dynamics (Laurie, 2008). The importance of research that contextualises and captures the complexities of people's everyday lives has been increasingly recognised in approaches to gender and development. Through a focus on intra-household relations feminist approaches have demonstrated the ways in which unequal power relations structure access to resources and control over decision-making (Laurie,

2008). Women put most if not all their income into the household unlike men, do more of the housework and are worst affected by domestic violence. 'Thus, if we are interested not only in aggregate measures of economic development but also in social justice, we need to disaggregate the household to discover patterns of resource allocation, the gender division of labour, and gender relations in the home' (Babb, 1996: 29).

Increasingly there have been calls for greater attention to the micro-level and the need to contextualise women's experience. The aim is to move away from fixed categories that homogenise social groups and classes and fail to understand the complex realities of household dynamics. This can be seen as a response to what Mohanty describes as a tendency by Western feminists to view 'Third World Women' as agency-less 'victims' (2003). These universalising and homogenising approaches are unhelpful and ineffective when designing development policy (Marchand and Parpart, 1995).

One of the key debates concerning research on gender and the household in Latin America is the relationship between economic restructuring and gender relations within the household. As discussed in Chapter Two, the debate ranges from the potentially empowering consequences of greater labour force participation for women, to the continuity of unequal domestic power relations based on persistent notions of gendered behaviour (Benería, 1991; González de la Rocha, 1988; Safa, 1995a). These authors have demonstrated that for some women greater participation in the labour force has led to increased power over decision-making in the home and the potential of women's public participation in labour activity to challenge gendered norms and values associated with appropriate behaviour. However, research has also demonstrated how women's greater incorporation into the labour market has not led to men's greater participation in reproductive activities in the home. Instead the maintenance of the gendered division of labour has led to women's combined responsibility in both the domestic sphere and in paid labour (González de la Rocha, 1995: 25). The potential for women's increased bargaining power within the household has also been challenged by research showing increasing levels of desertion and domestic violence (Chant, 1997; Gutmann, 1996; Benería, 1991). With this in mind, an analysis of the data from the León team indicates that the assumption of a *super-madre* who is able to work 40 hours a week and feed and maintain a household, ignores the fact that quite often work – both unpaid and paid – is shared amongst *all* the *females* in the household and impacts on young women's opportunities to study or to pursue their own interests, such as playing football.

## Poverty and female headed households

Although data on female headed households is often inaccurate and unreliable due to varying definitions across countries, the figures indicate that as a proportion of the total number of households in urban areas, their numbers have been increasing. They are characterised by their heterogeneity of status of household head, composition, age and socio-economic position (Chant, 2002: 548). Though there are other processes implicated to explain increasing numbers of female household heads, it is those relating to gender roles and relations that are seen as key (Chant, 2002: 549).

Despite increasing numbers of female headed households the ideal in most Latin American societies is the ‘male-headed nuclear family’ (Chant, 2002: 557). Contemporary research on households in Mexico has also revealed how the nuclear family supported by the earnings of the male household head describes a limited proportion of cases. Rather, the majority of households combine ‘diverse sources of income and participation by more than one member in the labour market’ (González de la Rocha, 1995: 23). Nevertheless normative perceptions and ideals of male-headed nuclear families prevail (Chant, 2002). In Nicaragua extended and single parent households represent a significant proportion of all households (Bradshaw, 2002). However, in the ideological shadow of male headed households, the female headed household is associated with a greater likelihood of poverty due to discriminatory practices in the labour market, inequality of legal and social policy that favours the predominant ideal notion of the nuclear family, and the financial neglect of absent fathers (Chant, 2002: 557). Assumptions of female headed households as the poorest have been contested; both macro-level and empirical studies have demonstrated a much more complex relationship (Jackson, 1998; Chant, 2002). For instance, research has shown how middle-class households in Mexico may also be female headed therefore demonstrating their heterogeneous character as well as challenging assumptions that associate female headed households and poverty (Willis, 2000). The ‘feminisation of poverty’ thesis – that women experience an unequal burden of poverty – brought into focus the differing way women experienced poverty to men but has conflated women’s experience of poverty with the identification of female headed households as a particularly vulnerable group (Baden and Goetz, 1998: 23). Such an analysis dovetails with development policy that targets female household heads for poverty alleviation due to their specific association with and responsibility towards the household and its members (Bradshaw, 2002). However, while some female headed households may be poorer than male, they are often more equal in terms of resource distribution.

One of the problems is that poverty measures based on income do not give a good enough picture of the complexities of poverty for women. Interestingly, Chant argues that the association of poverty and women cannot be generalised as a negative situation. Instead

she says, 'the greater share of female heads in poverty is mainly accounted for by growth in the number and proportion of all households headed by women, and not a greater probability of poverty within the group per se' (2009: 19). One of the important findings of feminist analysis of the household has been to highlight the importance of gender dynamics and unequal power relations for the distribution of resources and responsibilities. Female heads tend to contribute most if not all of their earnings to the household and female headed households often demonstrate a fairer distribution of household resources, which suggests 'that levels of nutrition, health care and education are often comparable, if not better, particularly when comparing daughters in male- and female-headed units' (Chant, 2002: 558).

The stigmatising of female headed households overlooks an analysis of the poverty of women in male-headed households, legitimates male-headed households as less problematic and, in privileging measures of poverty based on household income, fails to address the structural causes of poverty (Chant, 2002: 558). Chant argues increasing research is needed on the subjective experience of female headed households in order to challenge 'prevailing assumptions about poverty and female headship [and] allow for households of women's own making to be conceptualised as emancipatory rather than oppressive spaces' (2002: 559). Research has challenged the assumptions of income poverty measures through demonstrating how the household can act as a site of 'secondary poverty'. Studies in Mexico, Costa Rica and Honduras have suggested that men are more likely to withhold some of their income from the household, in some cases up to 50 per cent, 'thus placing women and children within the household, who depend on that income, in a situation of secondary poverty' (Bradshaw, 2002: 16).

Chant looks at female headed households in Costa Rica in order to investigate why, despite increasing amounts of funding targeted at low-income women, increasing numbers of female headed households are identified as poor. Costa Rica is a small and relatively wealthy country which over the last few decades has managed to reduce its dependency on primary export commodities and unlike Nicaragua, it scores high on human development indicators. Despite this, a fifth of the population is poor. Since the 1970s, female headed households have made up a greater proportion of households in Costa Rica and an increasing proportion of households in poverty. Chant finds in her research in Guanacaste, Costa Rica, that women see a number of advantages in being the household head, 'including greater self-determination, more control over household income and assets, and less vulnerability to secondary poverty and violence' (2009: 37).

Other authors have highlighted the necessity to understand household poverty as it relates to other social institutions. As Bradshaw asserts, the household has been identified as an important 'site where production, reproduction, socialisation and consumption all meet. However, this does not negate the necessity of recognising and understanding how the household interacts with other social units and respecting the household as a complex unit in terms of structure and functioning; as a site of conflict and cooperation' (Bradshaw, 2002: 14). González de la Rocha argues that women's experience of poverty in the home should be seen in the context of unequal gender relations in the workplace: 'Poverty in households headed by women is clearly related to the gendered income differentials that prevail in the workplace' (1995: 24). Thus, the gender division of labour and stereotypical norms of behaviour for women continue to structure women's experience of paid work and unequal distribution of labour in the household.

## Households and youth

The necessity for households to manage the pressures of economic crisis has consequences for all family members. In order to respond to economic crisis households have diversified their income sources; as jobs disappeared and real wages reduced, it became more profitable and simply necessary for household members to enhance the family income through participation in the informal sector. This meant in practice that households survived on up to five separate incomes, with income from younger household members indispensable (Perez-Aleman, 1992: 244). Similarly, Fernández Poncela highlights the importance of young people's labour in supporting the household: 'boys leave school to work as peddlers, while girls care for their younger siblings and perform domestic chores in the absence of their mothers or other adult women who are working outside the home' (1996: 57).<sup>42</sup> The greater share of responsibilities and domestic burden has resulted in increasing school dropout rates (Fernández Poncela, 1996). More recently, figures show that young people's incomes are still essential to the household in Nicaragua. From a young age many young people have to work to support the family in the informal economy. In 2000, 10–24 year olds made up 33.1 per cent of the economically active population, while 15–24 year olds made up 29.3 per cent. Additionally, 33.6 per cent of youth and adolescents did not attend school in 1998 because of labour and domestic activities (FIDEG, 2003).

However, diversifying household income and the necessity of young people's labour has important implications for their futures, including 'school desertion, a double shift for women, and a work overload for family members. The limits of this strategy are seen in the

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<sup>42</sup> Similarly, in Mexico the work of young people is becoming an everyday necessity although the amount they earn is often small (González de la Rocha, 1995: 23).

increase in the number of young males (between 15 and 25 years of age) who are neither studying nor working' (González de la Rocha, 1995: 24). Though research is limited, age and gender play an important role in determining young people's responsibilities. Through an analysis of the relationship between age, sibling composition and child labour in households in Nicaragua, Dammert finds considerable differences between the circumstances of children in the same household. Older sisters tend to engage in more domestic work than siblings, while in comparison, older boys spend more time in market and domestic work. Given that older girls are often responsible for childcare, Dammert suggests that programs which currently tend to focus on maternal employment should instead look at the responsibilities of daughters: 'childcare will have positive effects on older school-age girls who would otherwise stay at home and care for their siblings' (2010: 223).

Certain households have been identified as more vulnerable because members are less able to enter better-paid work, have fewer possibilities of being integrated into income-generating activities and are more likely to enter into precarious employment; among them are young households and households headed by women (González de la Rocha, 1995).

As previously stated the research on youth and the household in Latin America is limited in scope and size. Clusters of research tend to gather around two main issues: violence and reproduction (Barker and Lowenstein, 1997; McIlwaine, 2001; Krauskopf, 1998). Such topics are of course extremely important and relevant to young people's everyday lives. However, given that young people are implicated in processes of economic restructuring and are subject to the disciplining forces of traditional gender roles the following analysis looks at the relationship between youth, gender and the household in the context of broader economic processes.

The remainder of this chapter will focus on the experiences of the players. The purpose of this analysis is to offer, where possible, common trends and significant differences amongst the players' families and households. Given the size of the case study it is only possible to offer suggestions and highlight areas of particular interest.

## **The players' households**

Guadalupe is in many ways typical of a León barrio with its large and imposing church dominating the main square which is dotted with trees, patches of grass and weathered benches flaking under the harsh tropical sun. The square serves a number of functions: as a meeting point and socialising space, as well as supporting a number of small enterprises offering repairs to bikes, or selling ice creams and cold drinks. Around the square is a mixture of residential housing, a school, and a number of small businesses, many of which

function from home such as a lawyer and a hairdresser. On one of the corners a brightly painted shop front advertises different types of rum and of course the ubiquitous *Flor de Caña* made using the sugar cane grown on huge plantations just outside of León.

Abril was one of the longest serving members of the UNAN León team. Now aged twenty-two she first started playing for the team when she was seventeen years old. She lived a short distance off one of the main avenues from the square along a wide dual carriageway which leads to Guadalupe cemetery at the end. The houses lining the avenue are single-storey terraced buildings, typical in León – there are very few houses that have two floors in León and even in Nicaragua – with brick or adobe walls painted in pale pastel colours, and either tiled or corrugated roofs.

Her house, where she had lived all her life, was accessed through an alleyway off the main street. After around ten metres the alleyway opened up into a large walled yard consisting of open ground with patches of grass and a few trees dotted around the perimeter. The yard (around 40 metres by 30 metres) was large enough to contain the skeleton of a two bedroom house (in its initial stages of construction), four small dwellings (each around 3 metres by 5 metres) lining the rear wall and a large chicken coop attached to the last dwelling on the left. To the right near the entrance to the yard was a large sink for washing clothes, with an awning above and a large blue plastic barrel for catching rain water or filling with water in preparation for the often daily shortages. During the first few months of the research, León and much of the Pacific Coast region of Nicaragua was subject to electricity and water shortages.<sup>43</sup> Only the very rich in León can afford washing machines, even laundrettes are expensive and beyond the means of most, save tourists perhaps. The majority of people wash clothes by hand and if they can afford to, they pay a *doméstica* or housekeeper.<sup>44</sup>

Abril, like the other players on the team, was responsible for a number of domestic tasks including cooking, shopping, washing clothes and looking after younger siblings. The following section looks at some of the experiences of other players on the team to give a more general picture of young women's domestic responsibilities.

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<sup>43</sup> The Alemán government sold the national electricity company in 1998 to Unión Fenosa, a Spanish company, and the only bidder, who immediately increased prices from anything between 100 per cent to 400 per cent but without re-investment in the distribution service (Rogers, 2008: 111). With the election of Ortega electricity supplies soon improved; however, water shortages continued to be a problem.

<sup>44</sup> A *doméstica* refers to women who clean in people's homes for a living but can also involve shopping for and preparing food as well as washing and ironing clothes, sweeping, mopping etc. There is a lot of demand for domesticas given that few people have washing machines and washing clothes by hand is time consuming. Also, keeping a house clean - given the dust and rain and insects that are common in tropical Nicaragua – can take up a good proportion of each day as well as being physically exhausting.

## Domestic responsibilities of the players

All of the players on the team explained how their daily responsibilities, apart from studies (if they were in education), mainly involved domestic chores: washing clothes, shopping for and preparing food, cleaning and looking after younger siblings. The daily routine of domestic reproductive work is time consuming. With no modern domestic appliances in the players' households, washing clothes, buying and preparing food and cleaning takes up a significant proportion of the day. Laura complained that her brothers and sisters were lazy and as she was the eldest, childless and unemployed, she was left with the majority of the domestic responsibility. With the offer of a place at the University in Managua she saw an opportunity for a change and an escape from the responsibilities at home (Laura, age 22). While many of the players describe their daily domestic chores as taking up a significant amount of their time, some players had much less responsibility around the household. For instance, Sylvia (age 16) describes a day mostly revolving around meeting her friends and playing sports:

*Me levanto con una gran pereza para ir a clases. Entro a las siete pero salgo de mi casa a las seis, siempre llego tarde al colegio. Me llevo muy bien con los varones y nos reímos, nos reímos de muchas cosas tontas que dicen. No sé, yo estoy siempre hablando y todos me escuchan y se ríen. Siempre estoy molestando a los de mi clase, soy muy necia (Interview, Sylvia, age 16, 22 August 2008).<sup>45</sup>*

School finishes at midday and then Sylvia heads home with her friend, eats lunch, listens to some music and then heads to football practice:

*Luego, después de la práctica, corro con Daniela y hago abdominales para estar delgada. Después, eso son los Jueves y Viernes hay juegos de softbol y yo me quedo viendo. Después, me aburre entonces voy a mi casa. Llego, plancho mi camisa, veo algunas novelas en la noche y me acuesto (Interview, Sylvia, age 16, 22 August 2008).<sup>46</sup>*

Given that Sylvia is the youngest of three daughters who all live at home and help their mother, perhaps the characteristics of her household better explain her lesser responsibility for domestic tasks. Sylvia's relaxed day is in contrast to most of the other players and perhaps reflects how the demands of children and young people change as they get older, or depending on whether they have older female siblings. Lizbet, like Sylvia, was one of the

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<sup>45</sup> I get up with a great laziness to go to classes. I enter at seven a.m. but leave my house at six a.m. I always arrive late to school. I arrive and then have a laugh with the guys, we mess around, and we laugh a lot about loads of stupid things that they say. I don't know, I'm always annoying my class, I'm really naughty.

<sup>46</sup> Later, after practice I run with Daniela and we do abdominal exercises to get thin. After, on Thursdays and Fridays there are softball games and I stay and watch those. After, I get bored and go to my house. I get home, iron my shirt, watch some *telenovelas* and go to bed.



younger members on the team and had greater freedom than others to devote herself to her own interests:

*A veces me levanta a las 8, y después me pongo a hacer las cosas en la casa. Me pongo a limpiar. Después me pongo a estudiar y después en mi tiempo libre me pongo a jugar. Eso es lo que hago siempre normalmente ... A veces en las noches me pongo este aquí vengo a jugar aquí, en los sábados voy en la noche al campo, todos los días voy a jugar, o me pongo a jugar así con los chavalos, así de repente nos ponemos (Interview, Lizbet, age 17, León 22 August 2008).<sup>47</sup>*

It seemed that in contrast to the younger players, the players aged 18 years and over were expected to contribute to fulfilling daily domestic tasks. Rosa explained how when she went home she immediately had to take on the domestic responsibilities for the family home in Estelí: *'Allá en Estelí solo estoy viviendo con mi hermanito y con mi papa, entonces, cuando llego a Estelí a veces me toca a planchar la ropa de mi papa o lavarle la ropa, o sea, ir hacer comida, o sea, cosas que es tu mama la que tiene que hacer pero como no estar allí entonces, ni modo me toca a mí'* (Interview, Rosa, León, 31 July 2008).<sup>48</sup> The experiences of the players on the team demonstrate how domestic responsibility is an integral part of most of their lives from a young age, which could also explain why it therefore is unquestioned. Pitkin and Bedoya's study based on research among families in Solanda, a *barrio* in Quito, Ecuador, looks at women's perceptions of their responsibilities and the strategies they employ to fulfil them, in the light of macro-economic crisis and the effects of the austerity measures of the 1980s (1997). Like the players from León they encounter a similar tendency of the assumed domestic responsibility of female household members: 'One reason women tend not to question the "naturalness" of their domestic responsibilities is that much of their childhood, adolescence and adulthood before marriage consisted of these activities in their families of origin' (Pitkin and Bedoya, 1997: 38). They also point out how female household heads in Solanda rely on female children and relatives to share the burden of domestic responsibility and that households without daughters are much harder for mothers to maintain (Pitkin and Bedoya, 1997). From this perspective, Rosa may not be happy with the responsibility of the domestic burden in the absence of her mother but she accepts the responsibility as part of her role.

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<sup>47</sup> Sometimes I get up at eight a.m. and then start to do the things around the house: I start to clean. After I go to school and after in my free time I play [football]. This is what I do normally. ... Sometimes in the evening I come here [the pitch in Ruben Dario] to play, on Saturdays in the evening I go to the pitch, every day I go to play, or I play like that with the lads, all of a sudden we decide to play.

<sup>48</sup> In Estelí I am living just with my father and little brother, so, when I get there sometimes I have to iron my father's clothes or wash the clothes, or make the food. That is, things that your mother has to do but she isn't there, so, whatever, I have to do it.

Perhaps because female family members take on a substantial domestic role from an early age it is no surprise that many of the players on the team have already taken on paid employment as *domésticas* or indeed identified this type of work as something they would envisage themselves doing for their long-term future. By far the most common and easiest work for the players and women generally to enter into, was as a *doméstica*. Four or five of the players talked about the possibility of going to Costa Rica for domestic work where they would be provided with accommodation in the employers home and therefore earn more money. The players' experience of domestic responsibility does seem to prepare them to accept future paid work in reproductive labour.

The following section will look more closely at household composition and poverty to consider the implications of female headed households and extended households in terms of resource distribution.

## Household Composition

The majority of players live in households headed by women. Of the sixteen regular squad members ten lived in female-headed households, four lived with their biological mother and step-father, and one lived with her father (her parents had separated and she had remained with her father) but only for short periods as she lived and studied full-time in León. Nationally, of households in urban areas, 61.7 per cent were male headed in 2005 and 38.3 per cent female headed. The same figures for León were 59.73 per cent male and 40.27 per cent female, so there were slightly more than the national average of female headed households in urban areas of the León department (INIDE, 2007a). In terms of household heads, seven out of ten heads were male; in urban areas the figure reduces slightly to six in ten and in rural areas increases to eight in ten. Interestingly at a national level, households headed by men were more impoverished than those headed by women. Of those households described as poor, 73.3 percent were male headed and 26.7 percent female, and for extremely poor, 76.9 percent are male headed and 23.1 percent female (INIDE, 2007b: xi). So it would appear that these figures contradict to an extent the 'feminisation of poverty' thesis; in fact, those households most impoverished are more likely to be male headed. Poverty figures disaggregated by gender, however, show a strong link between female headed households and higher levels of illiteracy with 70.8 per cent of female household heads illiterate compared with 53.2 per cent of male. Those extremely poor had an average 2.7 years of education compared with seven years for those not poor, and again the figures are similar by gender. However, male household heads had an average 1.8 years schooling while female household heads had just one year. Of those in extreme poverty, only 50.6 per cent achieved primary level education, while 41 per cent had no level of education. It is no

surprise that almost all poor and extremely poor students attend (free) public schools and colleges (INIDE, 2007b: xv).

Comparing the composition of male and female headed households the figures show that of the former the majority are nuclear households while the latter predominantly include extended family as Table 1 below, clearly shows.

**Table 1.1: Household headship according to gender, selected department and nuclear or extended household (as a percentage of households)<sup>49</sup>**

| Department                | Nicaragua   |               | León        |               | Managua     |               |
|---------------------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|-------------|---------------|
|                           | Male headed | Female headed | Male headed | Female headed | Male headed | Female headed |
| <b>Nuclear household</b>  | 59.7        | 38.8          | 35.6        | 39.0          | 60.2        | 40.0          |
| <b>Extended household</b> | 28.2<br>1   | 48.4          | 28.2<br>2   | 48.7          | 27.1        | 47.0          |

Source: Encuesta Nacional de Hogares Sobre Medición de Nivel de Vida, 2005, (INIDE, 2005a)

Based on figures from fourteen households the average size was 5.07, this compares closely to the average number for urban households in the municipality of León, which was 4.9 in 2005, and the national average, also 4.9 (INIDE, 2007a). Of thirteen members of the team, seven lived with extended family and one lived with a lodger. Further, of those eight players living with extended family, five lived in female headed households. Of the other five, four were in female headed households and one lived with her mother and step-father. Obviously this an extremely small sample but it does indicate that a greater proportion of female headed households include extended family.

Anthropological research has brought into question the assumption of group cooperation within households as a strategy in the face of economic crisis. Rogers' ethnographic research in Managua demonstrates the importance of approaches that examine the complex internal relations of households: 'neither households nor families are necessarily unified institutions, but are rather multifaceted in nature...they need to be understood in terms of their internal institutional dynamics' (Rogers, 2007: 392). Rogers' challenges what he sees as a tendency in ethnographic research to emphasise group cooperation as a strategy in the face of increasing poverty. Instead, Rogers argues,

<sup>49</sup> The remaining categories of household composition refer to: i) single person; ii) households composed of extended family and persons who are not related; and iii) finally households of non-related persons.

households were divided into units that shared nothing in terms of costs or consumption, and that far from being economically unified there was a tendency towards ‘non-cooperative’ arrangements within households (Rogers, 2007: 392). The households were divided into smaller units, which could be composed of immediate or extended family, with each unit separately buying, preparing and eating meals.

Other players’ living in extended households demonstrated similar findings. Fernanda (age 23) had lived with her mother and grandmother who had a business making and selling tortillas. She had employed a number of people to help as the business was doing so well. After her grandmother died her mother took over and she gave a few people jobs to help her sell the tortillas at the University but according to Fernanda after some malicious gossip the work was taken away from her, leaving her in debt for a loan she had taken out at the bank. She now works in Costa Rica as a live-in housekeeper. After her grandmother died Fernanda’s uncle had come to León with his family and her mother had given him part of her land to build a house. Fernanda’s mother had argued with her brother as he had wanted her to sell her house, which she had refused to do. Instead, now with her mother in Costa Rica, Fernanda was sharing the house with another of the players on the team (Rosa); and her uncle, his wife and children and their partners lived separately in a house which they had constructed. However, she said the situation was difficult and relationships were strained. Fernanda does not consider her uncle as someone she can turn to for financial support, ‘*Fue muy duro cuando mi mama se fue, no se, no cuento con nadie aqui de apoyo, de cuando me falta algo o ayudandome. A veces me siento mal, pero al mismo tiempo un rato de que esas cosas no me perjudiquen*’ (Interview, Fernanda, age 23, 31 July 2008).<sup>50</sup> Two of the players on the team – Sylvia and Nina – live with their mother and sister, Claudia.<sup>51</sup> Until a few years previously the father of Sylvia and Nina lived with the family but he had been abusive to Claudia for a number of years until they forced him to leave. He now lives a short distance from the family home. Chant finds that ‘serial monogamy of a *non* co-residential nature is more common, partly because rising levels of land and property titling among women have strengthened their ability to survive alone’ (2009: 36). The mother and father continue in a relationship but have their own separate houses.

The family survives through a combination of incomes; the players contribute a proportion of their *beca* to the household when needed, Claudia contributes some of her

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<sup>50</sup> It was hard when my mama left. I don’t know...I can’t count on anyone here for support, for when I need something or someone to help me. Sometimes I feel bad but at the same time I won’t let it hold me back.

<sup>51</sup> Claudia had also played for the team but in 2008 decided to stop and instead concentrate on finding work to pay for her studies.

wages and their mother works as a *doméstica*. They were able to build a new property with the help of money from German friends who had come to work with the team over the years, and also through taking advantage of cheaper land made available to women by the local government. Through a diverse range of income sources of the mother and daughters (including donations), the family now have a property constructed with brick walls, a tiled roof and tiled floor. Though they live in a low-income neighbourhood, the characteristics of their property are more likely to be found in middle-income earning neighbourhoods.

Though Claudia's family could be described as low-income given the amount the household survived on, the quality of their home set them apart from the experiences of most of the other players on the team. In the next section I will examine in more detail the players' homes and living arrangements.

## Household living arrangements

Josefina's house in Corinto is constructed of wooden walls and a corrugated plastic roof; the materials were in good repair and relatively new. The bedrooms and salon occupy a space roughly eight by ten metres. The front door enters straight into the salon which is separated from the bedrooms behind by two wardrobes that are placed side by side with a gap between and a curtain acting as the doorway to the rooms at the back. The salon with its compacted mud floor is furnished with the standard white plastic chairs. At the back of the house is a small yard with a sink for washing clothes and dishes, a kitchen area and a latrine at the back. As Josefina showed me around she pointed out the large avocado tree, the fruit from which they would consume themselves, or sell or swap with neighbours or family. As there is no running water in her house Josefina showers across the street where her brother lives with his family. Josefina (aged 18) is the youngest of six; her father had died a few years earlier and she now lived in the house with her mother and sister.

When I arrived at Abril's house around 2 p.m. her grandmother was preparing food while the rest of the family were lounging in hammocks or watching television. The kitchen was located under an awning made from a mixture of corrugated plastic and metal, and sheets of plastic that were held down with planks of wood in order to protect the fire and kitchen equipment from rain. The kitchen consisted of a free-standing cement sink and draining board and a couple of tables draped in plastic sheets to protect the wood and hide the plates and cutlery stored on the shelves below. There was an assortment of plastic and wooden chairs scattered around the yard. Abril's family like many in León cook on *leña* or firewood, as gas can be too expensive for many people. In the early hours of the morning (3 or 4 a.m.) before sunrise, wood is transported by cart and horse, on bikes or simply carried

on foot slung across the back, often by children, and sold door to door. In urban areas of the municipality of León 42.5 per cent of households use gas, while 55.1 per cent use *leña* (INIDE 2005a: 67).

I had arrived late and, thinking I was not coming, Abril had gone for an afternoon nap. Her grandmother woke her up and she groggily emerged from the dark interior of one of the rooms. The room was large enough for a single and a double bed which accommodated Abril, her mother, and her younger brother. The other three rooms were allocated to her two brothers and their partners and children, each family occupying one of the rooms with the final room for her grandmother. The rooms were a popular way I had seen of expanding living space at minimum cost, as a new room could be added easily as and when needed.

Abril's living situation and the little personal privacy it afforded was common amongst the players and other homes I visited. In many cases household members will use temporary partitions, such as sheets, to provide some privacy and to demarcate allotted space. In fact, overcrowding is especially common in urban areas and the principal problem in Managua (30.8 percent) and Urban Pacific (39.8 percent). Those households in a situation of extreme poverty on average have seven members – three times greater in size than non-poor homes; on average three of those members are children below the age of thirteen, and five people occupy a single room (INIDE, 2007b: xiii).

One of Abril's brothers makes a living breeding cocks for fighting, consequently there was the continual din of cocks crowing as they pecked and clucked their way around the yard. The other brother was unemployed, while her mother made a little money selling soup to the neighbours at weekends. In all, there were ten people living in Abril's house; however, to an extent they were more sharing a living space rather than the costs and responsibilities of running a family household. For instance, often her brothers and their partners would buy their own food, cook for themselves and eat at separate times. The situation could be described more accurately as a household separated into smaller units with Abril part of a unit with her mother, younger brother and grandmother. Abril, her mother and her younger brother share one of the four rooms; both her older brothers have partners and one of the couples has a child. While the household members have their own sleeping quarters and share the same living space, Abril explained, they did not share food or cooking responsibilities; these were taken on by each sub-group in the household.

Abril helps cook, clean, shop and look after her younger brother, taking him to and picking him up from school. Often Abril would bring him along to practice in the afternoon

and was therefore able to combine her domestic responsibilities with looking after young siblings.

### ***'La situación': managing on less***

The *canasta básica* or basic shopping basket is a popular measure often referred to in discussion over rising prices. It is a calculation of the average cost of basic foods: pulses and grains, meat, dairy and vegetables, as well as other costs in the home such as rent, clothing and toiletries. In order to show how crucial fluctuations in the price of certain goods are to the household, it is useful to look at which food products are consumed in the greatest quantity. For those classified as extremely poor in Nicaragua more than half of their daily intake is composed of maize, rice, milk and beans (INIDE, 2007b: XI).

For the month of September 2007 the total urban basic shopping basket was \$C7,216.9, in February 2008 it had risen to \$C7873.9 and reached a peak in July 2008 of \$C8,686.96 (INIDE, 2010). According to these figures, in the space of about ten months, urban Nicaraguan homes had to find an additional \$C1470 a month to afford the basic costs of running a household, while at the same time real wages remained the same. A dish loved by Nicaraguans and eaten with most meals at any time of the day is *gallopinto*, a mixture of rice and beans flavoured with a little fried *chiltoma* – a small variety of green bell pepper – and sometimes garlic. It is a staple of the Nicaraguan diet and in fact the players would often complain to me that after a match instead of the food Diego provided they just wanted *gallopinto*; one had even asked the team captain to take the matter to the coach. Between September 2007 and July 2008 rice and beans increased by over a third in price. Rice went from \$C6.1 per pound to \$C9.93 and beans increased from \$C10.5 to \$C15.85 (INIDE, 2008).

How did the players' families cope with the economic crisis in Nicaragua? How does economic scarcity manifest itself in the household? One of the clearest examples of its manifestation is in the reduction of meals or meal sizes for the players. In fact the players often told me they would sometimes have to borrow food from neighbours or do without a meal. Managing *'la situación'* means eating less, or eating less of a well-balanced diet as many players explained, vegetables and meat were becoming less affordable. Claudia told me that now food prices had risen her family were eating less, she had lost weight and their diet had changed considerably. They tended to eat food that would fill them up: rice, pasta (not so often), frijoles (beans) and tortilla, and whatever money was left over they spent on meat and vegetables, but she explained vegetables were much rarer on her table. The basics had doubled in price within a period of six to eight months, previously \$C100 (\$5) would

buy rice, frijoles, tortillas, as well as some fruit, vegetables and meat and would feed the four of them (her mother and her two sisters) for a day, now the same would cost \$C200. Claudia's two younger sisters Nina (17) and Sylvia (16) continue to play for León and so at one point the girls contributed at least \$C1500 a month between them. In her house her family pooled whatever money they have and is needed, so her sisters contributed a portion of their *beca* when necessary. Additionally her brother sends US\$30 a month from Costa Rica where he works in a factory. Very little of the money coming into the household is saved and therefore, when family members are ill there are few resources to pay for medical care.

## Health

Health and nutrition are key indicators of welfare and well-being. For the players an injury can mean they are unable to help at home, go out to work or study, and the strain on the household's resources can be considerable. Health care in Nicaragua can be very expensive and beyond the means of many on lower incomes. One of the players had been suffering with anaemia but her family were unable to pay for the medication she required, so for several months Laura complained of tiredness, was losing weight and was unable to train. Her family were already struggling to pay for tests her mother needed because of a kidney infection and the family budget could not stretch any further.<sup>52</sup>

Playing football has taken its toll on Abril's body and towards the end of the 2007 season, just prior to the final play-offs, she had key-hole surgery on her knee to fix some ligament damage. By the time I caught up with her again in 2008 she was talking about the importance of taking time out from football, giving her body time to rest and the necessity for her to find work, perhaps on a market stall in León or further away in Costa Rica working as a *doméstica*. However, her mama was concerned about her safety working abroad. A lack of financial support had forced her to drop out of an engineering course shortly before the end of the first year. Her brother who had been helping her by paying half of the monthly fees of \$30 a month (Abril and her brother paid \$15 each), could no longer continue supporting her.

Veronica had caught chicken pox in May 2008 and was forced to stay at home till she recovered, a period of about three to four weeks. She had been working on an aunt's clothes stall at the market but they had employed someone else and she had lost the job while she was ill. On top of this, as is explored in greater detail in Chapter Six, her father, who lived in the United States, had stopped sending her money and she therefore could not

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<sup>52</sup> From fieldnotes 19 April 2008.



afford the fees for her graphic design course. She was well again by June but despite being in the final year of studies with just a few months left to go, the college was demanding payment otherwise she would be thrown off the course.

As the players could not always afford to eat a balanced diet, a number had iron deficiencies often leading to anaemia. Iron supplements solved the problem but because the players had little financial resources, few could afford them and often players would go to Diego for money with varying degrees of success.

The experiences the players provide of the impact of economic crisis on their diet, health and household responsibilities show just how pervasive the effects of poverty are in their lives. What is more, their descriptions bear a close similarity to those of their mothers. Babb's analysis of the effects of structural adjustment for women in Managua is based on research from the early 1990s. She concludes with this description of the ways in which women coped with increasing prices, decreasing incomes and the reduced social welfare provision:

Many noted that their families' eating habits had changed; instead of waking up to large meals of rice, beans, eggs, and cheese, they just had a bit of *gallopinto* (mixed rice and beans) and coffee. Instead of having three abundant meals, including meat, each day, they included meat in their diet only about once a week. They looked longer and harder for less expensive foods. Other women cut back on transportation costs, opting to walk to places where they had formerly taken buses ... In addition, with an apparent deterioration of physical and mental health in the country, women were taking on the care of family members in ill health (Babb, 1996: 44).

The similarities between then and now are striking. However, football for the players in this case study has provided an additional, primarily, leisure-focussed alternative for public participation which they both enjoy and have been remunerated for. In the final section below we will begin to see just how committed the players are to their team and playing football, and the importance of the *beca* in justifying their participation.

## **The *beca*, football and conflict in the household**

*No, digamos de que si sin dado caso si no me siguen ayudando entonces tengo que buscar algo, algo para puedo ayudar en mi casa, pero no me gustaría dejar a mi equipo. Es que, no sé, a mi yo siento que es parte de mi vida. ¡Fijate! Ya es como no bañarme, más o menos, jejeje (Interview, Veronica, age 23, 15 May 2008).*<sup>53</sup>

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<sup>53</sup> Let's say that without a doubt, if they don't continue helping me then I'll have to look for something, something so that I can help in my house. But I wouldn't want to leave my team because to me, I feel like it's a part of my life, you know?! Now, it's like washing myself, more or less yeah! Ha, ha, ha.

This quote from Veronica demonstrates how important the *beca* is to the majority of the players and their ability to continue playing with the team. It is a difficult decision for the players but some decide to leave often because they have to find work to contribute to the household, or need to pay for their studies, or simply do not have enough time because of studies. However, despite the absence of the *beca*, Veronica and indeed the majority of the players finished the 2008 season.

Economic scarcity had put a strain on some of the players' relationships with family members. *La situación* had meant that players came under pressure to contribute more to the household, whether in terms of paid employment or unpaid labour in the household. Increasingly football became a source of conflict as it was perceived by family members to conflict with responsibilities to the household, in terms of financial contributions for food and other household expenses, and in terms of contributing towards domestic labour. In some cases players were forced to leave the team. The following section will examine the significance of the *beca* to the players and their households. Halfway through the 2008 the team lost its funding and the players were no longer paid the *beca*. The tension and conflicts that arise from this situation reveal the importance of the *beca* to the players' lives. Can the players afford to continue playing if they are not paid the *beca*? In Veronica's case she explained to her mother that the team was having problems and the *beca* would not be paid this year. However, because of scarce resources in the household she felt under pressure to contribute somehow. In the past players had left the team to look for work.

### What do the players spend the *beca* on?

Most of the players were put under pressure by their family to stop playing football so that they could get a job and this pressure increased during the 2008 season when Diego stopped paying the *beca*. This is perhaps unsurprising given that female headed households are often dependent on a number of incomes for survival. The *beca* is used in a number of ways: to contribute to the household income, to pay for studies or to pay for personal items; each player may prioritise these expenditures differently depending on whether they are receiving income from other sources. The *beca* that the players receive for playing football is vital economically. Rosa explains that most of the players count on the *beca*: '*Ninguna de nosotras vive pues tan cómodamente con recursos económicos de que no es necesario, de que no te sirve que te dan en el equipo. Entonces, la mayoría pues siempre cuenta con este dinero*' (Interview, Rosa, age 22, 29 July 2008).<sup>54</sup> Veronica was in college the previous year

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<sup>54</sup> None of us lives so comfortably with economic resources that it's not necessary (the *beca*), that it doesn't help you to be in the team. So most of us count on the money.

and would use the *beca* accordingly: after taking out what she needed to pay for classes the rest went to her mother to help with the household maintenance, with any remaining spent on personal items.

Blanca explains forcefully exactly how important the *beca* is for her personally and the household's maintenance: '*De lo que me da Diego compro todo, porque mi mama no da eso. Mi mama no da pastel de dientes, mi mama no me da un par de zapatos, mi mama no me da un pantalón. Ella lo que me da es la comida. A mí me va cubrir es mi ropa, mi zapato, todo lo que necesito yo tengo que cubrir*' (Interview, 6 August 2008).<sup>55</sup> Blanca is 18 and from this age her family expected her to contribute to the household or at least provide for herself.

When I first met Abril in 2007 she told me she previously worked as a secretary. However, as the hours clashed with football training she did not want to start this type of work again. Before the start of the 2008 season she had worked part-time providing child care but by the time I caught up with her again in February this had finished and she was neither studying nor working. Diego always maintained that all the players had been offered the chance to take the entrance exam for the UNAN, but Abril maintained this was not the case. Others on the team explained Abril was just not interested in studying and I was never able to understand fully this situation. Through the team she had been receiving the *beca*, attended a referee course, and had spoken to Diego about possibly getting some coaching experience. However, by June 2008, two months into the season and with no *beca* and no work to supplement this loss she was coming under increasing pressure from both her mama and sister to stop playing and find work. She was resisting the pressure as she did not want to give up football, but mentioned that after the season she would maybe try and get a job at the market, working on a stall.

In Abril's case playing for the team offered opportunities for additional training and possible employment. In fact, during 2008 Abril occasionally worked as a *futsal* referee following a training course arranged through the team. In 2008 Abril regularly mentioned arguments with her mother or sister about her commitment to football. In these exchanges it seemed that the promise of coaching could be used as a bargaining chip with her mother and the rest of the family, and a justification of the time she devoted to the game. Opposition from her family was based on a combination of factors: the lack of funding for playing which meant Abril did not contribute financially to the household, combined with a

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<sup>55</sup> From what Diego gives me I buy everything because my mama doesn't give me this, she doesn't give me toothpaste, she doesn't give me shoes, my mama doesn't give me a pair of trousers, what she gives me is food. From my mama she isn't going to sort out my clothes, my shoes, everything I need, I have to sort it out myself.

questioning of her lifestyle – that football was not an appropriate sport for females; that her lifestyle was questionable as she just hung out with friends and did what she wanted. In fact, Abril explained that an uncle who lived in the US had been sending her money on a monthly basis to pay for her school fees. However, the money had stopped when her uncle heard from family or friends that she was not concentrating on her studies and only wanted to hang out with friends. Abril denied this, and this sort of accusation in the form of gossip was something mentioned by other members on the team and something which will be explored in greater detail later. Interestingly, Bradshaw investigated how gossip and jealousy impacted on conflict in the household possibly causing arguments. She found that the results varied greatly depending on location and age. For instance, 28 per cent of respondents in Dipilto and Estelí attributed arguments to gossip and jealousy, while in Managua the figure was just 9 per cent. However, when the results were disaggregated according to age the figure rose to 36 per cent (2002: 39). The experience of the players on the team and the results from Bradshaw's study suggest at least that young women recognise that their reputations are evaluated by family and community.

Diego, had been able to secure funding for the team for four years from the German Football Federation, but in 2008 they decided not to renew funding for the project.<sup>56</sup> For the players this meant that after the start of the season in April, they received just two months more of the *beca*; after that they were told by Diego that there would be no more money paid to players. The situation motivated the players to arrange a meeting at which they discussed whether they would finish the season if they were not paid; the decision was to play. The only player who continued to receive a *beca* was Alba as she was paid by the UNAN where she was enrolled as a full-time *becada* or funded student. The arrangement turned out to be slightly less clear over the course of the next few months, as Diego still managed to find money for players that had to travel from out of town or that had moved to León to play on the team. He explained to me that he was paying them out of his own pocket, but those on the team not receiving money expressed their suspicions that Diego was still being paid and just not paying them. A number of players complained they had been promised money by Diego which he then neglected to pay. Rosa had lost the *beca* from the University, having failed the previous year. She insisted Diego had promised to give her the money instead, but when he came to pay the players the previous month everyone was paid but he told her he did not have any money. Rosa does not live in León and rents a room from one of the players on the team. Without the *beca* she had to choose between playing at the weekend or going home to Estelí to pick up money from her father. She decided the money was more of

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<sup>56</sup> Diego had explained that in his opinion with the World Cup in South Africa in 2010, most funding for football projects was being directed towards Africa.

a necessity than playing and went home, despite other players telling her she was needed on the team. Depending on the *beca* from Diego can leave the players in a very precarious position and Rosa felt she had been unfairly treated:

*Es de, al verme que no va a estar a apoyar por universidad por esa beca interna, entonces yo había pensado en buscar a un trabajo, por lo menos de medio tiempo, pero no estar en el equipo. Pero al ver de, o sea, al contar con la palabra que Diego me ha dicho que si, me va a ayudar, entonces, a dejar a un lado la habilidad de buscar a un trabajo y seguir en el equipo, y el no me ayude, entonces, yo me quedo así, siempre en nada. Entonces, me afecta* (Interview, Rosa, age 22, 31 June 2008).<sup>57</sup>

Without the *beca* the players are left in a position of insecurity and dependency (on their families) which causes conflicts at home with family members. There were a number of players on the León team who lived in Corinto and would travel three times a week to train, involving a three hour round-trip each day. Two of the players were neither in school or working, the third was still in Secondary school, and the fourth in University. They had asked Diego if they would receive the *beca* and Diego had agreed to pay only their transport. However, the University student maintained he had promised to pay for her studies. After two months of training and not receiving the tuition fees she left the team under pressure from her mother:

*De no recibía pago y ella se retiro porque diego le dijo de que le iba a pagar Universidad y pasaban los dos meses y no le pago nada. Entonces, ella se retiro y la mama le digo porque se retirara que no está ganando. Más bien se estaba destruyendo su vida* (Interview, Delfina, age 18, 14 August 2008).<sup>58</sup>

## Conclusion

The purpose of this chapter was to show how poverty and gendered power relations within the household affect young women in Nicaragua. On a macro-level, economic crisis and structural adjustment policies have meant a double burden for women through their continued responsibility for household reproduction and greater participation in paid labour. Pervasive notions of femininity and female responsibility mean that female members of the household are expected to take up some of the responsibility of reproductive labour. Just as

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<sup>57</sup> To realise that I'm not going to be supported by the University with a *beca interna*, then I had thought about looking for work, at least short-term, but not to be in the team. But to see, that is, to count on the word of Diego, he has told me that he was going to help me, so then to rule out the possibility of looking for work and continue with the team and then he doesn't help me, so, then I'm in this position, always in nothing. So it affects me.

<sup>58</sup> For not receiving the money and she left [the team] because Diego said the University was going to pay her but after two months she hadn't been paid anything. So, she left and her mother told her to leave because she wasn't earning anything, that she was destroying her life, nothing more.

women are essential to the success of structural adjustment policy, young women also play an intrinsic role in maintaining the household. It could also be suggested that this 'naturalisation' of domestic responsibility is one of the reasons many women in Nicaragua seek out paid employment as *domésticas* when they are older, a point that will be discussed in greater depth in the following chapter.

The chapter also demonstrated the importance of looking beyond measures of income and consumption that tend to disguise the complexity and precariousness of household-living arrangements for young women's everyday realities. Abril's case demonstrated that sub-units exist within households, for instance as sons or daughters move in with their families. These sub-units do not necessarily share food or other domestic responsibilities. The assumption that extended households are therefore a 'survival strategy' or 'coping mechanism' for female headed households – among which extended families are indeed more prevalent – by increasing the probability of multiple incomes, is not proven. It is also clear that economic scarcity for the players has implications for their health and nutrition. For some families, economic scarcity meant having to prioritise health care for family members.

The players' commitment to football came under increasing scrutiny from family members especially once the *beca* was stopped. Clearly for many of the players the *beca* meant they could contribute financially to maintain the household even if they did not have time to work. However, without the *beca* some players were forced by parents to stop playing and many had talked of the necessity of finding work after the 2008 season. It is significant though that the majority of players continued to the end of the 2008 season despite family pressure to quit and this therefore demonstrates these young women are able to resist dominant notions of gendered responsibility within the household. The following chapter will examine the players' experience of education-to-work transitions, paying particular attention to both the ways in which gender shapes their experience and how their choices conflict with traditional gender roles.

## Young women's precarious experiences of education and work

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As we have seen in Chapter Five the players struggle with the consequences of economic restructuring in the form of poverty, economic crisis and the precariousness of everyday life. The previous chapter argued that the consequences of economic crisis are experienced most severely by women, while young women are often expected to take up an increasing proportion of the domestic burden. The chapter also showed how the players' dedication to football both allowed them greater financial benefits but also brought them into conflict with family members, and therefore demonstrated both agency and resistance on the part of the players. These factors along with the role of football in the players' lives are central to understanding their experiences of education and the labour market, as the following chapter will demonstrate. This chapter will examine the opportunities and constraints in education and the labour force for the young women footballers of CFF León. Through an analysis of the players' experiences this chapter will demonstrate how young women's opportunities to access education and the labour market are precarious, overlapping and circumscribed by notions of appropriate gender behaviour and spheres of activity.

There is substantial agreement between academic research and development policy as to the necessity of increasing education levels for girls and young women. The benefits for young women are associated with better health, nutrition, lower maternal and infant mortality rates. Moreover, investments in education show some of the highest returns of any form of investment (Browne and Barrett, 1991). Education then is seen to be an investment in both the social health and economic wealth of the nation and therefore key to successful development processes. This chapter takes a closer examination of this assumption through an analysis of the circumstances and decision-making processes of the players. In a country where education levels are low and adolescent fertility rates are high, this group of young women who are educated beyond the national average and are all childless, do support the association between education and fertility. The preoccupation of development policy with reducing fertility rates has overlooked to some extent the continued barriers young women face in the labour market. Increased education for young women does not translate into more skilled and better-paid work. This chapter then is concerned with explaining and examining why these young women's experiences of both education and work continue to be

characterised as precarious. However, a more profound analysis reveals the tension between structural constraints in their lives and their own personal agency that shapes their decisions.

The experience of the players will be examined in light of what they reveal about young people's transitions from education to work in a developing world context. Their experiences bring into question formulations of linear and distinct transitions for young people. They also point to the importance of examining how wider social and cultural processes operate in young people's lives and in particular, the role of gender in shaping young women's experiences and opportunities. From this perspective the chapter allows greater space and attention for young women's decision-making to be assessed in a wider socio-historical context. By viewing young people as social actors in their own right this chapter demonstrates the ability, potential as well as the constraints the players confront in their everyday lives, and the strategies they employ to overcome them.

The chapter begins with a discussion of approaches to young people's experiences of education and work in the social sciences. Particularly useful is a consideration of young people's transitions in a developing world context and the concept of 'negotiated interdependence'. In light of this the chapter will move on to consider the importance of education in the long-term futures and expectations of the players. How are their choices over motherhood, work and personal expectations shaped by social and economic processes? What factors inform their decision-making processes as regards these areas of their lives? This discussion informs the second half of the chapter which examines these young women's experiences of education to work transitions. These players' experiences and opinions reveal how the gender division of labour and gendered inequalities are reproduced in the labour market and result in prejudicial terms of employment for women. The young women's lives reveal the gendered difficulties of transitions from education to work in Latin America as overlapping and sometimes conflicting commitments and obligations that continue to reflect the persistence of gendered norms and values in Nicaraguan society.

## Youth transitions studies

Analyses of young people's experiences of education and work in modern industrialised countries have traditionally been approached from a transition perspective. In contrast to the previous focus on cultural manifestations of youth subcultures since the 1980s, youth transitions have focussed on the institutional arrangements in young people's lives and how they shape their experiences (MacDonald *et al.*, 2001: 2.4). As such, they focus on those areas of young people's lives that have been identified as key to enabling the transition from school to work, and therefore from the dependent stage of youth to the independence



associated with adult life (Nayak, 2008: 13). Transition studies look particularly at issues around education and employment for young people and the effects of class, ethnicity and sexuality as well as particular problems associated with youth, such as teenage pregnancy, drug addiction and juvenile crime.

A major criticism of transitions approaches is their focus on the institutional experience of young people and an inability to take into account the wider social and historical context of their lives. Wulff argues the focus of youth transitions approaches on socialisation, education, and human development, depicts young people in a limiting way, as 'objects of adult activity' and devotes greater concern to the 'institutional systems in which youth are implicated than with youth culture' (1995:1). From such a perspective there is often a tendency to view 'education' and 'work' as distinct stages in young people's development and a lack of recognition of the blurred boundaries between dependence and independence and youth and adulthood. Further, the concept stresses the individualistic characteristics of transition at the expense of understanding the dynamics and role of household and family relations, let alone the implications of wider community relations. Finally, youth is depicted as a stage in transit, as unstable and temporary, which negates the importance of understanding the implications of being young (Gillies, 2000: 219-210).

There is however wide recognition that transitions from youth to adulthood should not be viewed as a linear process (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997; Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). In developed countries transitions have in fact become prolonged due to changes in education, labour market and family structure (Ruddick, 2003). These processes and changes have resulted in more options and therefore more uncertainty for young people (Furlong and Cartmel, 1997, Wyn and Dwyer, 1999). Young people, therefore, will more likely experience a series of transitions in the minority world as they fluctuate between dependence and independence, however, as Punch states the ultimate goal is still independence (2002: 124). Others have argued that transition approaches are still pertinent despite the strong criticism and argue 'transition' should be understood as 'a general, overarching concept; a metaphor that does not *presume* a particular sort of *content*, *direction* or *length* at the level of individual experience' but does remain a 'critically important period in which individual life chances are established' (McDonald *et al.*, 2001: 5.6 [emphasis in the original]).

From this perspective how then is youth as a 'life phase' experienced outside modern industrialised societies? Punch's work is important as it is one of very few studies concerning school-to-work transitions in the majority world and therefore challenges previous assumptions of transitions approaches which predominantly focus on minority

world youth transitions.<sup>59</sup> In contrast to the established view of young people moving between dependence and independence on the way to adulthood and autonomy, Punch argues, their social relations and strong sense of responsibility to the family mean their lives are more likely to be characterised by ‘negotiated interdependence’ as young people ‘move in and out of relative autonomy and independence’ (2002: 124). Based on ethnographic research in a small rural community in Bolivia, Punch demonstrates how the boundaries between dependence and independence are not fixed but change over time:

[T]he concept of ‘negotiated interdependence’ is a useful term which reflects how young people in the majority world are constrained by various structures and cultural expectations of daily responsibilities yet also have the ability to act within and between such constraints, balancing household and individual needs (Punch, 2002:132).

This idea of negotiated social relations points to a level of agency associated with the decisions the young people make over their choice of youth transition. In the case of rural Bolivia, migration is seen as offering greater opportunities socially and economically than education (Punch, 2002:131).

The young women’s experiences in this study demonstrate the importance of understanding wider processes in young people’s lives, recognising how education and work can overlap, and the tensions and challenges this causes. Furthermore, by holding in tension both the structural forces that shape their lives and the decisions and choices they are able to make, this chapter reveals how young women actively negotiate and resist obstacles and barriers in their lives.

## **The precariousness of education in Nicaragua**

The purpose of this section is two-fold: i) to place the players’ education levels within the wider national context of Nicaragua; and ii) and to examine the difficulties the players face to regularly keep up attendance in the Nicaraguan public school system and especially in moving from secondary to higher education. The players’ experiences point to the success of efforts to increase female enrolment in primary and secondary schooling however, social and economic barriers remain to their greater incorporation into higher education.

The Nicaraguan standard education system consists of five grades of primary, six grades of secondary followed by higher education courses. More recently females are participating in greater numbers than males at all levels of the education system (INIDE,

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<sup>59</sup> Punch prefers the terms ‘minority’ and ‘majority’ worlds as they reflect more accurately the inequalities between the areas of the world: ‘The minority world consists of a smaller proportion of the world’s population and land mass despite using the majority of the world’s resources’ (Punch, 2002: 123).

2005b: 73). However, enrolment figures at a national level remain a problem. In 2005 almost half of Nicaraguans aged 6 to 29 years of age were not enrolled in education. The largest proportion of any age group enrolled in education are those aged 6 to 14 years, while nine out of ten persons aged 10 to 14 are enrolled in school (INIDE, 2005b: 73). However, there is a dramatic decrease in the proportion of the population over 15 years enrolled in education, especially between primary and secondary school. One of the principal challenges for Nicaraguan youth is the high drop-out rate that occurs in the first few years of secondary school. In Nicaragua, 15 to 19 year olds constitute those students who should be in the final years of secondary school or starting higher education. In reality, for every 10 persons in this age group only five are enrolled in education, which means in the near future, less than half the population will have an education accreditation or high school diploma (INIDE, 2005b: 74). Most adolescents leave schooling to enter the labour market and help support their families. Entering at such a young age often means they are forced to take low skilled, poorly paid jobs. This tendency affects males more than females with 54.1 per cent of females and 48.6 per cent of males aged 15 – 24 years enrolled in education (INIDE, 2005b: 75). The First National Youth Survey of Nicaragua found that in 2003 only 34 per cent of those surveyed were studying (SEJUVE, 2003).<sup>60</sup> Economic problems were the principal reason to not study. For young women, 11.5 per cent stated marriage or long-term relationships and 10 per cent stated pregnancy as common reasons to leave education (SEJUVE, 2003). In contrast 35.4 per cent of male respondents stated as a reason for leaving education that they had decided to work (SEJUVE, 2003).<sup>61</sup>

Of young people aged 20 to 24 years, the group that corresponds to higher education enrolment, only two of every ten are enrolled in education predominantly because of a lack of resources to cover the costs of enrolment and materials, but also the inability to cover a loss of income from having to leave a job to study (INIDE, 2005b: 76). There is a marked difference in enrolment rates for males and females of this age group, with 18 per cent compared to 23.5 per cent respectively enrolled. In urban areas the gap expands to 21.9 per cent for male enrolment and 28.4 per cent (INIDE, 200b5: 77). On average women will earn less than the average considering their years of schooling reflecting a preference of Nicaraguan businesses to employ males (Laguna and Porta, 2004).

Particularly important factors explaining the barriers to young women's enrolment in education are maternity and childcare. Of females aged 6 to 29, 18 per cent were not

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<sup>60</sup> The survey questioned young people between the ages of 15 and 30 years.

<sup>61</sup> In rural areas figures of enrolment are below those of urban areas in all age groups. In urban areas 60 per cent of 15 to 19 year olds were enrolled in education compared to 38.5 per cent in rural areas. The disparity is largely explained by the lack of educational facilities and the expense of travelling to them (INIDE, 2005).

enrolled because of pregnancy and childcare responsibilities compared to 0 per cent of males. While paid labour was the reason for 43.4 per cent of males and 16.3 per cent of females, a further 11.3 per cent of females stated domestic responsibilities impeded their educational enrolment while the figure for males was just 0.2 per cent (INIDE, 2005b: 78). These results suggest the continued prevalence of the gendered division of labour.

In order to be accepted on a scholarship at UNAN-León applicants are required to have completed their *bachillerato* or high school diploma before sitting the university entrance exam. Ten of the regular squad members had completed their *bachillerato*; the rest of the players were still in school, while one player had dropped-out of school. Of those with a high school diploma, six were studying part-time and supported themselves through the *beca* from the team, part-time jobs, and/or financial support from family members. One player studied full-time at the UNAN and received a *beca externa* or external scholarship. Another player, Rosa, was repeating her third year of university having failed her exams; the remaining two players had completed their *bachillerato* but because of domestic responsibilities and financial constraints were not studying.

All of the players who had finished secondary school had completed their high school diploma. In all, six players on the team had been offered the opportunity to sit the entrance exam for UNAN-Leon. A successful entrance exam meant they would have their tuition fees paid and receive a *beca* of US\$30 a month for playing on the team. However, during the 2008 season only one player was studying full-time at the UNAN with a *beca*.<sup>62</sup> The other players funded their own study through paid work or family support, often in the form of remittances, from relatives abroad.

Universities in Nicaragua offer courses in technical and vocational qualifications which are two to three years long and undergraduate degrees which take four to five years. By far the most popular is the shorter course as most students cannot afford to support themselves to study for more than a few years. Playing on University sports teams in Nicaragua offers some young women an opportunity to access higher education and study for a professional qualification, which would normally be beyond their financial means. The benefits for the individual can be multiple. Through playing football Rosa received a sports

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<sup>62</sup> According to the coach all of the players who had passed their *bachillerato* had been offered a place at the University. In order to take this up – like every other prospective student - they had to pass an entrance exam. If the student is financially able it is best to pay for special classes before the exam in order to prepare, as demand for the entrance exam - which consists of grammar and maths questions - is extremely high. Those that fall within the average score band are accepted, those that fail have to wait another year to try again, or as is more often the case, find work in order to pay for part-time studies.

scholarship that paid her tuition fees, and through the team, she arranged to live with Fernanda her friend and team mate. Playing football helped her obtain a *beca* to study in Leon at the UNAN and leave the family home in Estelí. She was awarded a *beca externa* of 500 *cordobas* a month (around \$30), and began a five-year *carrera* in pharmacology. The *beca externa* is designed for students still living with their families and covers costs of materials, transport, and food. With the help of one of her teachers Rosa managed to transfer to a *beca interna* which entitled her to a room on the University campus and also covered bills and food.

Rosa was one of only two players enrolled on a course at the UNAN during the 2008 season and she was repeating the third year of a five year degree. Rosa failed her third year, she explained, because she had been lazy and had not found the classes very interesting; instead she would go to her room and rest and then go to football practice. This year though she was still missing classes to go to practice. As she was repeating the year, she was not entitled to the *beca internado* and so was supporting herself on the money she received from her father (approximately C\$400 every two weeks) and the *beca* from the football team (whilst it was still being paid to everyone). She was able to manage on this money because she was staying with Fernanda and only contributed towards bills. Without this arrangement she would not have been able to afford the living costs of re-sitting her third year. In this way friendship networks on the team enabled some players to relocate and study. Even with a *beca*, it is almost impossible to study for a degree (whatever the length) in Nicaragua without the help of your family:

*Hay siempre estés grupos que se organizan supuestamente en ayuda de los jóvenes, y realmente el joven aquí se supera porque su familia te está apoyando, o sea, porque siendo joven no puedes trabajar y estudiar. Es muy difícil, porque muchos han tenido el deseo a ir a universidad pero no pueden ir a la universidad porque su condición económico no es suficiente como para ir a estar allí. Porque en universidad parte de que te tienes que gastar para folletos y todas esas cosas. O sea, tenes que gastar para tus cosas personales, ropa, paste de dientes, y si no hay alguien que te ayude económicamente entonces no se puede ir (Interview, Rosa, age 22, 16 July 2008).<sup>63</sup>*

A lack of financial support forced Abril to drop out of an engineering course the previous year at the UNAN. After speaking to various people in the University she managed to

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<sup>63</sup> There are always these groups that organise supposedly to support young people and really here, the young person improves themselves because your family is supporting you, I mean, because being young you can't work and study. It's really difficult because many have had the desire to go to university but they can't because of their economic situation is insufficient to go there. In university part of what you have to pay for is the materials and all these things. I mean, you have to pay for your personal things, clothes, toothpaste, and if there isn't anyone who can help you economically, you can't go.

negotiate a half *beca* of US\$15 to help cover the US\$30 a month course in systems and engineering:

*Sabatino estaba estudiando, Ingeniería y Sistemas. Y la otra media beca que era, o sea, la mensualidad era US\$30 pero yo sola pagaba US\$15 y uno de mis hermanos, quien estaba en la hamaca, quien estaba costada él era quien me ayudaba para los otros US\$15. Pero ya después se lo hizo difícil y no puse seguir (Interview, Abril, age 23, 25 July 2008).<sup>64</sup>*

Her mother did not have a decent job or access to resources to supplement the loss, ‘*Entonces, yo le dije ‘tranquilo, no se preocupe, voy a salirme, ni modo’’* (Interview, 25 July 2008).<sup>65</sup> She looked for work in the market working on a stall in order to fund the course herself but the jobs were always on a Saturday. The course took five years to complete and she left a month before the end of the first year but she intends to go back and finish the course.

Relatives also make decisions on whether or not to support the players based on notions of appropriate behaviour. Abril’s uncle lived in the US and had been sending her money on a monthly basis to pay for her school fees. However, the money stopped when her uncle was told by family and friends that she was not concentrating on her studies and spending her time hanging out with friends. Abril denied the accusations as gossip and lies, nonetheless, they had a powerful influence on her ncle and he stopped financial support for her school fees.

Verónica’s father left Nicaragua ten years ago to work in the United States. He left Verónica and her two sisters (one older and one younger) with her mother. Her father formed a new family in the US but continued to send payments of around US\$100 a month for Verónica and her sister. The payments though were irregular and it was often necessary for Verónica or her sister to call him repeatedly to ask for the money. She feels he has a responsibility to send the money and it is not fair they have to demand it from him.

*Yo pienso que sí. ¿Pues qué imagínate? Somos sus hijas desgraciadamente y ni siguiéramos casar nada, no, no...Y el nada. Fíjate, todos mis hermanos allá trabajan, tienen sus carros, tienen todo, y el no tiene porque mantener nadie, cuando nosotros estamos de él siempre llamando y el nos dice de que busquemos de dios y que el señor te va a ayudar (Verónica, age 23, 29 July 2008).<sup>66</sup>*

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<sup>64</sup> Saturdays I was studying, Engineering and systems. And the other half of the *beca*, so, the matriculation was US\$30 [a month] but I only paid US\$15, and one of my brothers, who was in the hammock, who was asleep, he was the one who paid the other US\$15. But then afterwards it got difficult and he couldn’t continue.

<sup>65</sup> So I told her: ‘Don’t worry, I’m going to leave. It doesn’t matter.’

<sup>66</sup> Yes, I think so. Well, can you believe it? We are his daughters unfortunately, and were not even married, no, no...And him, nothing. How about all my brothers working there? They have their cars, they have everything and he doesn’t have to look after anybody, when we are always callings him and he says that we search for God and that He will help you!

Some of the \$100 had been used to pay for registration and tuition fees for an English language course Verónica was enrolled on but more recently her father stopped sending money and she was forced to withdraw from the course. Her father told her he did not have enough to support her and her sister, but Verónica is doubtful whether this is true. She believes he has a good lifestyle, he has a home, a car and work and his children are grown up so he only has to look after himself. Instead she says he is critical of her lifestyle, accusing her of not studying hard enough, partying too much and failing to go to church. Verónica, like Abril blames his opinion on gossip and believes her brother was lying to her father telling him they were ‘*mal criadas*’ or badly brought up:

*Es que a veces la gente le meten y mentirán a nosotros para que no nos mandan, porque en realidad necesitamos de la ayuda de él, me entendés?...Hasta mi propia hermano le dice que somos mal criadas que festejamos, ¿imagínate?! Yo no soy festejera, no me puedes ver - que estoy ahí necia y todo - pero no ando en fiesta no me ando emborrachando, no ando con bola ni nada de eso!* (Interview, Verónica, age 23, 15 May 2008)<sup>67</sup>

Verónica explains that young women who are ‘*mal criadas*’ go out to parties all weekend and like to get drunk, ‘*Si ya sales mucho mucho, andas en fiesta y todo, ya piensan mal de vos. “Ay mírale, mira la gran bacanalera!” Como dicen, “No le interesa los estudios, no le interesa nada que pasa en su casa!” Me entendés?*’<sup>68</sup> Her father, who is evangelical (Verónica is Catholic), has told his daughters they should look to God to bless them and help them through their difficulties. He has made it an explicit condition that he will only send money if they start going to Church.

After the English course Verónica enrolled on a *carrera técnica* in graphic design. However, without the *beca* from football she was struggling to pay the US\$30 monthly course fees. A series of unfortunate incidents had made her situation even more difficult. A bout of chickenpox meant she lost her job on a market stall and fell behind at college, a situation compounded by a two-week transport strike making it impossible for her to travel to college. Unless she could catch up and pay what she owed (around US\$80) in course fees she would not be able to graduate. Seeing how distressed she was about the situation I offered to pay the US\$80 and she finished her course. This is just one example of how

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<sup>67</sup> The thing is sometimes people involve themselves and they lie about us so that they don’t send us (the money) because we really need the help from him, you know? Even my own brother, he tells him that we are badly brought up, we party. Can you believe it?! I’m not a party girl! You don’t see me – I’m naughty and everything – but I don’t go around parties, I don’t go around drunk, I don’t go around with a hangover, nothing like that!

<sup>68</sup> If you go out a real lot, going to parties and everything, they think bad of you, “Hey look at her. look at the big party girl!” They say, “She’s not interested in studying, she’s not interested in anything that happens in her house!” You know?

precarious the players lives are. Even common and relatively short-term illnesses have a devastating effect on future plans. Had I not paid her fees, Verónica would have had to repeat the year and find a way to support herself. Her case also demonstrates how education and work often overlaps in the young women's lives and can be interdependent.

Despite dropping-out of school, Delfina (age 17) hoped to eventually study architecture, a particularly expensive course because of the materials students need and it is five years long. Her aunt lives in Miami and paid for her to attend private school but Delfina dropped out and was unsure whether her aunt would continue to support her. Her mother was growing increasingly frustrated that Delfina preferred to spend time with her friends and 'anda vaga' rather than get a job or finish her schooling, although Delfina still plans to finish high school.<sup>69</sup>

*Sí, pero yo voy a seguir estudiando, es solo dos años que me faltan y yo quiero sacar ya, bachillerarme y hacer mi vida, porque no todo el tiempo voy a estar así solo no estudiando, no estoy trabajando, no hago nada. Eso molesta a mi mamá que dice que yo solo pienso en jugar. Entonces mi mamá me dice a veces que me salgue! Yo digo que no! (Interview, age 17, 14 August 2008).*<sup>70</sup>

Delfina is confident that she has her priorities right but her mother sees football as a distraction from school. Her reputation to 'anda vaga' has affected the opinion of her Aunt and therefore her opportunities to study. All three players, Delfina, Abril, and Verónica, were perceived as preferring to have a 'good time' or 'anda vaga', rather than be responsible, study hard, and look after their homes. The consequences for the young women were devastating to their opportunities to finish school and complete university courses.

On average in Nicaragua females are better educated than males and participate more in schooling. The biggest fall in school enrolment is between primary and secondary school predominantly explained by young men's necessity or desire to work and young females' domestic and maternal responsibilities. The figures for higher education enrolment drop substantially more and it is often only children from highest income households that can afford tertiary education. Two of the players were enrolled full-time (Monday-Friday) with a *beca* for playing football at the UNAN-León University. One player received financial support from her father while the other continued to live at home. For the rest of the players full-time study, even with a *beca* was too expensive in terms of the materials.

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<sup>69</sup> *Vagar* means to loiter, be idle, to wander about the streets and is also associated in Nicaragua with smoking, drinking, taking drugs and, especially for males (*vagos*), being involved with gangs.

<sup>70</sup> Yeah, but I'm going to carry on studying, I've only got two years left and I want to get it done already, *bachillerarme* and make my life because I'm not going to do this all the time, I'm not studying, I'm not working, I don't do anything. It really annoys my mother. She says that I only think about playing. So sometimes she tells me to get out! I tell her no!



transport costs and income lost through no longer being able to work. The rest of the players studied part-time so that they could combine this with productive and reproductive labour. In addition, the players' experiences also show how school to work transitions for these young women are interrupted and delayed with significant financial consequences for the players in terms of the money invested in courses and lost, and also in potential lost income. Economic factors were important in determining the players' ability to access higher education.

Players also faced criticism from family members and relatives in terms of the perceived transgression of appropriate gendered roles. Delfina in particular was accused of '*anda vaga*' or to be wasting her time hanging around in the streets. This is a criticism levelled at the young women for their involvement in football and reflects gendered notions of appropriate spheres of activity for females and males. It is a reflection of the pervasiveness of gendered notions of appropriate behaviour as the street is perceived as a masculine space while young women are closely associated with their responsibilities in the home. Transgressing the social norms and values has real material consequences in these players' lives as Abril, Veronica and Delfina all lost financial support of a relative. Both the economic dependence of the players and the strength of social boundaries for females mean their experiences of education are precarious. It is worth noting that despite the label of a '*vaga*' and conflict with her mother over her behaviour, Delfina continued to '*anda vaga*' and 'hang-out' with her friends in the street. That she rejected the criticism and continued to behave as she pleased perhaps suggests that social norms and values do not necessarily constrain young women's choices.

All the players were relatively well educated and supported the importance of education in their lives but they expressed diverse personal reasons for delaying motherhood. As an essential characteristic of notions of femininity the following section examines the importance of motherhood to the players' identities. What factors influence the players choices and what do they tell us about motherhood for young women in contemporary Nicaragua?

## **Education and motherhood**

This section will examine the attitudes to and experiences of, relationships for the players, and their perceptions of socially acceptable sexual behaviour for young women in Nicaragua. None of the current players on the team had children and they all stated an intention to delay motherhood until their mid-to-late 20s when they anticipated they would be economically secure, and therefore in a stronger position to support a family. Interestingly, none spoke about the role of a husband or partner; instead the emphasis was on

their own personal educational development, securing a good job, and personally ensuring their ability to support a family.

## Reputations and Relationships

It was difficult to discern a common pattern amongst the players of length of relationships. Three players (one of whom had left the team) currently had or were in relationships of longer than five years, which began in their mid-teens. Veronica, Fernanda and Sara had all met their boyfriends around the age of 13 or 14. Sara (who recently had a baby) and her husband had been together five years when they married in 2008. They first met at Campos Medicos, the University sports ground - when she was thirteen and he was eighteen – where they both played football. Veronica had recently split up from her boyfriend after eight years together and Fernanda was about to celebrate her seventh anniversary. The two players planned to have children after finishing their studies. Daisy explained she had been seeing someone but they were finding it hard to see each other, they both studied and worked so they often did not see each other for days. Rosa was in a relationship with a student from Estelí for six months. He lives with his mother and has two children with a previous partner. The children spend most of the time with him but because he is always working or studying he does not see them and she does not have a relationship with them: *'No, no son obstáculos para mi. Ya están grandes los niños, es que de hecho yo no me ha relacionado con ellos con los niños, porque él, como te dijera, el es un hombre casi siempre se mantiene ocupado casi no se mantiene en su casa'* (Interview, Rosa, age 22, 29 July 2008).<sup>71</sup>

The players described how young women's reputations regarding their sexual morality were crucial for how young women were perceived by the wider society:

*As I reached the gates of Campos Médicos I bumped into Fernanda, Veronica and Rosa – as ever, they arrived together - and walked the rest of the way with them. I told them I had just been to visit Sara at her home and how I had not realised she was married and that they had been seeing each other for four years. Fernanda (age 24) told me that she and her boyfriend would have their seventh anniversary in November. Then Veronica (age 23) said that she and her boyfriend were together eight years until they split up the previous year. I asked if it was common to have such long relationships and they all agreed it was. I asked them if it was common for people to have a number of shorter relationships and they explained that in high school it is more common but once you finish high school, girls have long relationships. I told them in England it's common for women to have a number of shorter relationships, and Veronica immediately replied that she wanted to book her ticket to England; we all laughed and the other girls agreed with her. Veronica said that women in Nicaragua if they have short relationships with a number of partners then they are called 'una vaga', 'fácil' or 'una zorra'. Fernanda said that while that*

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<sup>71</sup> They aren't a problem for me. They are grown up, and the fact is I'm not close to them because he, like I said, he's always busy and is almost never at home.

*is true for women, men can have two or three girlfriends at the same time and people don't say anything, they think it is normal.* Notes, 30.07.08

Rosa explained how common perceptions of acceptable relationships change as girls get older. It is acceptable for girls in secondary school to have a number of relationships with boys as during this stage girls and young women are perceived to know little of what they want and therefore may have a number of boyfriends without it affecting their reputation: *'Mira, realmente aquí es por cuestionas de reputación, entonces normalmente eso sucede cuando estás en secundaria o sea, cuando no tenes un visión de lo que quieres en la vida y tenes un novio en un año tenes otro novio en otro año, y como que se mira normal mas es en secundaria'* (Interview, Rosa, age 22, 29 July 2008).<sup>72</sup> However, once at University, *'todo el mundo'* or *'all the world'* is going to point to you and question your reputation: *'Pero una vez pensas andar en universidad todo el mundo te va a señalar en universidad, o sea te va a quedar como un mujer fácil, asi como dijo la Fernanda, como una zorra'* (Interview, 29 July 2008).<sup>73</sup> Once young women reach university age it is not acceptable for them to be dating a series of boyfriends as they risk being labelled easy and a *'zorra'* or slut.

If young women are perceived as having brief sexual encounters it is perceived as insulting to the values normally associated with femininity: *'O sea, es como denigrante para una mujer como a decir vos, vas a costar una noche y después como se miran como nunca se han visto ... O sea, no es normal, y si pasa eso aquí, no sé, afecta mucha la moral de la mujer.'*<sup>74</sup> Rosa explained that both young men and young women are responsible for passing comment on others' behaviour. However, she also pointed out how young men were not subject to the same constraints on their sexual behaviour, in fact, sexual experience is an important characteristic of masculinity, *'Mira si hay un montón de hombres y yo digo que tengo 10 mujeres y el otro dijo que tiene 5, yo soy más porque yo tuve 10. No es tanto por el valor de mujer, si no es como un grado más porque vas acumulando más experiencia de sexo. O sea, es como te ven como un objeto solamente eso'* (Interview, 29 July 2008).<sup>75</sup>

Three of the players had been in long-term relationships (of at least four years or more) from their early teens. Two other players were in relatively new relationships of six

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<sup>72</sup> Look, actually here it's about reputation. So normally this happens when you are in secondary school, so, when you don't have a vision of what you want in life and you have a boyfriend one year, another boyfriend the next, and this is seen as normal in secondary school.

<sup>73</sup> But once you are in university all the world will point at you, so you will be known as an easy woman, as Fernanda said, as a slut.

<sup>74</sup> So, it's insulting for a woman, like you said, you spend the night and later they all look at you like they've never seen you before. So, it's not normal and if it happens here, I don't know, it affects the values of the woman a lot.

<sup>75</sup> Look, if there's a load of guys and I say I have ten women and the other says that he had five. I'm the best because I had ten. It's not about the value of the woman, but another grade up as you go gathering more sexual experience. So it's like they see you only as an object.

months or less. It is common for young women to start long-term relationships in their early teens and the players' explanations suggest this is because young women who are perceived to have many boyfriends risk their sexual morality. The players expressed frustration at the limitations placed on them by dominant notions of sexual behaviour for young women and at the double standards that characterise perceptions of men and women's sexual morality. The notions that condition the players' relationship patterns of behaviour reflect dominant notions of male sexual virility and female purity.

The general perception from the players was that relationships were long-term commitments. The next section moves on to consider how the players' opinions and plans for motherhood reflect general patterns in Nicaragua and how their educational experience may influence their choices.

The teenage fertility rate in Latin America is one of the highest in the world and has been identified as a major cause for concern by governments and international development organisations. While the average fertility rate has reduced between 2000-2005, to 2.4 teenagers have doubled their participation of total fertility, from 8.5 per cent to 14.3 per cent during the same period (ECLAC, 2005). Nicaragua has one of the highest adolescent fertility rates in the world with around half of Nicaraguan women giving birth before the age of 20 (Lion, *et al*, 2009: 91). While the fertility rate of those aged 15 to 49 dropped 25 per cent between 1990 and 2005, the adolescent fertility rate of those aged 15 to 19 dropped by just 11 per cent to a 127 per 1,000, the highest in the world outside Africa and even higher than Sub-Saharan Africa (Lion, *et al*, 2009: 91). Adolescent mothers run a higher risk of pregnancy complications, maternal mortality, infant mortality and malnutrition. In addition, they are at greater risk of poverty, decreasing social mobility and single parenthood. Adolescent childbearing is thus seen to have detrimental consequences for both the reproductive health and well-being of the individual and the economic and social development of the nation (Blandón L *et al*, 2006: 1).

Given that the players are childless and stated an intention to delay parenthood until their mid-20s, the following section analyses the factors that have influenced the players' decision-making processes and what their choices imply for the possibilities of young women to resist traditional gender roles associated with early motherhood. Also assesses the centrality of motherhood to these players' identities.

The association between increased levels of education and decreased fertility rates has become increasingly accepted in development policy and planning. Education has been recognised as playing a crucial factor in women's childbearing behaviour, with higher education levels amongst women leading to lower fertility rates (Browne and Barrett, 1991:

275; Castro Martín and Juárez, 1995: 52; Lesser Blumberg, 1995: 7). Better educated women are more likely to delay marriage or unions, have fewer children, use contraceptives, have a healthier better educated family, earn a better wage, and thus contribute to national development while putting less strain on state services (Lesser Blumberg, 1995: 7). Much of the research underpinning such claims relies on demographic trends that tend to view schools as gender and class-neutral institutions (Castro Martín and Juárez, 1995: 57). Education is important for women for their long-term futures as ‘a source of knowledge and cognitive skills; as a resource that enhances economic opportunities and social mobility; and as a socialisation process that shapes attitudes, values and aspirations’ (Castro Martín and Juárez, 1995: 56). Education then has cognitive, economic and social consequences for women and while therefore it surely has consequences for reproductive behaviour there are also implications for women’s economic futures and social position. Critics of the assumed link between education and fertility argue that while there may be an association between education and lower fertility rates, more schooling for females does not necessarily challenge gender inequalities. What is taught in the classroom often does little to challenge the social norms that underpin gender inequality and may in fact reinforce stereotypical ideas of appropriate gendered roles (Hyams, 2000). Ansell argues such instrumental and economically deterministic approaches to the value of schooling for girls of top-down policy-makers have been criticised for their complete disregard for the context of young people’s lives (2005: 134).

The 2000 Nicaraguan PRSP (Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper) contained a strong economic growth focus and lacked any particular discussion of plans to address gender inequality and as Bradshaw concludes, ‘in general are not ‘gendered’ documents’ (2002: 23). Where women are mentioned is in terms of education and reproductive health, which Bradshaw argues can be explained by the document’s emphasis on human capital. Moreover, the assumed link between education and fertility has been increasingly questioned (Hyams, 2000). Such an approach denies women’s fundamental right to decide, and to be able to have children: ‘Rather than be included in the PRSP as a fundamental right of all women to manage their own fertility, the need to control women’s fertility is central in the Nicaraguan PRSP’ (Bradshaw, 2002: 24). Further, limiting a consideration of women’s poverty to their reproductive behaviour, essentialises women’s identity and role as predominantly mothers, and fails to consider other demands around increased access to better employment for women. The trend of targeting mothers for poverty alleviation strategies is associated with theoretical and empirical findings that payments received by women are more likely to be spent on the welfare of their children (Schultz, 1990). Such an approach prioritises a general recognition of women’s greater commitment to the well-being

of their families than of men and has led to the increasing trend of development programmes to channel resources towards women (Chant, 2009).<sup>76</sup>

For many of the players the economic situation in Nicaragua was an important factor in planning to have smaller families (usually one or two children) at a later age. Lizbet (age 17) explained, '*No pienso tener muchos hijos realmente, porque eso requiera cómo va la situación ahorita, aquí quien sabe.*'<sup>77</sup> The unpredictability of the economic situation in Nicaragua is clearly important in influencing Lizbet's plans for a family and her desire to be financially, '*No se, tal vez cuando salga de mi carrera, y tenga una carrera fijo y pensar en esta cosa de formar una familia. Cuando ya ir a sacar mi carrera porque no puedo estar...¿Yo con tal vez un hijo y no tengo mi carrera pues con que mantenerlo?*'.<sup>78</sup> First a degree, then a profession and then she will think about a family; without training and qualifications she does not see how she can support a child. Another player intended to have children when she 25 or 26, when she was '*mas segura*' or '*more secure*' after finishing her studies.

Most of Monica's (22) friends and peers already have children but she is planning on waiting until her late 20s. Her parents encouraged her to concentrate on finishing university before thinking of starting a family and she agrees:

*[ b]ueno, mi papa y mama me aconsejan que termine primero universidad para que yo puedo avanzarme. No es que me obliguen que yo estudio, pero si les gustaría que yo primero termine Universidad y después ya me dicen que vas a tener tiempo para tu familia. Y yo creo que sí, que es cierto por lo menos a mí, no tengo esto, que*

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<sup>76</sup> Bradshaw argues there are two assumptions inherent in such an approach: better schooled girls, it is assumed, will be more productive in the labour force, and better educated girls are more likely to have less children, essential for the country's economic development (2002, 24). Bradshaw describes how the Bangladesh Female Secondary School Programme involved payments direct into girls' bank accounts on the condition of 85 per cent school attendance and that the girls remained unmarried until over 18. There has to be some doubt as to what extent 'conditioning' behaviour can be 'empowering' as Bradshaw concludes: 'while the aim of the programme to limit early marriage is a laudable one, the means by which to achieve this is perhaps open to question, especially in rights terms' (2002: 828). One condition of successfully receiving the transfer is for mothers to attend education sessions which give training in health and nutrition initially, then later in the programme on possible sources for income generation such as animal husbandry (Bradshaw, 2008: 830). However, the time dedicated to these sessions can mean income lost for women and less time for responsibilities in the household. Thus, compliance means women place an extra burden on their time and income, while non-compliance can mean similar economic costs but also the loss of opportunities for their children, 'The design of the PRPS thus reinforces the idea of the 'traditional' family and family values, and the gendered roles and norms of behaviour, including women's assumed altruism, on which they are based' (Bradshaw, 2008: 838).

<sup>77</sup> I don't think about having many children really because it depends on the situation. Right now, who knows (what's going to happen)?

<sup>78</sup> I don't know, maybe when I've got my degree and have a fixed profession, and then I can think about having a family. When I've already got my degree because I can't be...me with maybe a child and no profession, well, how would I support him (the child)?

*necesito estar con alguien, que tengo que casarme, que tengo que tener mis dos hijos. Si se va a dar, se va a dar, y espero que es mas adelante'* (Interview, 3 July 2008).<sup>79</sup>

The emphasis Monica's parents place on her education reinforces Rosa's opinion that young people in Nicaragua need their parents' support – whether financially, through childcare or providing accommodation – to improve themselves through education and the better work prospects higher qualifications can bring. It is impossible for young mothers to study and earn enough to maintain a family unless they have the support of a partner or their family to offer childcare or financial assistance. There is an indication that both of these young women see their education as something that will give them greater control over their futures. Without a higher degree young people in Nicaragua are limited in the type of employment they can find and the wages they can earn. Young mothers are therefore among the poorest in society, '*Y pues, si, hay mucha pobreza porque hay muchas jóvenes embarazadas. Aquí, la mayoría de la población es joven, sobre pasa la cantidad de personas adultas'*.<sup>80</sup> The desire of the players to delay motherhood until after finishing higher education is perhaps a consequence of knowing the limitations of work opportunities for young people without secondary education, a subject that will be analysed in greater detail later in this chapter.

For young women in Nicaragua an education at technical or degree level means the possibility of greater economic independence through the potential of better paid employment, more personal freedom, and greater control over decision-making. Rosa talked about the sort of future she sees for herself given the freedom she has become accustomed to whilst living in León:

*Mira, realmente en un futuro me veo así, con un trabajo. O sea, realmente, no tengo planes ahorita a tener hijos o hacer un hijo. Mira pienso así, es de tener mi carrera, de hecho que me van a pagar. Entonces es como vivir, para mi puedo salir a cualquier lado sin estar dando explicaciones de donde va. ¿Con quién está? ¿Que porque te moviste allí? ¿Que por qué hiciste eso?* (Rosa, age 22, 31 July 2008).<sup>81</sup>

Rosa is quite clear that her future concern is to successfully finish her degree which will ensure her access to better paid work, but more importantly, the possibility to maintain the

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<sup>79</sup> [w]ell my papa and mama advise me to finish university first so that I can advance myself. It's not that they oblige me to study but they would like me to finish university first and after they say I will have time for a family, and I think it's true, that it's true at least that I don't have to be with someone, that I have to get married, that I have to have my two children....If it's going to happen it's going to happen and I hope it's more in the future.

<sup>80</sup> And well, yes, there is a lot of poverty because there are many young pregnant women. Here, the majority of the population is young, more than the amount of adults.

<sup>81</sup> Look, really, in the future I see myself with a job, so, I really don't have plans at the moment to have children or make a child. Look, I think like this, to have a degree means they are going to pay me, so it's a way of surviving/living. For me, I can go out to whatever place without having to give explanations of where I am going, with whom and why I went there and did that.

freedom she has now in León. These freedoms include: the freedom to go where she likes, to see whoever she likes and without having to explain herself or answer to anybody. Further, she is enjoying the freedom from responsibilities her life in León gives her, ‘... *Fijarte que cuando yo estoy aquí a mi me encanta la vida que llevo aquí, o sea, es a ver que no tengo responsabilidades*’ (Interview, 31 July 2008).<sup>82</sup> In contrast, Rosa elaborates on the restrictions she experiences when at home in Estelí:

*Porque mira, fijate que aquí puedo acostarme a las 11 o las 12 de la noche. Podemos amanecer platicando, pero en Estelí no, o sea, a las 10 mi papa cierra la puerta y de esta hora yo tengo que estar a dentro de mi casa dormida, entonces no es como aquí. Por ejemplo si yo estoy en universidad yo estoy en clases y a lo mejor me di un poquito mas de tiempo que supuestamente tengo que tardarme y llego tarde a mi casa allí en Estelí me regañan, pero aquí no* (Interview, 31 July 2008).<sup>83</sup>

Living with her father entails relinquishing many of the freedoms she has grown accustomed to in León. Additionally, paid work will allow Rosa financial independence from her father:

*Es que realmente me siento una mujer independiente pero todavía soy dependiente económicamente de mi papa. O sea, es lo único, aparte de ser mi papa es lo único que me esta ayudando ahora. Entonces, una vez que yo empiezo a trabajar voy a independizarme completamente* (Interview, 31 July 2008).<sup>84</sup>

She feels that this greater independence will allow her to live at home without the problems she faces at the moment: restrictions on where she can go and when, as well as responsibility for domestic tasks, ‘*Va a ser todavía mejor para mi, voy a poder estar en Estelí y no voy a tener problemas, me siento pues. Creo que voy a seguir viviendo allí donde mi papa. No se tengo que buscar una empleada (laughs), es que realmente no me va a dar tiempo.*’<sup>85</sup> She envisages paying a cleaner to look after the house as in her opinion there is little sense in studying to then be stuck in the home washing and cleaning: ‘*Entonces, tengo que ver alguien por allí que haga lo que yo hago, porque, de hecho, no voy a estudiar para irme a encerrarme en mi casa a lavar trastes, a cocinar...no tiene sentido. Entonces, si pienso así*

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<sup>82</sup> Look, when I’m here I love the life that I have here, I mean, you have to see that I haven’t got any responsibilities.

<sup>83</sup> Because look, see here I can go to bed at eleven or twelve at night. We can get up in the morning and chat, but in Estelí I can’t, so, at ten my father locks the door and at this time I have to be inside my house, sleeping, so it’s not like here. For example, if I’m in university, I am in classes, perhaps I happen to be running later than usual and I arrive home late, in Estelí they tell me off, but here no.

<sup>84</sup> I really feel like an independent woman but I’m still dependent on my father. So, apart from being my father it’s the only way he’s supporting me at the moment. So then once I start working I’m going to be completely independent.

<sup>85</sup> It’s going to be much better for me, I can be in Estelí without any problems, is how I feel. I believe I’ll carry on living there with my father. I don’t know, I’ll have to look for a cleaner (laughs), because really I won’t have time.



*con más libertad*' (Interview, 31 July 2008).<sup>86</sup> Studying and work therefore represents greater personal independence and an escape from domestic responsibilities.

Rosa recounted a conversation with another player on the team about motherhood and domestic responsibilities, and they agreed it was too demanding for them at the moment:

*Con la Fernanda nos ponemos a placticar y me da risa que un día, o sea, coincidimos en muchas ideas, "Imaginate Rosa" dice, "llegar a tu casa cansada y cocinar, que él está llorando que tenes que revisar la tarea a otro, o sea, hay mucha demanda y vos cansada. ¿Qué puedo dar?" Me siento como ahorita, que no estamos en posibilidades ni estamos capacitadas para ir a aguantar eso* (Interview, 31 July 2008).<sup>87</sup>

They recognise the responsibilities family life will hold for them and admit to not being able to stand up to the demands of family life at the moment.

Throughout the fieldwork I met only two players who were mothers: Sara (17), was married with a new-born baby and a partner of four years; Jacinta (28) had two children and had recently re-located to Managua. Sara's time was filled with the responsibilities of looking after a young baby and she had returned to school one day a week to finish her *bachillerato*, but she had started playing *futsal* once again. Jacinta was working full-time in a laboratory in the capital so had no time for training and matches. Sara planned to train in accountancy and develop a local community organisation aimed at supporting young mothers. She and her husband were living with her family but hoped - with the help of her father who was working in Costa Rica - to either buy their own home or re-locate to Costa Rica. Both players had sufficient training or support from partners and family to provide for their children and continue working or schooling, once again reaffirming the importance of family support for young mothers trying to maintain a working life or complete schooling.

## Football and motherhood

None of the regular players on the team wanted to give up football and the opportunities and experiences it offered, in order to start a family. For some of the players their desire to continue playing football is their motivation to not have children, or to at least postpone parenthood. Blanca (age 18) was not interested in having children, '*no me llama la atención*', and talked of the girls she grew up with playing football who have now stopped

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<sup>86</sup> So, I have to see someone over there that does what I do, because, in fact I'm not going to study in order to go and be locked -up in my house to wash dishes, to cook...it doesn't make sense. So, I think like so, with more freedom.

<sup>87</sup> I was chatting with Fernanda (24) and it made me laugh, we had such similar ideas. Can you imagine it, she said, to get back to your house tired and to have to cook, and he's there crying, you have to look at homework, there's so much to do and you're tired, what can I give? I feel like now it isn't possible for us and we aren't capable of bearing it.

because they have children, *‘Una de ellas era defensa y es alta la muchacha y era buena ... hay una que era portera ... salieron embarazadas y tienen dos hijos cada uno .... Ya están completas ya están!’*<sup>88</sup> In her neighbourhood most of Blanca’s peers have children and she believes she has avoided the same path because she plays football, *‘Ya pues, mejor dicho ... si las únicas que hemos quedado, mejor dicho, soy yo de aquí ... la de mi edad, soy yo ... de ahí todas ya tienen hombre ... Se meten rápido con hombres ... Por eso el fútbol siempre me ha gustado’*.<sup>89</sup>

Part of Rosa’s decision to delay having a family concerns her dedication to playing football, *‘Pienso que sí, es bonito a casarte, formar una familia, pero no ahorita, es porque yo digo, ahorita estamos jóvenes y podemos disfrutar mucha más de la vida así, sola, dar más de nosotros’* (Interview, 16 May 2008).<sup>90</sup> Being single offers opportunities she knows will not exist in the future, *‘O sea, va a llegar un momento indeterminado en que nosotros ya no vamos a poder jugar a unos 25, 28 años, o sea el futbol, hay que hacerlo a otro, ya vivimos en este momento y empezar otra etapa en nuestra vida, formar una familia, ya con tu trabajo, cosas así. Pero al momento así estamos bien’* (Interview, 16 May 2008).<sup>91</sup> She sees playing football or having a family as a choice and now is her opportunity to play.

Nicaragua has one of the highest adolescent fertility rates in the world; however, none of the current players on the team had children or intended to have children in the near future. The predominant attitude of the players is to finish higher education before having children. Having children whilst young and uneducated, often leads to limited work opportunities in poorly paid employment. That all of the players are either still in education or have finished at least secondary school tends to support the link, at least superficially, between education and lower fertility rates. However, the players’ explanations of their intentions are varied. Some point to problems of the economic situation in Nicaragua and the necessity to get a university qualification to be ‘more secure’ and hopefully find better-paid work. Lizbet in particular was concerned about how *‘la situación’* may worsen and her worries reflect the economic precariousness that characterises most of the players’ everyday lives and therefore the choices they make.

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<sup>88</sup> One was a defender, she was tall and really good...the other was a goalkeeper..they both ended up pregnant and have 2 children each...that’s it they are finished!

<sup>89</sup> I am the only one of my age from here (still single)...(girls from here) already have a man...they get together quickly with men...it’s because of this I’ve always liked football.

<sup>90</sup> I think it’s nice to get married, to start a family, but not at the moment because I say now we are young and we can enjoy more of life and give more of ourselves if we’re single.

<sup>91</sup> So a moment is going to come along when we aren’t going to be able to play, when we’re 25 or 28. That is, the football, you have to do one or the other, we’re living in this moment and then starting another stage in our lives, to start a family, with your job, things like that. But at the moment we’re happy.

Other players, like Rosa, prioritised her current freedom and independence and was reluctant to take on the domestic responsibilities of family life. Rosa and Fernanda clearly did not see family life as appealing and their opinions suggest young women in Nicaragua do have expectations that they will be able to be financially secure and pursue their own careers and that they can potentially resist dominant notions of femininity associated with domesticity and motherhood. It is worth noting that Rosa is one of the players in a better position to find well-paid work given the support she receives from her family, and the prospect of her qualifying from university with a higher degree. Rosa's situation represents the only real possibility from amongst the players of a 'conventional' transition from education to work, in the sense that her studies are (relatively) uninterrupted and her qualification should guarantee her a decent wage.

For all of the players during the 2008 season playing football meant postponing motherhood. Players discussed the importance of economic security and an education before starting a family, and usually not until their mid-to-late-20s. Others did not see motherhood as part of their future. Many were reluctant to give up the independence they felt they had in their lives including the time and freedom to play football. When the players considered the prospect of motherhood, it is interesting that in many cases, being financially secure – through education for instance – was as important as their desire to continue playing football and maintain the freedom or independence that their lifestyle currently offered them. The dedication and commitment to football represents a significant amount of agency and autonomy in their decision-making.

## **Football and education**

A number of players failed exams, or had seen their marks reduce precisely because of their commitment to football, leading in some cases to their withdrawal from the team. It became clear that despite their assertions, the players were not, or had not, always been as committed to their education as they were to football.

One player, who had become a regular team member towards the end of the 2007 season, withdrew in 2008. She claimed to have agreed with Diego that he would pay her the *beca*, but had waited two months and had only received the money for transport costs. Under pressure from her mother she had been forced to leave. Through players on the team I learned of other cases when parents made their daughters withdraw to focus on their studies or domestic responsibilities.

Blanca's schooling suffered because of the time she devotes to playing football and her commitment to the national team has had a direct effect on her results:

*Yo he bajado mucho porque me salgo de clase por futbol que me voy 15 días de entrenar, entonces me dificultar mucho. Paso, pero no como se debe, como en 60 por ciento o 70 per ciento. Ahora, en primer semestre yo pase bien todito, después ya fui a la selección y he bajado en las clases. La selección perjudica mucho y ahora estoy recuperándome, estoy subiéndome, entregando tarea, porque si no, voy a repetir un año (Interview, Blanca, age 18, 5 August 2008).<sup>92</sup>*

Similarly, Sylvia had fallen behind a year and failed fourth grade because of the time she dedicated to football. The *concentracion* or training camp for the Nicaragua Under-20 squad in Managua lasted more than six months and seriously affected the academic progress of three of the León players. Lizbet's mother became so concerned with her daughter's poor school performance that she withdrew her from the training camp just a week before they were due to leave for Mexico. Another mother preferred for her daughter to make the daily five hour round-trip from León to Managua so that she could continue to live at home and attend school in León. The *concentracion* had begun early in 2008, before any official date had been given by FIFA concerning when the actual competition would take place. In fact the competition took place in mid-June and FENIFUT decided to delay the start of the women's league by two months, at one point even discussing abandoning the league for 2008 to concentrate solely on the national squad. For those players on the León team it meant six months of their lives – studies, training, and living - being mostly based in Managua, and the situation caused a great deal of disruption. After she was selected to play in the U-20 national team Lizbet moved to Managua to attend a school in the capital and train every afternoon. She told me she had a problem with one of the teachers and it was better that she returned to study in León but her classes clashed with national team training so she had to make a choice and she chose school:

*Entonces yo me dijeron que eligiera entre futbol o mis estudios pero tengo que también buscar por mi futuro. Entonces yo dije que no, que tenía que estar estudiando porque es mi futuro pues, que en el futbol una lesión y ya se acabo y de allí no mas, mientras que mis estudios siempre voy a estar allí, hago lo posible pues pero tuve un problema con un profesor allí en Managua, pues que venir aquí en León (Lizbet, age 17, 22 August 2008).<sup>93</sup>*

While still in school she is reluctant to get involved again with the national team because the demands of training in Managua do not allow her enough time for her school work. Instead she intends to wait and see if she is called up to play for the under-19 squad by which point

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<sup>92</sup> I passed but not like I should have done, like with 60 percent, 70 percent. So in the first semester I passed all of it well, then after when I went to the selection, I lowered (my standard) in classes. The national team is really detrimental. Now I am recovering, raising my level, handing in homework, because if not I am going to have to repeat the year.

<sup>93</sup> ... so they told me that I needed to choose between football and my studies, but I have to also think about looking after my future. So I said no, that I had to be studying because well, it's my future. In football, one injury and that's it, finished, and from there nothing more, while my studies are always going to be there (Lizbet, age 17, 22.08.08).

she hopes she will be a university student with a football *beca* giving her greater flexibility to balance her time, '*me dijeron también en la sub-19 que ya puede estar en la universidad mas por lo que es la beca y todo eso, ya puedo concentrarme más en el futbol y en mis estudios*' (Interview, Lizbet, age 17, 22 August 2008).<sup>94</sup>

Players fell behind in school precisely because of their commitment to football and especially because of national team training. They all expressed a concern and supported the importance of education; however, in reality many prioritised the opportunity to play football. One player withdrew from the team because of the detrimental effects on her studies but did so under pressure from her mother, rather than through her own choice. Football played an interesting role in the players' lives that demonstrated their ability and agency and even power to make their choices. In this regard, the following section looks at the players' agency in balancing football and work.

## Football and work

Most of the players were put under pressure by their family to stop playing football so that they could get a job and this pressure increased during the 2008 season when Diego stopped paying the *beca*. When I asked Abril in July about her plans for the end of the season she explained that she has to get work, in fact she feels she should work now but the hours would mean giving up playing and even though she is under pressure from her mother to work, especially now Diego has stopped regularly paying the monthly stipend, she does not want to stop:

*Necesito, tengo que trabajar, buscar a un trabajo cuando termine la liga, y pensaba hacerlo ahorita pero no quiero dejar el equipo, vamos muy bien, y me siento bien jugando y si yo busco a trabajo ahorita y mi mama me lo dice que busca a trabajar, que ya eso que te dan no te ayude nada. Pero no lo hago porque si yo estoy trabajando no voy a venir a la práctica ni a los juegos porque tengo que venir los dos, tres días y eso es imposible con un trabajo. No se, quizás a trabajar cuando termine la liga* (Interview: Abril, León, 23 July 2008).<sup>95</sup>

Abril was out of education throughout the period of fieldwork and spent her time away from football fulfilling her domestic responsibilities and otherwise watching television. She

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<sup>94</sup> ...[T]hey also told me that in the Under-19 you can already be in the University because of (receiving) the *beca* and all that, so I can already concentrate more in football and in my studies.

<sup>95</sup> I need to, I have to work, to look for work when the league finishes. I thought about doing it now but I don't want to leave the team, we're doing really well and I feel good playing....my mama tells me to look for work, that what I get (from the team) doesn't help me at all. But I don't do it because if I'm working, I'm not going to come to the practice or the matches because I have to come [to train] two or three days and that's impossible with a job. I don't know, maybe I'll work when the league finishes.

worked intermittently as a futsal referee during 2003 earning around US\$2-3 for an afternoons work but this was inconsistent and unreliable work as she would often arrive and all the games had been allocated. Abril took part in a refereeing course Diego organised for the team which ran over a number of weeks but which only two reached the final examinations and neither of those completed. Diego complained about how frustrating it was to organise the course and then watch the players all gradually dropout. The course had been organised on a Saturday and involved classroom as well as practical exercises, at the end of which the players if they qualified, would have been able to referee in the national league (male as well as female matches) and also throughout Central America. In the end only Abril used what she had learned to referee five-a-side games in the *futsal* league.

Diego had recruited a number of players from Corinto for the 2008 season, one of them, Delfina (18) who had been out of school for two years and still had three years to complete began missing training towards the end of July. Her mother had arranged work for her at the port customs office. She worked up to 24 hour shifts checking in serial numbers of cargo and the details and identification of the owners or transporters. The work was only temporary but when I asked her if she stopped working so she could start playing football again she said partly yes because she was missing a lot of the practice and matches. Diego also sent 100 Cordabas through two of the other players who live in Corinto so that Delfina could pay transport costs and get to training. Because he sent the money Tania felt she had to go to practice, '*Si, por un lado ya estaba extrañando a Diego, bueno el me mandaba C\$100 para ir a practicar con él. Así que tenía que ir*' (Interview, Delfina, 14 August 2008).<sup>96</sup>

Abril had turned up for training on a few occasions during August unusually quiet and on one occasion visibly upset. Previously she had mentioned difficulties at home with her mother and sister who were unhappy about the time she devoted to playing football. On this occasion she explained that things were better at home but her sister (who was 32) continued to pressurise her to find work. She said she understood their attitude but felt it was unfair as she gave money to her mother and though it was not a great deal, she felt she was independent and not only relying on her family for support. However, she was reconsidering her ability to commit to the team and would have to leave if she was not paid the *beca*. This was in contrast to a previous conversation in June, when Abril told me the players had called a meeting between themselves (whilst Diego was away in Mexico) to discuss whether they would finish the season without being paid the *beca* and they had unanimously decided to continue playing. A further concern for her was the amount of injuries and operations (three)

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<sup>96</sup> Yeah, on the one hand because I was already missing a lot and Diego, well he sent me C\$100 to go to practice with. So I had to go.

she had suffered, and she felt she needed a break from playing football. There was the possibility of work in Costa Rica where a friend of her sister's knew of a job as a *doméstica* that was offered along with accommodation. When I asked if she would get bored working as a *doméstica* she replied that she was working as a *doméstica* at home every day anyway. As mentioned earlier, working as a *doméstica* or cleaner are the sort of tasks all of the players have to undertake at home and so for some, being paid to do the same work makes sense.

Abril was not the only one considering her future, Veronica (age 23) and Fernanda (age 23) had talked about the responsibility they feel to provide for themselves now that they are over 18, as they put it, '*no somos juvenes ahora*', 'we're not young now'. They see themselves as beyond the age that they should be completely dependent on their parents. Some of the players, predominantly those in their 20s, seemed to be facing increasing hostility regarding their commitment to football from their family as well as an increasing sense of responsibility to their family to work or study so that they could continue their football career. But they were also painfully aware that their football career was limited; unless they secured a *beca* to study full-time - which in some cases does not even interest the players - then inevitably they would have to stop playing and start working. With or without a technical or university qualification some of the players talked about working as *domésticas*.

## **The precariousness of work**

Work for young women in Nicaragua can be characterised as poorly paid, insecure and exploitative. These factors contribute to a precarious existence which undermines young women's ability to improve their socioeconomic position either through better employment (i.e. skilled and better remunerated) or improved education levels. Further, the type of work available to young women often reproduces the traditionally gendered division of labour. While inequality and socioeconomic background are key determinants for young people's economic prospects, young women are seen to face particular barriers to participation because of the traditional division of labour and their association with the private sphere (Weller, 2007: 78). The unequal and prejudicial terms of young women's labour force participation means that despite higher education levels than young men, they are more likely to work in low-skilled, low-paid and vulnerable employment. However, the players' decisions over when and where to work demonstrates that they do have strategies of resistance and expectations that go beyond traditional gendered roles. The following discussion considers the four main areas of actual or possible income-generating activities that emerged in discussion with the players: i) their individual experience of paid work; ii) home-based income generating activities; iii) *maquila* employment; iv) and migration.

Apparent from the players experiences and preferences was not only the economic and material importance of paid work but also the qualitative value they included in their decision-making. For the players, earning an income was essential to the household included in their decision-making were other less material considerations of for instance, decent working conditions and the opportunity for new experiences.

The first part of this discussion will examine the nature of paid work available for young women in León using examples of the players' experiences. What is evident from the testimonies of the young women is that paid work is predominantly informal, unreliable, mundane, often short-term and poorly paid. Commonly the players take up jobs in the service sector in bars and restaurants, shops and market stalls and as *domésticas*. Domestic service is one of the most common forms of employment for women and for young women. This section will look in greater detail at the reasons why young women are likely to become *domésticas* and the advantages and disadvantages of this form of work. Following the players' individual experience of productive work the discussion will turn to some of the strategies of home-based income generation that were common amongst the players' families and vital to household survival, and to which the players also contributed their unpaid labour. Given the economically precarious and vulnerable nature of many Nicaraguan households, I will examine how families cope during extreme economic crisis and exceptional natural disaster. Given the importance of the *maquila* industry to the Nicaraguan economy and that they predominantly employ young female labour, an examination of the players' opinions offers an interesting insight into more personal perceptions and opinions of young people towards this particular type of work. Finally, there is an increasing trend in Nicaragua and elsewhere in Latin America for young people to migrate often in search of better employment opportunities. Many of the players were considering their futures and migration, particularly to Costa Rica, was often discussed. The final section will examine the factors that the players identified as important when deciding whether or not to migrate, and the role of family and friends in the decision-making process. Further, what will be the social and economic repercussions for Nicaragua? Will it ease the burden on an already extremely poor country and inadequate state apparatus or does it represent the draining away of Nicaragua's cultural and economic future? Perhaps most importantly, will it lead to the improved standard of living the players hope for?

## Opportunities of paid work for young women

As discussed in Chapters Four and Five, women have felt the worst effects of economic restructuring given their association with the well-being and maintenance of the household. Additionally, they face unequal and prejudicial terms of incorporation into the labour



market, where they earn less and work longer hours than men. Women throughout Central America are more likely to be employed in work characterised by high levels of job insecurity and no social safety nets (UN DESA, 2010). Jobs in the informal sector are diverse from street vendors, to shoe-shiners to industrial home-based workers; however, the earnings and operation remain similar. Women also represent a greater proportion of informal sector workers where employment comes without social security protection, wages are lower than in the formal sector and are not protected by labour legislation, such as the minimum wage. Informal work is far more important for women than men and in the late 1990s 58 per cent of women compared to 48 per cent of men were involved in informal sector work and women in Central America are more than twice as likely to be working part-time as men (UN DESA, 2010).

Workers in the informal sector are characterised by their low levels of education, 69 per cent of those working in the informal sector have not finished primary school compared with 37 per cent in the formal sector (INEC, 1995). Women's increasing integration into the informal sector in Nicaragua in the 1990s was a result of the privatisation policy of the UNO government which saw a drastic reduction in the number of cooperatives, state enterprises and public sector employment (Babb, 1996: 40). It is estimated that at the beginning of the 1990s around 20 per cent of all employment (218, 210) was in the public sector, by the end of the decade this had reduced to just 5.1 per cent (78,365) (Walker, 1997: 9).

Employment is seen as a key factor for young people's successful transition to independence and adulthood: 'work can be viewed as a key to social integration, a source of meaning in the lives of individuals, a platform for civic involvement and a driver of material progress' (Weller, 2007: 62). However, young people and especially young women face particular obstacles and barriers to opportunities in the labour market, whether formal or informal. Young people are most likely to be laid-off first in times of economic crisis because of their lesser experience. The nature of the work available, particularly where it involves low-skilled and low level technology, means there is little scope for skills development and advancement (Weller, 2007: 64). Employment indicators for young women are less favourable than for young men across all education levels and they are also more likely to earn less than young men (Weller, 2007: 67). The majority of work available to young women is low-skilled, low-paid, temporary employment and predominantly within the service sector which represents 71 per cent of female economic activity in Nicaragua (CEPAL, 2008). Young women (aged 15-24) in Nicaragua are more likely to be unemployed than young men with an unemployment rate of 15.8 compared to 10.8 (CEPAL, 2008). Perhaps one factor to explain the underemployment of female workers is their greater difficulty in the employment market based on prejudicial terms of employment largely

premised on gender constructions. The labour available to women is determined not only by gender but also by age, 'most types of work and employment are bearers not only of gender but also of seniority. Young women are doubly marginalised through their age and gender and therefore more likely to be one of the lowest earners in the labour market. They operate not only according to economic principles, but also to the principles which structure different kinds of social hierarchy. Thus certain types of work are regarded as socially impossible for white women, others are only performed by young women and still others are the province of older women' (Ennew, 1986: 53).

In Nicaragua 70 per cent of the population are of working age (aged 10 years or more) and of this group women show the highest proportion of those economically inactive. This could possibly be because they are engaged in domestic labour or in the informal sector. More than half of the population, despite working forty or more hours per week, do not earn the minimum wage as it corresponds to the job they do (INIDE, 2007b: xii). There is chronic unemployment and underemployment in Nicaragua and this is evident in Leon. León is predominantly a university city and the large influx of students means much of the work for young women is in the service sector; in cafes, bars, shops, and markets, selling stationary or clothes to meet the demands of a large student population. Many also work as *domesticas* or domestic cleaners. As in the rest of Nicaragua employment is predominantly in the informal sector (IS). Much of the work is very poorly paid even by Nicaraguan standards; long hours are the norm and there is little job security - these jobs come without contracts and the concomitant benefits they guarantee. The players have worked in a variety of service sector roles: as *domesticas*, secretaries, on market stalls selling clothes or household goods, refereeing, baby-sitting, port security, waitressing and as shop assistants. Only Monica remained in steady employment for the period of this fieldwork, working as a gas station supervisor, she used the money she earned to pay for her course at the UNAN.

Claudia (age 25) faced an important decision at the start of the 2008 season. Along with her two sisters, Claudia had been involved in the team since its formation nine years earlier. Over the years her family had grown close to Diego, who had supported her and her sisters financially through school, and helped them renovate and furnish their home. Claudia was the eldest member of the team at 25 and she became one of my closest friends on the team, probably because she was closer in age to me than the other players. In March of 2008, as the team began pre-season training Claudia often spoke to me of her desire to be more independent and not have to rely on the *beca* that Diego provided to support her. She wanted to find a job to support herself and fund night classes but taking a job would mean leaving the team and giving up football which she loved playing. In the event she decided to leave the team and look for work. However, the work she found was often unreliable.

Claudia started working in the bar of a small hotel in the centre of León serving drinks, main meals and snacks all day, to mostly groups of young male students or travellers. The job had been arranged through the coach of the team, Diego, and Claudia was set to earn \$C70 a day for an eight to ten hour shift, with a meal included – usually food is not included.<sup>97</sup> Despite the favourable terms, she left after just a day's work complaining the manager was too aggressive and shouted at the staff. After a few weeks of searching she found a job in a clothes shop and Claudia earned \$C60 a day with no meal included, half an hour for lunch and no breaks. Unable to afford the daily cost of buying lunch, Claudia instead got up between 5am and 6am everyday in order to complete any domestic tasks and prepare her food for the day, before cycling to work for 8am. Apparently, Claudia's choice on where she wanted to work was not only based on financial motivations. Given that the job in the bar seemed to offer much better conditions than working in the clothes shop it could suggest Claudia's choice of employment was not based on financial motivations but on working conditions. Claudia continued working in the shop for the next two months until she was eventually laid-off as work slackened and her relationship with the manager deteriorated.

### Home-based income-generating activities

Many of the players' households supplemented earnings from paid work with income-generating activities from the home, for instance making soup to order for neighbours or baking cakes to sell from their living rooms. Family members, including a number of the players, would contribute their unpaid labour to such activities. It is common in León and throughout Nicaragua to see signs hanging on the fronts of houses advertising the home-cooked soup of the day - usually a meaty broth - that in large quantities is cheap to produce and therefore profitable to sell. Abril's grandmother had become well-known in her neighbourhood for the hearty soups she prepared at the weekends, setting out tables in the yard in front of her house for people to sit around. '*Era bien alegre*', '*it was really fun*' Abril explained. But that was years ago and fewer people ordered the soup so her mother, who had taken over from her grandmother, had to work on a tight budget and prepare exact numbers of portions. Abril was responsible for drumming up business by knocking on her neighbours' doors and taking orders. At the weekends Lizbet helped her grandmother prepare bread and pastries which she sold from the living-room of her home. For other families, women generated income through making tortillas, mending, washing, and ironing

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<sup>97</sup> The local *bufets* or lunchtime canteens scattered around León offer plates of food from around \$C20-\$C25 for a plate of rice, beans and meat, served with a tortilla and *fresca* or soft drink. However, those on a more limited income buy their lunch at the market or from vendors on street corners. Snacks of steamed corn or *chicharrón* (deep-fried pork rinds) with plantain and yucca served in banana leaves can be bought for around \$C10 and are designed to be eaten whilst on the move.

clothes, and through child-care. These cannot be described as 'extra' sources of income they are 'necessary' sources of income. There are advantages of this type of informal sector work as '[w]hen formal sector employment and childcare are scarce, working informally out of their homes may allow women to integrate household and economic responsibilities, an advantage despite low earnings' (Babb, 1996: 36).

### Working as a *domestica*

Within the service sector domestic service is the biggest employer of unskilled Latin American women especially amongst young migrants (Chant, 2003: 209). Women's predominance in domestic service can be understood as not only a response to demand, but more importantly, as a consequence of dominant cultural understandings of appropriate roles and activities for men and women. Domestic service is low-paid and perhaps for this reason, despite economic recession, demand for domestic workers has not significantly decreased. The sector has predominantly been associated with the first step into employment of young women (Chant, 2003: 210). This is perhaps due to the unequal responsibility girls and young women take on from an early age in fulfilling domestic tasks. Across Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America, girls, like their adult counterparts, are more likely to perform unpaid work within the household. Among older girls (15-17) the likelihood increases and between 1999 and 2003 on average 90 per cent of girls and 67 per cent of boys were engaged in housework (UN, 2010: 108). Similarly, in Chapter Five, the players described how domestic responsibilities were an integral part of most of their lives, especially older daughters. Young women's transition to domestic service can be seen as a role that has become part of their 'personal identity' within the private sphere of the home, as '[f]rom the time she is very young she has been directed to fulfil the prescribed role of mother and wife in the domestic setting' (Young, 2002: 81). In addition, domestic workers remain largely unorganised. Unionisation is made difficult by the paternal relations that underscore their employment and lack of contracts. This leaves them vulnerable and dependent on the 'good will' of their employer (Young, 2002: 88). Moreover, the nature of the work and its location in the domestic, and therefore private sphere, renders their work invisible and undervalued.

It is a role the players on the team have also practised from a young age. Laura was injured for the majority of the 2008 season and with her mother ill with a kidney infection, she spent the majority of her time cooking and cleaning for her family. Laura and Abril had both had part-time jobs as *domésticas* in the past two years and the latter was considering a full-time job with accommodation in Costa Rica. When I asked her if she would find the work boring she quickly replied that it was what she did everyday anyway, she saw it as better to at least get paid. Two other players mentioned they were considering the possibility

of domestic work in Costa Rica. For the players and their mothers domestic service was a common source of income which they predominantly undertook on a part-time basis whilst continuing to live with their families. Research elsewhere has demonstrated the heterogeneity that exists amongst women who work in domestic service. In Lima domestic servants were often young rural women who had migrated to find work in middle-class homes, 'Though many parents prefer that their girls stay at home, they cannot support them, and domestic service is one of the few opportunities available to young, poor women' (Young, 2002: 81). In the case of the León players it seems that there is a growing trend to migrate not only from rural to urban areas but to go further and cross borders for employment even in low-paid domestic service.

Domestic service was a common source of income for both the players and their mothers. On a trip to Corinto to visit Josefina and Delfina I was struck by the lack of commerce and industry in the town. When I asked how most of the people earned a living they explained the men were predominantly employed at the docks while the women work as *domésticas*. Fernanda's and Claudia's mother were working full-time as *domésticas* but in very different circumstances. Of the other players at least five of the mothers were part-time *domésticas*. Fernanda's mother had been working for more than a year in Costa Rica as a live-in *doméstica* while Doña Corina (the mother of Claudia, Sylvia and Nina) worked in León for a number of different households. The former would send money back to her daughter to support her living costs and studies. Fernanda was considering going to join her mother as she had also been offered work, she felt guilty that her mother had to work alone and so far away to support her but she was reluctant to give up her studies to work as a *doméstica*. Doña Corina worked every day in households across León but often complained that the work could be unreliable with employers cancelling or shortening her duties at the last minute. Doña Corina's work was also subject to other logistical issues, for instance, during the two week transport strike in March she would have to walk from her home on the outskirts of the city into the centre (a journey of around an hour) in the tropical heat before starting a six hour shift. She complained that the work was exhausting and she had health problems such as varicose veins, '*Yo trabajo en otros lados lavando, planchando ropa, haciendo limpieza así como vengo aquí, pero es duro el trabajo*' (Interview, Doña Corina).<sup>98</sup>

There are signs however that younger women are increasingly turning to other forms of employment rather than domestic service which they see as poorly paid with 'slavelike' labour relations. In Goldstein's study of everyday life for women in the *favelas* of Rio de Janeiro, she notes how younger women in their late teens and early 20s, despite possessing

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<sup>98</sup> I work in other places, washing, ironing clothes, doing cleaning, but its hard work.

the necessary skills and experience for domestic work, were more interested in pursuing employment opportunities in factories in the industrial suburbs of Rio even though this is similarly characterised by its poor working conditions and wages (2003: 96). Goldstein also notes that in Rio working as a *doméstica* was seen as good honest work and amongst the players and Nicaraguans generally there was never any embarrassment or indication of shame attached to the work, only acknowledgement of its physically exhausting nature. That the work is arduous is reflected in the fact that most Nicaraguan's would pay someone if they could afford it. Doña Corina generated a good deal of business washing and ironing clothes for her neighbours and Rosa explained that once she is working full-time she expects to be able to pay someone to look after the domestic tasks.

It is interesting to note that in contrast to the young women Goldstein encountered in Rio de Janeiro, the players were more likely to work as *domésticas* than in the *maquilas* which they unanimously described as exploitative, a point which will be explored in greater detail in the following section.

### **Maquilas in Nicaragua: 'Es que no es un gran futuro que digamos'**

The *maquila* industry represent a large proportion of the employment available to women in the formal sector throughout Central America.<sup>99</sup> Since the 1980s and the shift to neoliberal economics, this type of production has proliferated. Latin American governments have attracted multinationals through incentives of tax relief and relaxed employment laws (Safa, 1995; Tiano, 1990). Economic recession and the increased necessity for women to generate income have led to a large supply of cheap female labour. During the 1980s in Mexico the assembly sector grew by 350 per cent and was the leading source of export revenue in 1995 (Chant, 2003: 211). In Puerto Rico, labour-intensive export-oriented manufacturing has been an established industry since the 1950s and by 1965 was the leading employer, out-stripping employment rates in the agricultural sector. In 1950 of the total number of working women in the country 42.9 per cent were employed in manufacturing (Ríos, 1995: 133). Therefore, that manufacturing has established and proliferated in developing countries, mostly employing female labour, 'is not an aberration or a chance occurrence but an inherent feature of the post-World War II restructuring of the economy' (Ríos, 1995: 126). Women often represent more than 70 per cent of employees in the *maquiladora* industry (Chant, 2003: 211).

Nicaragua has not eluded the focus of international business and since 1990 a

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<sup>99</sup> In Mexico these factories or assembly plants are termed *maquilas* but amongst the players and other Nicaraguans they were often referred to as *fábricas*. Both terms refer to labour-intensive assembly factories that mainly produce garments and electronics.

number of free-trade zones or '*zonas francas*' have been established mainly around the capital Managua but also near León where they have become significant employers and national exporters, representing 19.5 per cent of total urban employment in 2007 (CEPAL, 2008). Following the Sandinista electoral defeat of 1990, the newly elected Chamorro government rapidly introduced neoliberal economic policies including the privatisation of 80 per cent of previously state-owned agricultural and industrial enterprises. The largely feminised textile industry was worst affected by privatisation and 10,000 workers lost their jobs as factories were liquidated. These women became a ready source of labour for the new export-oriented economic growth model Nicaragua was to embark on: 'This once unionised work-force was dislocated when these plants closed, only to be incorporated as a trained and desperate labour pool when transnational assembly factories set up production in the newly opened Free Trade Zones' (Bickham Mendez, 2002: 12). In 2002 there were a total of 31 private and state factories in Nicaragua employing 28, 097 workers, around 80 per cent of whom were female with on average of more than three dependents (Bickham Mendez, 2002: 12). Between 1994 and 2005 the number of maquilas in Nicaragua rose from 14 to 82 and between 1994 and 2004 the number of workers employed rose from 3,432 to 60,000 (Luis Rocha, 2006). The percentage of women employed in the industrial sector in Nicaragua has almost doubled between 1995 and 2007 from 11.1 per cent to 19.6 per cent. However, the service industry is by far the biggest sector for economically active females, employing 71 per cent of women in 2007 (CEPAL, 2008).

The manufacturing industry is facing increasing problems in the wake of the global financial crisis. There are increasing closures and job losses and in 2008, 13,000 of the 88,000 strong workforce lost their jobs, representing a 14.77% fall in employment in the sector (END, 18.01.09).

Women who work in the *fábricas* are characterised by the players as young, poorly educated, often mothers and desperate. When I asked the players if they would work in a maquila it was common for them to reply, '*Es que no es un gran futuro que digamos*' or 'As we say, it's no great future' (Interview, Lizbet, age 17, 22 August 2008). A number of the players mentioned that they had, do, or would in the future be prepared to work as a *doméstica* but none of the players would work in a maquila. It is important to point out that none of the players had actually worked in a maquila and opinions were based on the experiences of relatives and friends.

That women have been favoured by the maquila industry was first addressed in Elson and Pearson's 1981 article, 'Nimble Fingers Make Cheap Workers': An Analysis of Women Employment in Third World Export Manufacturing', they identified a number of

'natural' characteristics employers associated with women's work: 'Women are considered not only to have naturally nimble fingers, but also to be naturally more docile and willing to accept tough work, discipline, and naturally less inclined to join trade unions than men; and to be naturally more suited to tedious, repetitious monotonous work' (Elson and Pearson, 1981: 93). Their contribution was an attempt to examine not only that women had been integrated into the workforce but to evaluate the possibilities and problems of such integration, and in doing so they revealed the importance of perceived beneficial 'feminine' attributes that pervaded the employers rationale. Indeed, according to Ríos, Gender stereotypes have powerfully determined women's involvement in paid labour, 'Gender-typing is an ideological construct that, once crystallised in a particular labour market, plays a central role in the reproduction of the social relations of production', moreover, even when the conditions change the label remains (Ríos, 1995: 127).

In Nicaragua, young women have been specifically targeted by maquilas in the FTZs with adverts offering work to 16-20 year olds (Bickham Mendez, 2002: 12). The emphasis on young and often single women has tailed off in many Latin American countries. In Argentina for instance, there is a greater representation of women around 30-40 years of age as younger women stay in education longer (Chant, 2003: 214). In Nicaragua, 20 per cent of the urban female employed population is in the manufacturing sector, the largest proportion in Central America apart from Honduras with 21.4 per cent (CEPAL, 2008).

## Working conditions

Conditions in the *maquilas* were described by the players as exploitative with workers expected to remain on their feet for shifts of eight hours or more, not allowed toilet breaks and in some cases risking injury because of poorly-maintained equipment. Working in the *maquilas* takes a physical toll on the employees because of the long hours they have to work and the toxic substances to which they are exposed. Sara (age 17) explained she is only aware of negative concerning employment in the *maquilas*, particularly regarding harsh working conditions - '*hacen cosas super pesadas*' - and exposure to toxic chemicals that cause skin rashes and reactions. Her husband works in a pharmacy and often employees from the *maquilas* buy treatment for skin problems caused by the materials they handle at work. Under pressure to work fast there are often accidents. Overall, even though the wages can be attractive for Sara the hours and working conditions mean it is not worth it.

According to Lizbet, who lives in a *barrio* on the outskirts of Leon, though majority women in her area do not work those that do work in an assembly plant situated next to the *barrio*. Like the responses of the other players she says she would not work in a *maquila*.



There is a saying where she lives: '*Dicen que no es un buen gran futuro trabajar alli, no me gustaría*'. She explains this is because for her people are exploited at the factory, that almost no-one is capable of being on their feet for eight hours a day, they earn almost nothing and the hours (de turno or shift work) are hard, too hard for a person to fulfill. Lizbet (17) wants instead to focus on her studies to get ahead, '*Es que no es un gran futuro que digamos, ahorita voy a concentrarme en mi carrera, que voy a estudiar y superarme*' (Lizbet, age 17).<sup>100</sup>

The players' descriptions of working conditions reflect those in the literature. Women are often required to work ten to fifteen hour days with compulsory overtime and few breaks. Poorly ventilated shop floors lead to respiratory problems, and arthritis is also common, while sexual violence and shop floor harassment are increasing in incidence (Bickham Mendez, 2002: 13). In this passage, Luis Rocha describes 'Elena's' typical experience of working in a garment factory in Nicaragua:

*She earned C\$1000 a month in return for standing up for over 12 hours checking ten bundles of twenty pants each, making sure that the hem was perfectly sewn, the edges weren't ragged, the zipper wasn't damaged, the clasps and buttons were firm and the labels, pockets and waistband were up to the brand names standards. The factory was very small and poorly ventilated, with 15 sewing machines in a 24-square-meter space. Time was strictly clocked: half an hour for lunch, no breaks and toilet visits timed. The girls were subjected to a pregnancy test before being hired. While the shift was ten hours, overtime was mandatory every day, including Saturdays. Sitting down earned you punishments and reprimands. After three months, Elena fell ill with the classic symptoms caused by the high temperatures and the lint-saturated air inside the plant: a cough, catarrh and hoarseness (Luis Rocha, March 2006).*

## Education levels of maquila workers

Rosa explained how the women tend to be poorly educated and often have had to leave education to work in the maquilas, which in the long term limits their opportunities for better work. She has female friends and family in Esteli who work in '*fabricas de puros*', or cigar factories, predominantly to support their children:

*No se creo que medio les ayuda pues en las cosas de ellos pero es que aparte son jóvenes y tienen hijos entonces normalmente siempre se van a esas fábricas ... entonces a lo mejor sus papas no tienen buenas condiciones económicas para que ellos siguen estudiando y cuidar a sus niños no, tienen que dejar de estudiar (Rosa, age 22).*<sup>101</sup>

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<sup>100</sup> 'It isn't a great future as we say so right now I'm going to concentrate on the course that I'm going to study and improve myself' (Lizbet, age 17).

<sup>101</sup> 'I think it sort of helps them with things, but as they are young and have children they normally end up staying in these factories. Probably their parents are not in a position economically for them to continue studying and to look after their children so they have to stop studying.'

The *maquilas* become a necessity for these women in order to support their children. They become trapped in this type of work because their family are unable or unwilling to support them to improve their education financially or through childcare. Family support is vital if young people are to finish school and continue into higher education and especially if they also have children.

That women are preferred because they are cheaper and less likely to unionise has been noted in the literature (Safa, 1995; Elson and Pearson, 1981). A lack of education is one reason that the women are less well organised. The majority of people working in the factories, according to Rosa, have not finished secondary school which limits their ability to demand their rights as workers,

*La mayoría de las que están en la fábrica son personas que no han tenido la posibilidad ni siquiera sacar su secundaria, entonces son personas limitadas intelectualmente. Entonces, tienen que acoplar a las normas que allí mandan, o sea, no tienen la amplitud de conocimientos como para decir que 'esto está mal', y de defenderte, porque si no conoces no puedes defenderte (Rosa, age 22).<sup>102</sup>*

Being able to defend yourself is a question of knowledge, of having learnt what your rights are and to be able to articulate them; to be armed with the knowledge and confidence to be able to say: "this is wrong". Far from an innate characteristic, for Rosa, what she perceives as acquiescence on the part of these women workers is due to their lack of access to a better standard of education.

Many over-qualified women can end up underemployed working in *maquilas*. Women who have high-school diplomas may work as seamstresses, while supervisors may have studied at university for several years. Unemployment, according to Luis Rocha, allows the industry to not only capture overqualified staff, but to also exert extensive control over the labour force through the threat of dismissal and the repression of union organising (Envio, 2006).

The previous comments indicate that mothers working in *maquilas* rely on family (and extended family) for childcare while they work. It would seem family members are prepared to offer childcare if in turn there is a financial contribution to the household and for this reason continuing studying is no longer an option, the family need economic input and cannot wait the years required to finish schooling or university. In fact, because the *maquilas* employ workers on a shift basis it is almost impossible to work and study even part-time and

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<sup>102</sup> They haven't had the chance to even finish secondary school so they are limited intellectually. So they have to stick to the rules that are set there (in the maquila), that is, they don't have enough knowledge to say "this is wrong" and to defend themselves because if you don't know, you can't defend yourself.

with little or no alternative training these women find it difficult to find better employment.

## Leaving León

Traditional migration theories highlight the importance of economic structural factors in explaining individuals' decisions to migrate in search of employment and have largely failed to address gender-specific experiences of migration. Between the 1960s and 1990s women's experiences of migration have gradually become the subject of greater enquiry. During the 1960s and 1970s women's migration was subsumed under the category of "migrants and their families", however, increasingly those critical of women's status began to question their invisibility from migration debates and their presumed passivity and association with the domestic, private sphere (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). In the 1970s and 1980s the WID paradigm with its emphasis on women's integration and modernisation through the development process 'added women' to research on migration and began to explore the emancipatory potential of female migration (Willis and Yeoh, 2000: xi). From this perspective men and women were seen to experience migration differently, however, their individual choices were explained by gendered norms and behaviours and women's roles as mothers and wives determined their lesser participation in migratory flows and the workforce of the destination country (Boyd and Grieco, 2003). Since the 1990s, theories of gender and migration have emphasised the importance of understanding both structural processes and individual agency, to reveal how not only economic and political processes but also gender norms and relations shape female migrants experience (Willis and Yeoh, 2000: xi). This followed the shift to GAD and recognition of the diversity amongst women, the ways gender intersects with other identities and is shaped by culturally specific norms and values that create inequalities between men and women.

Women's participation in internal and external migration has been significant and equal to that of men across the region. Available statistics point to women's equal or greater share of intra-regional migratory flows in the Americas and the heterogeneity of female migrants and their experiences (Martínez Pizarro and Reboiras Finardi, 2001: 29).<sup>103</sup> Moreover, women's experience of migration differs to that of males especially in terms of decreased work opportunities in often precarious and exploitative situations such as sex work or domestic labour (Staab, 2004: 8). In the case of Nicaragua economic restructuring and increasing poverty since the 1990s has led to decreasing employment opportunities and low wages. While men and women migrate in similar numbers, gendered differences appear

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<sup>103</sup> Statistics on migrants are particularly unreliable. Many migrants are illegal and therefore undocumented; figures miss women who migrate as 'dependent spouses'; and women's labour which predominates in domestic labour and sex work, is informal and illegal and therefore often invisible (Jolly with Reeves, 2005: 8).

in the choice of destination country. Costa Rica is the destination for 52.8 per cent of female and 47.9 per cent of male migrants. The gendered gap grows when comparing migrants to the next most popular destination, the US, with 41.1 per cent males to 34.4 per cent females (EMNV, 2005). An estimated 450,000 Nicaraguans reside in Costa Rica (ILO, 2001: xi). One study estimates that of male Nicaraguan migrants to Costa Rica, by far the largest proportion, 32 per cent, work in agriculture and livestock, while 52 per cent of females work in personal services (described as domestic employees) and 32 per cent in commercial activities.<sup>104</sup> International migration from Nicaragua has a youthful face with 83 per cent of female migrants and 88.2 per cent of male migrants below the age of 34 (EMNV, 2005). Those who migrate are predominantly of working age pointing to the primarily economic motivations of migration for these young people. Women who migrate are generally more educated than their male counterparts, while a much larger proportion of males without any education migrate compared to females, 8.2 per cent compared to 3.8 (EMNV, 2005). These last figures can perhaps be explained by the prejudicial terms that women face in the labour market and the relatively easier access to employment for men.

Of particular interest for this discussion is the development in research on gender and labour migration in Latin America. Two trends have been identified in the types of labour female migrants undertake: firstly, global economic restructuring and the expansion of export-led manufacturing has led to increased numbers of rural-urban and international female migration for work in the manufacturing or *maquila* industry; secondly, and representing the largest proportion of migrants, are those women who seek out service sector employment linked to reproductive activities predominantly in domestic service and sex work (Willis and Yeoh, 2000: xiv). Migration patterns of employment for women point to the persistence of gender-based inequalities that limit them to predominantly low-skilled, poorly-paid work that reflects women's subordinate position to men and their association with reproductive labour and the private sphere.

What is distinct about these young women is they have no dependents whereas much of the literature points to the economic necessity to migrate to support children. This does not mean however economic factors will not determine their motivations but it does point to other factors in the decision-making process that should be considered and have not been to any extent by the literature on gender and migration to date.

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<sup>104</sup> The other main areas of male employment are commercial activities and personal activities representing 15 per cent and 13 per cent respectively. These figures are from the "Nicaragüenses en el Exterior," National Statistics and Census Bureau, United Nations Population Fund. Managua, September 1999 cited in Barahona Portocarrero, 2001.

There were a number of players who discussed moving to Managua to work or study while others spoke of migrating to Costa Rica. Firstly I will examine the personal motivations of those players considering leaving León and the factors that make such a decision more likely. Secondly, I will argue that their motivations stem from both economic necessity and a more personal wish to both broaden their opportunities and experiences, and to gain more freedom. The feeling amongst the young women was that Managua offered more and better paid work. Despite this only one player had made the move to Managua taking her two children and working in a laboratory. Given the harsh economic reality and the difficulties families face in meeting the demands of everyday life in León it is interesting that the players are discouraged by family members from leaving the household. The strength of traditional associations of women and the domestic sphere will be examined in the light of family reluctance for their daughters to migrate.

Rosa (age 21) sees working in Managua as a chance to broaden her education, get to know new people and take advantage of better work opportunities. Though she says it is a more difficult city to live in, Rosa believes it offers greater opportunities to learn, meet new people, and gain new experiences:

*Si, tiene dificultades a vivir en Managua, pero lo que pasa es que este, no se, yo me ubicaría pero realmente este, si lo miramos así del punto de vista económico me saldría mas favorable que quedarme en Estelí, porque vivo allá y tengo casa allá. Pero, viéndolo desde el punto de vista de mas aprendizaje, de relacionarte con más gente, o sea, de agredir de un experiencia este, con mucho mas importancia en tu vida, entonces me gustaría estar en Managua sinceramente. O aquí quedarme, aquí en León, pero, no se...* (Rosa, 22 years old, 29.07.08)<sup>105</sup>

Her father lives in Estelí so she could save money by moving home once she finishes her degree but as a student she sees it as important to go where she can learn the most despite Managua being a dangerous city:

*Mira es que, lo que pasa es que, este, uno como estudiante siempre tiene que buscar lo mejor, o sea, la forma donde vos aprendas mas, donde que das mas conocimiento, y pienso que Managua sería una buena opción. Si, Managua es una ciudad peligrosa y todas las cosas, es que pasa es que como te digo como Managua es la capital, entonces los problemas que nosotros no pueden resolver en los departamentos siempre se mandan allá a Managua. Entonces, si me dan la posibilidad de estar allá, porque no? Pero todavía no se? Realmente a mí en mi casa me esperan allá dentro dos años, que yo estoy allá en Estelí. Entonces, no sé*

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<sup>105</sup> Yes, there are issues with living in Managua but the thing is, I don't know ... I would relocate there but actually ... it's ... If we look at it from an economic point of view it would be better for me to stay in Estelí because I have a house already there. But, from the point of view of learning more, of getting to know more people, or to take advantage of an experience, it has much more importance in your life. So I would really like to be in Managua or stay here, here in León but I don't know...

*realmente como para ese momento donde toque decidir y donde me voy a quedar, no sé?* (Rosa, 22 years old, 29.07.08)<sup>106</sup>

Her decision is also dependent on negotiations with her family. There is an expectation from her family that within two years – after she has finished her university course – she will return to the family home in Estelí. For her though, living in León is preferable to returning to Estelí and perhaps this indicates that living independently - away from the family household - is of greater value to her than which city she chooses. While Rosa had no plans to leave Nicaragua for work she did express a wish to study in Cuba if she could secure a scholarship (through her studies not the football team).

A deciding factor as to where players prefer to migrate is whether they have relatives or friends already established in the destination country. Claudia (age 25) would like to go to Costa Rica where her older brother lives with his wife and children (who were born in Costa Rica). He has worked for the last five years in a drinks-making factory where he is able to earn better wages than in Nicaragua and now he has residency he can study for free. Nicaraguan migrants often have to live in the cheapest, poorest and most dangerous areas of the city where Costa Rican locals would prefer not to live (Luis Rocha, 2010). Claudia has visited her brother a number of times and on one occasion was almost robbed when she arrived at his neighbourhood on the bus. Fortunately her brother met her from the bus-stop and because he was a local resident nothing happened to Claudia. Perhaps because of this experience, her mother Doña Corina, was unhappy about her daughter moving to live with her brother. Claudia for her part had decided to stay in Nicaragua until she finishes her education as being a non-resident, in Costa Rica the fees would be prohibitive.

Laura's brother works in a factory in Panama and she was considering going to join him. She also knew of a Nicaraguan girl who lived in Panama and had a scholarship to play football. Recently however, she had been offered a place at University in Managua with a *beca* to study agriculture which she would like to take up. Her mother sees Panama as a better option as she thinks Managua is too dangerous. But Laura was impatient to leave home complaining that she always had to help her mother with the cooking, washing, and cleaning and wanted to escape these responsibilities.

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<sup>106</sup> I decided to change...Look, the thing is, a student always has to look for the best, that is, the best way that you are going to learn the most, where you get most knowledge and I think that Managua would be a good option. Yes, Managua is a dangerous city and all those things... the thing is though, it's like I told you, as Managua is the capital all the problems that we can't solve in the departments they always send to Managua. So if they give me the possibility to be there, why not? But I still don't know, really they are expecting me there, in my house, for me to be there within two years, so, I really don't know at the moment what to do and where I am going to stay, I don't know.

It was common for the players to meet opposition from family members, especially mothers, when they discussed leaving León. The perceived (and real especially in comparison to León) negative aspects of Managua - usually described as: crime, insecurity, congestion, insanitary conditions - have so far dissuaded the players and their parents (to allow them) to go. While it was common for parents to say 'Managua is too dangerous' or 'Costa Rica isn't safe', for the players themselves, issues over safety were not a determining factor in their motivations to migrate. The migration of family members has been widely recognised as a household survival strategy in the face of economic crisis and decreasing work opportunities, however the reluctance of the players parents to allow them to leave points to the influence of gendered norms.

Other players who talked about leaving Nicaragua primarily saw Costa Rica as an opportunity to find better paid and better skilled work. Fernanda (age 23), who has an Aunt in Costa Rica, had been planning to visit with Veronica in the hope that they could find work using their graphic design qualification as they believed there would be more employment opportunities there. However, Veronica's (age 23) mother was cautious about the idea and afraid that 'algo malo' or 'something bad' might happen. Veronica had agreed with her mother that León was much safer than Costa Rica but both players believed they had better opportunities to use their course in Costa Rica. Finally, as discussed earlier, there were Fernanda and Abril were considering going to Costa Rica to work as *domesticas*. Fernanda was considering joining her mother as a live-in *domestica*, while Abril had spoken of a possible job through a friend. Research shows that the majority of female migrants find work in domestic service in Costa Rica where women can earn on average US\$150 a month compared to US\$60 a month in Nicaragua (Willman-Navarro, 2006: 255).

Overall, when the players discussed their options to migrate they spoke with little certainty and often it felt without conviction. When I asked them if they wanted to leave León, apart from Rosa and Claudia, they all explained that they liked living in León and would prefer to stay, explaining that they had their family and friends in León and they were reluctant to leave them. Rosa on the other hand, was clearly keen to put her qualifications and experience to use in an appropriate job. She was also clearly hungry for new experiences. Perhaps living away from home and the freedom this allowed her to meet new people and experience new things meant her expectations were now broadened. For Claudia there were a number of personal factors that made her situation unique. She had been in a relationship with a German student and had spent several months with him in Germany. She continued to study German, had maintained contacts with German friends, and hoped to be able to perhaps live and work there at some point in the future. Given the financial costs of travelling to Europe it would be very difficult for Claudia to gather enough money together

in Nicaragua but she saw Costa Rica as an opportunity to find better paid work and save her earnings.

Studies of international migration have shown how women have traditionally tended to follow adult male migrants, usually husbands or fathers (Chant with Craske, 2003: 245). In this case though, Claudia and Laura had older brothers that they would possibly follow. Indeed, immigration studies from around the world have shown that family migration, that is 'family reunification related migration', has become the dominant form of international migration. The process of migration has also been shown as enabled through a series or 'chain' of sponsorships from family or relatives (Yu, 2007: 5). In this sense, Claudia and Laura would rely initially on the sponsorship – in the form of accommodation and meals, as well as employment contacts – of their brothers whilst they established themselves and found employment. The rest of the players relied on broader social networks involving extended family and friendships for employment contacts and places to stay.

From the above discussion it is possible to conclude that the players' primary motivation to migrate (with the exception of Rosa who I will discuss further below) was for employment, which fits with the general trend for international migration from Nicaragua. Costa Rica was the favoured destination which also fits with the general trend for Nicaraguan women. Migration for young women though is more complicated than can be explained though economic determinants. The players' experiences indicate social factors also play a role in the process and by looking at the individual attitudes of the players we can reveal the importance of social networks to the process of migration. The players are not following their partners or migrating to support their children as has been demonstrated in other studies of gender and migration. Their experiences also contradict studies that show the determining role of the household in decisions to migrate given that it is often the player's parents who prohibit or attempt to dissuade them from leaving.

## **Conclusion**

A key premise of this thesis is to analyse the ways in which young women's lives are shaped by structural processes, especially of gender ideology, but also how they negotiate and resist these structures. Two critical areas of young people's lives were addressed in this chapter and the players' experiences and difficulties in accessing education and better paid labour have demonstrated the precarious nature of their lives. Social and economic structures at times are a determining factor in their choices and opportunities and these processes have interesting consequences, both to reinforce and to give new opportunities to resist dominant notions of femininity. The young women are delaying motherhood because of, in some



cases, economic uncertainty and their prioritisation of education, but others simply reject the responsibilities of domestic life. Similarly, despite economic pressures and conflict with family members, all of the players prioritise their football careers over work and education, and even motherhood. This chapter has demonstrated the central role football plays in their lives and how its influence and effects go beyond the boundaries of the football field causing tensions and opportunities in unexpected areas.

Young women's steps from education to work in Nicaragua can be characterised as interrupted, while their experiences of each occur concurrently and are interdependent. The spheres of the household, education, work and the football field overlap and are interlinked. The precariousness of their lives means that fluctuations in one aspect of their lives can severely compromise their success in another. Additionally, gendered social norms and values shape their transitions. Young women in Nicaragua rarely transition from a state of dependence to independence in the sense transitions are understood in modern industrialised nations. Throughout their lives girls and young women tend to be responsible for 'adult' tasks of reproductive and productive labour. Additionally, finding work does not mean moving from the family home. Young Nicaraguan women only leave the family home to study, move in with their partner or, increasingly, to migrate – even in the latter case they tend to move in with family members. Education and work opportunities may allow young women greater autonomy over decision-making, but it is more useful to apply Punch's notion of 'negotiated interdependence' in the sense that the players' feel an obligation and commitment to their family but they maintain a certain amount of agency over choices and decisions.

Gendered notions of appropriate activity and participation are still pervasive in their lives. Though better educated than their male counterparts these young women will find it harder to find better paid work. Moreover, young women's paid labour tends to reproduce their activities in the home in domestic service and the service sector. Men's participation in the public sphere of the labour market maintains its privileged position despite women's greater integration into paid employment. However, these players are conscious of the barriers they face and the often exploitative nature of work available to poor young women, and they determinedly express their intentions to ensure they are in control of their both in the short and long-term.

## More than just a game? Football, friends and 'macho-Marys'

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*[Juego futbol] a distraerme de los problemas que hay y todo eso, si. Es una forma de desahogarme ahí pues como dicen, si, así lo tomo yo. Es que, cuando yo estoy con todas ellas es un mundo diferente. ¿Me entendés? Cuando vienen todas y me pongo a platicar con ellas, me siento muy ... es obvio pues que es otra ambiente y la frega y toda. Y cuando ya llego a la casa ... ¡Boo chica! A la. Que hace falta esto, que hace falta la otra pues, una vez se pone a pensar... pero no siempre así. Siempre hay cosas así. Vos sabes que así es la vida, siempre varia, y tenés que acostumbrarte a reírte a eso (Verónica, age 23, 15 May 2008).<sup>107</sup>*

For Verónica, football represents an opportunity to let off steam and escape from the problems and worries at home associated with a lack of resources. Being able to chat and banter with the other girls on the team makes it feel like when she's at football, she's in another world. Football represents a place to laugh and chat and relax with her friends and to forget how difficult life can be. Verónica's comments are indicative of the opinions of the rest of the team. As such, football occupies a central place in the players' lives, both in terms of the time they devote to training and matches, and also in terms of the enjoyment and importance they place on taking part and being part of a team.

The players' participation in football has real substantive consequences for their lives in terms of financial support. Less materially conspicuous, but no less important are the changes in the young women's educational, career, and family expectations through their participation. The young women are conscious of the socially transgressive and potentially challenging implications of their participation in a traditionally male sport in a highly *machista* Nicaraguan society where women, especially young women, have limited opportunities to participate in public life. The role of leisure activities generally and sports teams particularly as possible organisms of social development are receiving greater

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<sup>107</sup> [I play football] to distract me from problems and all of that. It's a way of letting off steam, as they say. When I'm with the other players it's a different world, you know? When everyone comes along and we start chatting, with them I feel really ... it's obvious that it's another atmosphere and we mess about and everything. But then when I arrive at my house. Boo chica! A la. It's like we need this, we need that and then you start to think ... but not always, you know? That's how life is here, it always changes, and you have to get used to it and laugh about it.

attention in academic research and development policy. Football in Nicaragua is the fastest growing sport for young women, a national league has been in place for over ten years and the Nicaraguan national women's teams have been involved in FIFA-organised international tournaments. The development in women's football in Nicaragua mirrors the growing global appeal, which for some has come to symbolise 'a significant talisman for women's egalitarian progress in sport' (Hong, 2003: 268). Football is becoming increasingly popular in schools and is overtaking other sports for both men and women in Nicaragua. The players in my case study are members of a pioneering group of girls and young women who were some of the first to take up the activity in Nicaragua, and form part of a wider regional and global phenomenon in the growing appeal of women's football. Many of the female football players who currently take part in the national league began playing before it became more common for women to do so. In this sense, they can also be seen as the group which faced most exposure to hostility from the wider society which was unused to seeing young women striding out into what was, while secondary to baseball, a traditionally masculine sport. Focussing on the lives of young women footballers in the metropolitan city of León, this chapter will explore how sport can provide a public space for participation for young women that can possibly transcend traditional female roles in Nicaragua. This chapter, therefore, examines the experiences of the young female footballers for CFF León through their own interpretations of the opportunities and challenges football offers them and how they negotiate them, as well as the perspectives they encounter from wider society.

As we have seen in Chapter Five and Six, as a result of social and economic processes the players' lives are unpredictable and precarious. The effects of both poverty and economic crisis and of perceived transgressions of appropriate gendered behaviour shape these young women's experiences and opportunities. One of the central arguments of this thesis is that dominant notions of appropriate behaviour for young women are pervasive in their lives in both the gendering of public and private space, and the ascribing of appropriate activities for men and women, as reflected in their responsibilities in the domestic sphere and opportunities in education and the work place. It is also of crucial importance to the approach of this thesis to avoid homogenising and essentialising descriptions of women that depict them as agency-less victims and ignore the diversity and complexity of their lives. This chapter will demonstrate that football represents an activity these players enjoy and an opportunity for these young women to socialise and escape other problems in their lives. As such their participation represents both choice and freedom in their lives and decision-making processes. That the players choose to play football in the face of opposition and criticism I argue, demonstrates that these young women are active agents and subjects that make choices and act, rather than passive victims of wider social and historical processes.

The extent to which young women's participation in a traditionally male dominated sport has the potential to destabilise gendered notions of appropriate activities and the essentialising assumptions upon which such binaries are constructed, will be examined through an analysis of the opinions of parents, friends and the wider public.

Sport has become an important arena in which to examine constructions of masculinity and femininity and as a site where unequal gender relations are reproduced (Hall, 2002; Hargreaves, 1994). As a bodily practice, embodying 'natural' characteristics of skill, power and athleticism, sport is seen as, 'a potentially powerful public arena for the perpetuation of the ideology of male superiority and dominance' (Messner, 1994: 68). However, it has also been shown to be a site of contestation, resistance and agency in relation to meanings of masculinity and femininity and of challenging unequal power relations between men and women (Birrell and Theberge, 1994; Messner, 1994; Whitson, 1994). As women's participation in sports and particularly traditionally masculine sports has increased, so to have challenges to the ideological basis of men's domination leading Messner to his conceptualisation of the female athlete and her body 'as ideologically contested terrain' (Messner, 1994: 66; Whitson, 1994; Saavedra, 2009). Analyses seeking to deconstruct the sex/gender binary opposition upon which masculinity and femininity are constructed, have revealed more fluid and diverse notions of gender identity as performed and shifting rather than 'fixed' and essential (Butler, 1990). The approach of this chapter therefore, is to examine the ways in which binary notions of femininity and masculinity are constructed in the arena of women's football, and furthermore how they are destabilised and transgressed by the players.

The chapter begins with a discussion of the players' introductions to the game, the difficulties they encountered and what this indicates about the gendering of public space in Nicaragua. This is followed by an examination of the meanings the players attached to playing football and the role of the team in their lives. The opinions of family, friends and the wider public are explored as a means to understand the pervasiveness of dominant notions of femininity and masculinity and how these are interpreted.

### ***'Yo soy la única rara en mi familia'***

This first section examines the player's introductions to playing football. At what age and through whom young women become involved in sports can reveal a great deal of how gender relations impact on how women enter football, and about how social spaces and particular sports are gendered (Scruton *et al.*, 1999: 99). Access to public space is an important factor in determining whether and at what age girls become involved in football as

‘transgressing the boundaries of gendered space may be more difficult in some cultural contexts’ (Scraton *et al.*, 1999: 103).

Given the gendered distinction of public and private spaces for female and male activity it could be expected that young girls and women would be more likely to begin their football careers within the relative security of the school. Three of the players began playing football in their local neighbourhoods when they were seven or eight years old and these players only joined organised teams in their early teens. Blanca, Lizbet and Heydi participated in informal games with local male friends. Each of the girls lived next or close to waste ground, where boys would congregate to play; they were often the only females involved. Rosa’s family had no interest in football, ‘*Yo soy la única rara en mi familia*’ (Rosa, age 22, 29 July 2008).<sup>108</sup> Her interest had been piqued watching boys play on waste ground near her house and she decided she wanted to join in, ‘... *así empecé, y me empecé enamorarme de futbol, me gustaba*’ (Rosa, age 22, 29 July 2008).<sup>109</sup> She said the girls would always play kick-ball but she did not enjoy it. Some of the boys playing football were good friends so she asked them to teach her, ‘*Entonces así empezamos y jugaban duros y teníamos que prepararnos firme para que nosotros no nos votaran*’ (Rosa, age 22).<sup>110</sup>

Blanca also started playing in her local neighbourhood on a patch of ground in front of her house, ‘*Yo empezaba de jugar desde los ... De no sé. ¡De cuando tenía conocimiento jugo futbol! Siempre yo jugaba futbol, es la verdad*’ (Blanca, age 18).<sup>111</sup> Blanca also had to prove herself on the pitch to be accepted by the boys who had initially dismissed her as a *llorona* or cry-baby, and not strong enough to play with men. She remembered one particular moment in a game when she impressed everyone by scoring an amazing goal or *golazo*: ‘*Entonces yo era defensa, pero como yo soy algo rapido me ponía ya despues delantera y me he hecho un ¡golazo! que todo el mundo quedo sorprendido y ¡ganamos!*’ (Blanca, age 18, 6 August 2008).<sup>112</sup>

Finding public space to play football in Leon is difficult and the few players that began this way were well aware that they were fortunate in having such a space in their neighbourhood, all of them reported that the space was very close to where they lived. Had it

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<sup>108</sup> I’m the odd one in my family

<sup>109</sup> That’s how I started, and I started to fall in love with football, I really liked it.

<sup>110</sup> So that’s how we started and they played hard and we had to prepare ourselves well so that we weren’t thrown out.’ Being just a ‘*chavala*’ or young girl she always had time once she had done her homework to play.

<sup>111</sup> I’ve played football since ... I don’t know. Since when I can remember I’ve played football! I’ve always played football, it’s the truth.

<sup>112</sup> They put me in defence at first but because I was fast they soon moved me up front and I scored a *golazo*! Everyone was surprised and we won the game!

been further away perhaps they would not have been able to take part. It could be that there are issues of safety which prohibit where girls and young women are permitted to socialise. Perhaps the proximity of the playing field assured their parents that they were safe, they literally played in front of their houses. Perhaps for these two reasons: the lack of public spaces and reluctance of parents to allow their daughters to play out in the streets, most of the players started their football careers in school teams.

It was common for players to be introduced to football by their brothers. In the case of one family, all three daughters started playing football with their older brother who would take them to Campos Médicos, the University playing fields, to watch him play and eventually they began to join in themselves. Similarly Sara would practice in front of her house with her brother before she joined the school team. The rest of the players began playing in same-sex school teams and in organised small-sided games.<sup>113</sup> All of the players eventually became involved in organised *futsal* games or school teams, were they were later scouted by Diego to play for UNAN-León.<sup>114</sup> A minority of players learned to play football on the streets and waste ground in their neighbourhood with local male friends.

The issue of public space is interesting because there seems to be fewer public spaces where young women can socialise or play sports. In León parks and streets are masculine spaces. It is obvious walking around León in the evening that parks and street corners are populated predominantly by young men whether playing sports or just chatting. There are a few public sports areas scattered around the different neighbourhoods of León which are most often for basketball or baseball but also sometimes utilised as football pitches. But it is by far the young men that access these facilities. Groups of girls hanging around socialising are just not a common sight beyond sunset.

Scraton *et al.* found that in England, Germany and Norway female footballers began playing football on average between the ages of 4-6 while in Spain the average was much older at 11 years (1999: 102). Those who started playing at a younger age began playing in their local neighbourhoods in informal spaces often through and with males. The older Spanish players also mentioned streets and parks but would more commonly mention female friends as contacts and support to becoming involved (Scraton *et al.*, 1999: 103). Scraton *et*

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<sup>113</sup> The majority of players competed in other sports, especially kick-ball, before learning to play football. Another popular activity was traditional or folk dance. However, football was the primary sports or social group affiliation for most of the players during 2008.

<sup>114</sup> Futsal is an indoor soccer game that is played with a small heavy ball designed to encourage players to develop their ball control. It has become increasingly popular in Nicaragua and FENIFUT credit the growth in futsal leagues with encouraging a greater number of female players to play football. Diego would either go along to school competitions or *futsal* tournaments to watch the players and invite them to train with his team.

al. suggest the gendering of appropriate spaces for males and females may be more difficult to transgress in some cultural contexts, and that the masculine environments of streets and parks are restricted to Spanish girls until they are older than is the case in other European cultures (1999: 103). The experience of the CFF León players has more in common with the Spanish experience. The majority of players began football at a later age in schools and organised games. However, that three of the player's began to play in male-dominated public spaces demonstrates the ability of some girls to negotiate and resist gendered expectations. The following section goes on to consider the reasons why and the meanings the players attach to playing football.

### **The meanings the players attach to football**

In this section, the meanings the players attach to football are examined. The majority of players stress the importance of the social aspects of involvement and the degree of *camaraderie* with the other players, which helps to distract them from other problems in their lives. Less common, but no less important to individuals, figured more personal feelings associated with the emotions of playing in a match and scoring goals, or how they feel more aggressive playing football. Each player expresses the enjoyment derived from football, but some find this in very differing ways. Interestingly, while most players view football as a 'fun' activity and valued the fitness aspect of the sport, the social aspect was much more significant.

Monica had joined the team in May 2008 and though she was relatively new to the game, she was enthusiastic and dedicated to training. Many of the players described the training sessions as a distraction from problems in their lives and Monica similarly felt completely focussed during practice sessions: '*Bueno, me llama la atención bastante practicar deporte y me siento bien practicándolo, no se ... Por ejemplo, en un día tengo bastantes problemas y ya llego a la práctica y yo olvido todo. Me concentra en todo lo que es la práctica, nos ponemos a jugar en el juego y olvidamos todo*' (Monica, age 22, 24 July 2008).<sup>115</sup>

Wanda (age 21) has a scholarship for the UCA in Managua. Her course fees are paid based on playing for the University football team and she also plays for UAM in the women's first division. Wanda relies on monthly payments from a Christian family in Indianapolis in the United States, who are sponsoring her through University by paying for basic living costs, transport and materials. Household economics are complicated by the fact

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<sup>115</sup> Well, playing sports always interested me and I felt good playing, I don't know ... For example, one day I have loads of problems and as soon as I arrive at training I forget them all. I concentrate completely in the training, we start to play the game and we forget everything.

that her mother has diabetes. For Wanda, playing football provides a break from her problems at home: *‘Me ayuda a relajarse, y me ayuda a olvidar mis preocupaciones. Por ejemplo, la situación en mi casa a veces es dura, la situación económica. Mi padre murió, así que mi madre me tiene que cuidar’* (Wanda, age 21, 5 August 2008).<sup>116</sup> The financial support gained through playing football is vital to her future, but clearly so is the distraction it provides from the hardship of everyday life.

An important element of how players on the team interacted and why they enjoyed socialising with each other, concerned their proclivity to ‘annoy’ each other, and to ‘mess around’, or *‘fregar’*. *‘Fregando’* involved both verbal and non-verbal exchanges and was displayed through the familiarity and relaxed nature of the ‘banter’ between team members. Verónica explained that with fellow players on the team there is a sense of camaraderie that does not exist vis-à-vis other friends. With teammates, *‘las chavalas’* or ‘girls’, she immediately starts joking and can speak informally because she has confidence in their friendship: *‘with the girls on the team I start to joke around ... I have confidence in them and I can act normal’* (Verónica, age 23, 16 July 2008).<sup>117</sup> Time spent with the team offers an opportunity to behave in ways that perhaps she does not have in other areas of her life; in other circumstances she is not able to act ‘normal’ and ‘joke around’. Rosa, Fernanda, Verónica, Laura, and Abril constituted a particularly close group of friends within the team and were some of the longest-serving players. Rosa also spoke of the importance of *‘fregando’* with her friends and noted that whenever they meet, they mess around and tease each other. She described how their friendship goes beyond the time they spend together at football and extends to home visits and hanging out with their respective families. Another factor mentioned is the togetherness she feels; the group she is closest to within the team always count her in on whatever social plans they have. Perhaps because Rosa is from Estelí she feels like they are her family while studying away from home, *‘Porque realmente, yo no tengo familia aquí en León, entonces, ellas como que han venido, han formado parte de mi familia’* (Rosa, age 22, 16 May 2008).<sup>118</sup> She explains that the closeness between her and some of the players means she can be open about her problems as they are like family to her:

*Yo conozco sus problemas, ellas conocen de los míos. O sea, es como somos una familia, como si fuésemos hermanas, o sea, prácticamente para mí es como mis hermanas. Mira, cuando te digo hermana, o sea, prácticamente es como parte de tu familia, siempre están en tu casa y sabes tus problemas, que saben cuando andas*

<sup>116</sup> It helps me to relax, it takes me away from other worries. For example, the situation in my home sometimes is hard, the economic situation. My father died, so my mother has to look after me.

<sup>117</sup> *‘Chavalas’* is a word used in Nicaragua to refer to a girl, female child or adolescent. The players constantly referred to each other as *‘chavalas’* despite the average age of players being 19 years old. It seemed to reflect the familiarity, friendship, and affection between them.

<sup>118</sup> Because I don’t have family here in León, so they have become, they have become part of my family.



*triste, y te miran alegre o te llama alguien, o te están fregando* (Interview, Rosa, age 22, 16 May 2008).<sup>119</sup>

Ultimately, the girls she knows well on the León team are the people she is able to talk most intimately with and know that they will listen to her, *‘Como te dijera, es de contarles las cosas más íntimas sin pena, sin miedo, o algún problema que tuviste, y entonces ellas siempre te van a estar allí para escucharte’* (Rosa, age 22, 16 May 2008).<sup>120</sup> Verónica similarly describes a good team member as someone who listens to other people’s problems. She makes clear that football is not only about coming to practice and kicking a ball around; it is really important to listen to people’s problems, as this quote demonstrates: *‘Si tiene un problema digamos entorno de tu casa. De saber si puedes ayudar o si tenés problema, digamos que te peleaste con tu mamá o algo, saber escucharla también. Si no solo venir a patear al balón y va, si’* (Verónica, age 23, 15 May 2008).<sup>121</sup>

As an indication of the importance of the social aspect associated with the team it is worth mentioning that even when players were injured they would often come along to training sessions and matches to socialise with their friends on the team. Abril and Laura, players who both had long-term injury problems during the 2008 season, continued to turn up for training sessions and join the team for matches both home and away. During training they would sit on the side-lines and chat. Often they were joined by a mixture of spectators: boyfriends and friends of players who would chat and lounge around on the grass watching the training session. In this way, the training sessions and matches became a large part of the players’ opportunities to socialise with team mates and with wider friendship groups and demonstrates the role football played as a meeting place and socialising space.<sup>122</sup> As Verónica explains, her team mates are those she is closest to and spends the most time with, *‘Para mí, mis amigos con las que me más relaciona son las del equipo, pero tengo por lo*

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<sup>119</sup> I know their problems and they know mine. It’s like we are a family, as if we were sisters or for me, really, it’s like my sisters. Look, when I say sister, well, it’s like part of your family. They are always in your house, they know your problems, they know when you are sad, they see you when you are happy, they will call you up and they will mess around and annoy you.

<sup>120</sup> Like I told you, you can tell them the most personal things without worry or fear. You can tell them about some problem you have had and they are always going to be there to listen to you.

<sup>121</sup> If someone has a problem, let’s say, at home. To know if you can help or if you have a problem, let’s say that you fought with your mum or something, it’s important to listen to her and to not only come along and kick a ball around.’

<sup>122</sup> It was an activity that they could also combine with child-care responsibilities and often younger siblings would be brought along to watch and generally help out, perhaps fetching the balls during shooting practice.

*menos compañeras de clase, tengo aquí amigos así de la cuadra, mas amigos hombres que mujeres. Pero as con el equipo que más me relaciona' (Interview, 15 July 2008).<sup>123</sup>*

Between February and June 2008 Lizbet trained with the national squad in Managua and found meeting other players one of the most enjoyable aspects of her involvement:

*Fue bonita para que conociera más jugadoras, para aprender y adquirir una mejor conocimiento [de jugar futbol]. Porque conocí una de las mejores jugadoras de Nicaragua y todas las chavalas siempre amigales. Cuando una tiene problema o no puedo hacer un ejercicio siempre están explicando. Era una experiencia realmente bonita que casi la mayoría de las personas no tiene un oportunidad experimentar. Entonces fue algo que quedo en mi mente y en mi corazón realmente (Lizbet, age 17, 22 August 2008).<sup>124</sup>*

Lizbet was in the squad to go to Mexico and had relocated to a school in Managua. She was living with a member of the football federation who also had other players housing with her. However, her parents withdrew her just a matter of weeks before the tournament started because she had fallen behind at school. They decided to bring her back to León and because she had to repeat classes, she would not go to Mexico. Lizbet was surprisingly philosophical about the experience when I spoke to her just days before the squad left for Mexico and seemed to be content to concentrate on her studies. She had a positive experience during the training camp where she said she got to know new people including one of the best players in Nicaragua and she improved her knowledge of the game.

In contrast to the explanations earlier, Claudia (age 25) became frustrated with the attitude of other players and no longer enjoyed the atmosphere at training. She was dissatisfied by the routine of training and was struggling to get on with the other younger players. She said things changed since some of the players had moved to Managua to play with the squad. It meant they could not train regularly with the León team and when they did they brought an attitude of superiority. She said the team had changed a lot; the players were a lot younger and she found it hard to relate to them and missed the more mature players. The team had also become more stratified she thought, with some groups of players not talking to other team members. Even though Claudia struggled to find like-minded team members her comments reconfirm the importance of the social aspect of being a team member.

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<sup>123</sup> For me, my friends that I mix with the most are those on the team, but i have friends from class and from the block [where I live] and more male friends than females. But it's with the team that I mix the most.

<sup>124</sup> It was really nice to get to know the players, to learn and gain a better knowledge (in terms of football). Because I got to know one of the best players in Nicaragua and all the girls were really friendly. When someone had a problem and couldn't do the exercise they always explain. It was a really nice experience that most people don't have the opportunity to try. So it was something that stuck in my mind and in my heart (Lizbet, age 17, 22 August 2008).

Some players did stress physical and emotional aspects of the game that they enjoyed. Lizbet tried to express the emotions she feels playing and scoring a goal but in the end concedes that it is indescribable: '*Es que no hay una palabra para definirlo, no sé, me gusta todos los movimientos, cuando una nota un gol, la emoción que se siente, o tal vez gol de la final. O sea algo bonita que se siente maravillosa, es algo que no se puede expresar realmente*' (Lizbet, age 17).<sup>125</sup> Sylvia explained her enjoyment of football in terms of physical exertion and mental agility, the running involved and intelligence to play the right pass. She started playing when she was eight years old and joined UNAN-León when she was eleven. She says she likes football because it motivates her and cheers her up. Further, she feels football has made her more aggressive both on the pitch and off, and people take more notice of her. Many of the players complained during the 2008 season that the training sessions were not hard enough and that they would prefer much more fitness and stamina training.

The players predominantly viewed football as a space away from stresses at home and the hardship of economic scarcity. Both through focussing on training and through socialising with team mates they were able to 'let off steam'. The players socialised whilst getting changed to play, during training, and whilst cooling down after the session. Away matches were also valued as an opportunity to visit somewhere new and *fregar* with their team mates. In this way, the players' socialising was predominantly centred on the training ground or travel to and from matches. The team did not tend to get together after matches as is more common elsewhere in the world. This reflects dominant norms of gendered behaviour, which as we have seen in Chapter Six, largely views drinking and 'partying' as demonstrating unacceptable characteristics for young women. Some of the players were also friends outside of the football environment, especially those players who had been on the team the longest. Those players also expressed the strongest feelings of friendship and closeness to other team members.

None of the players talked about the importance of winning a game and only one player spoke of enjoying the feeling of aggression whilst playing football. Those characteristics then that are largely associated with male participation in sports, of aggression, competitiveness and violence, did not figure in these players motivations (Dworkin and Messner, 2002: 18). Indeed, Hargreaves has suggested because of the dominance of male influence over female sports, female athletes will inevitably reproduce dominant masculine values, as characterised earlier (1994: 252). However, the

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<sup>125</sup> 'There isn't a word to define it, I don't know...I like all the movements, when you score a goal, the emotion that one feels or maybe it's a goal in the final, something beautiful that makes you feel great. It's something that you really can't explain.'

interpretations of these players contradict such a view. As Scraton *et al* conclude from their cross cultural analysis of female footballers in Europe, ‘Women play with aggression, skill, determination and competition; yet they also articulate a central concern for cooperation, support, connectedness, and fun’ (Scraton *et al.*, 1999: 107). Scraton *et al* suggest that this commonality in meanings for the female footballers might represent a ‘female global culture that cuts across national boundaries’ despite the level of control of the women’s game by male football authorities and organisations (1999: 107). While the players are not consciously resisting dominant masculine sporting traits, they do express different motivations for playing, stressing the importance of socialising, friendship and openness with team mates, and as we shall move on to discuss in the following section, the importance of being committed to the team.

## Commitment to the team

In different ways the players expressed and demonstrated their commitment or what they perceived as a lack of commitment to the team.

*The consequences of the team losing against UNAN-Managua were particularly painful for Abril. Their goal came late in the game with the score tied still at 0-0. Abril, the goalkeeper, had gone to collect what seemed like a harmless low cross but the ball had somehow bobbed through her hands. It was a nightmare goal to concede for a goalkeeper, just a complete mistake which unfortunately cost us the game. Three or four players had done their best to comfort her after the game by going over and talking to her individually or giving her a quick hug, but she was distraught. When I saw her a couple of days later she explained she could not sleep after the match on Sunday night until she convinced herself that she had saved the team a goal by saving an earlier free-kick. She said she had been better Monday, but again today, (Tuesday) she had been really upset at home and crying. Abril felt she had let the team down and that it affected her so deeply shows how important it is to her. (Field notes, 29 July 2008).*

Having never beaten UNAN-Managua the game had meant a great deal to the whole team and especially to Abril, one of the longest serving players.

At the beginning of May 2008, a national transport strike by taxi and bus unions began that went on for two weeks and caused major disruptions as most people in Leon rely on public transport, very few have private cars and certainly none of the players’ families. Many of the players at school and university, missed lessons as they could not get to class and the numbers at training also reduced to around five or six who lived close enough to walk or cycle. Some of the team were stuck in Managua where they were taking part in national team training and the players from Corinto were also not able to travel. Others on the Leon team lived too far away to walk and did not have a bike. However, some players put in considerable effort to train. Andrea would walk eight kilometres to training from where she lived in Ruben Dario on the outskirts of the city.

Those players who attended training regularly were especially upset during the 2008 season that not all players showed the same commitment. Rosa had been particularly disappointed to be dropped for a game and replaced by someone who did not come to training regularly. She explained she was upset because she felt the other players were sacrificing their time and effort only to be overlooked for others that did not show the same commitment:

*Quien quiera que sea, me parece injusto que haya jugadores que vienen a cada practica y que (Diego) iba a jugar con alguien que no viene a las practicas. Te hace sentir incomodo y es a;go que me molesta mucho por que tu haces sacrificios con tu tiempo, y tu inviertes tu tiempo mientras que la otra persona estaba haciendo otras cosas mientras tu estas quemandote bajo el sol. Y que ni siquiera puedan jugar contigo? Asi es como lo veo y les dije que no a las ninas, que no iba a jugar (Interview, Rosa, 16 May 2008).<sup>126</sup>*

This particular incident moved Veronica to publicly complain about what she saw as unfair treatment of some of the players. It was the only occasion that season when a player spoke in front of the team and the coach and she took the opportunity as we sat under the shade of a tree changing out of ours boots at the end of a match. The rest of the team remained silent while Veronica explained she thought it was unfair that players who invest their time and energy in the team are overlooked for people who do not even come to training. No-one else made a comment and later in a private conversation with Diego he dismissed the speech saying Veronica was just standing up for her friend. However, it represented an exceptional demonstration of support for a friend and team member over a perceived injustice.

Sometimes players would take it upon themselves to criticise the actions of others if they felt they had shown less commitment to the team as the following example demonstrates:

Before travelling to away matches the players would rendezvous at a meeting point from where the minibus would come by and pick them up. Whilst waiting with Jacinta (we were the first to arrive) Lula came along in a taxi, looking a little tired and bleary-eyed. She had slept in after ‘*descansando*’ or resting as she put it the night before and been too late to get a *camioneta* (the local minibus). Jacinta began to tell her that she should not be partying the night before a match. Ana responded that you had to be able to rest. Jacinta agreed but said not the night before a match. There was a real sense that she felt Ana was letting the team down and she expressed to her earnestly that she was not taking her commitment seriously or as

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<sup>126</sup> Whoever it is, it seems unfair to me as there are players that come every practice and he (Diego) was going to play someone that doesn’t come to practice. It makes you uncomfortable. it’s annoying because you sacrifice your time, you invest your time, and that other person was doing some other thing while you are burning [in the sun] playing and then they are not even going to play you? So this is how I see it and I said no, I said no to the girls, I’m not going to play (Interview, Rosa, 16 May 2008).

seriously as others. I had heard other team members complain about Lula's behaviour and lack of commitment to the team (Fieldnotes, 12 June 2008).

These examples demonstrate that not all players shared or demonstrated the same level of commitment to the team. They also show that for some of the players their commitment to playing was taken very seriously and was an important part of their personal sense of fulfilment and happiness. For Abril the level of anguish she felt at her mistake was in response not only to her personal unhappiness but to the feeling she had of letting the team down. It is this responsibility to the collective success of the team that is clear in the previous examples. The following section examines how the players responded to the Coaches expectations and demands of the player's commitment to the team.

### Conflicts between the players and the manager

This section analyses some of the relationships of the team predominantly between the Coach, Diego, and the players and examines the tensions and conflicts that arose. Though the players are dependent on Diego to be picked to play in matches and in terms of being paid the *beca*, it is interesting that the players demonstrated a number of strategies of resistance to Diego's authority that will be explored in greater detail below.

Most of the players explained to me that they found it very difficult to talk to Diego, whatever the subject, because he did not listen to their opinions. Common problems that occurred between the players and Diego surrounded issues to do with payment of the *beca*, kit (for who and when new football boots would be distributed was a constant issue for discussion), the type of food they were given after the match and perhaps most importantly the perception by the players that Diego's priority was the team and not the players' well-being.<sup>127</sup>

Often in training Diego would become annoyed at what he felt was a lack of effort on the part of the players and begin to criticise them, often on an individual level, as they went through the various training exercises. I never witnessed a player respond verbally to his criticism during training but commonly the players would continue the exercises without changing their level of effort further irritating Diego. During one particular training session Diego had consistently criticised a number of players for 'not being interested' or 'not giving it their all'. During the technical training they remained serious and made no comment when Diego would point out their mistakes. At the end of each session we would

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<sup>127</sup> There was some evidence then that the players discussed, at least in small groups, the politics of the team. On another occasion I discovered that the team had met in private to discuss the *beca*. I and Diego were away in Mexico at the Under-20 World Cup qualifying tournament. When I got back from Mexico in late June I was told that the players had arranged a meeting to discuss the *beca* and whether they would continue to play without the money. They had all agreed to finish the season.

normally have a small-sided game for the last 20 minutes or so. On this particular day Veronica and Rosa spent much of the match in fits of laughter that began to spread to other players. When I tried to find out what was so funny the players were in such uncontrollable fits of laughter they could not explain, while the rest of us looked on nonplussed. Diego remained quiet throughout the match. This incident, by no means uncommon, demonstrates how the players enjoy football for the opportunity it gives them to '*fregar*' and 'mess about' with their friends. It also indicates how the players resist the criticisms and rules that Diego tries to enforce and determinedly enjoy themselves.

On one occasion a player refused a punishment from Diego for turning up late and simply left. Nina regularly turned up late for training but usually only around 10 to 15 minutes. On one occasion she arrived half an hour late and Diego told her to do '*vuelatas*' or turns around the pitch as a punishment. Her response was to ask, 'Why would I want to do that?' Diego told her that playing football was voluntary and if she did not want to play she did not have to. So she got on her bike and went off without kicking a ball. Diego was angry with her attitude and said she would be dropped on Sunday, but when Sunday arrived with no better replacement in his opinion, Diego put her on the team. Nina had been able to avoid training and still be picked to play, and demonstrated how the players often resisted Diego's rules, this time with regards to punctuality. In fact, punctuality was a constant cause of frustration for Diego. During the 2008 season, he changed the start time of training three times in order to ensure that all the players would be able to make it on time, but on each occasion the same pattern ensued with the majority of the players arriving 15 minutes late. On match days there was a core group of four or five players, that would arrive on time but the rest would arrive with barely enough time to put their boots on. Every week, Diego would demand they arrive an hour before kick-off to help prepare the pitch and put the nets up and every week he would complain that they always arrived late. The players knew that, though they depended on Diego to be picked for games and for their monthly *beca*, he needed *them* to be a Coach and to field a team. At these crucial points the players determined lack of punctuality represented defiant resistance to Diego's rules.

## Like a job

For Rosa, the *beca* was like her wages and she was entitled to the money because she trained regularly and fulfilled her commitment to the team, '*Es como si estuvieras en un trabajo y no tenes que andar recordando a tu jefe que tiene que pagar. O sea, no es lógico ni*

*agradable* (Rosa, age 22).<sup>128</sup> She was unhappy that each month Diego was unclear about when (or even whether) the players would be paid and that the players always had to go to Diego and ask for their money. Rosa was one of only two players during the 2008 season that had a *beca* to study at the UNAN for playing football, and this may account for her perception that playing on the team is an obligation as part of her studies that should be remunerated. The University paid her course fees but Rosa had to cover living costs. Rosa had failed some of her modules and had to repeat a year and, therefore, did not qualify for the *beca* in 2008 and so was more reliant than ever on Diego. None of the other players referred to it in the sense of work. Perhaps the *beca* was more crucial to Rosa because she counted on the money to support herself.

While Wanda (player with UCA and the UAM) did not describe football as a job she was very clear that it was an obligation to be fulfilled in order to get the education she wanted to be able to start her career. Because she has a sports scholarship she has to spend a lot of time playing football but her studies are much more important to her than football, as she puts it, '*En este país no se puede vivir del fútbol y estoy consciente de que mis estudios son lo más importante, por supuesto el fútbol me ayuda a continuar con mis estudios y es algo que quiero seguir haciendo*' (Interview, 5 August 2008).<sup>129</sup> She plans to work at the airport after she has finished her course where she says you can be paid well. With the money she saves she plans to start her own business renting out football pitches.

Many of the players demonstrated resistance to Diego's attempts to impose his authority on the team. One of the favourite strategies was to arrive late for training and matches. Some players could even refuse in front of the team to follow Diego's rules, although it was often the better players who knew there was little chance of being dropped from the team that would consider this strategy. Having grown frustrated with trying to communicate with Diego the players had designed other strategies that in turn frustrated Diego but did not affect their chances of playing or being paid. Finally, some players treated their relationship with Diego as if he was their employer and in this way felt he should fulfil his role as their employer.

The following discussion takes a broader perspective looking at the opinions and attitudes of family, friends and the wider public to female footballers.

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<sup>128</sup> It's as if you were in a job. You shouldn't have to be reminding your boss to pay you. It doesn't make sense and it's not pleasant (Interview, Rosa, REF).

<sup>129</sup> In this country you can't live from football and I'm conscious that my studies are the most important, of course football helps me to get ahead in this, in my studies, and it's something that I like to do.



## Football: 'Marimachas', 'Es para hombres' or 'Mejor que anda vaga?'<sup>130</sup>

As a traditionally male sport characterised by aggression and strength, women's football is an arena in which women are likely to face the most hostility and suspicion regarding their sexuality (Hargreaves, 1994: 171). Compulsory heterosexuality is a key aspect of the maintenance of masculine hegemony and those that transgress the gender order face labelling and stigmatising, especially regarding their sexuality, however there are also signs that the hegemonic order 'leaks' and that 'deviance, resistance and subversion abound' (Saavedra, 2009: 444). Indeed, women's increasing participation in traditionally masculine sports has resulted in complex outcomes for gender boundaries 'Normative ideal about female bodies and 'ideal' femininity have become severely disrupted as women have moved into traditionally male-only sports. However, these accounts are not simply about transgression or the blurring of traditional boundaries; they also involve evidence of conformity and contradiction as some women appear to comply with certain 'norms' of traditional femininity' (Scraton *et al.*, 1999: 1000).

Notions of femininity and masculinity in Nicaragua are closely related to the gendering of the public and private realms and the morality associated with the *casa/calle* dichotomy (Cubitt and Greenslade, 1997; Montoya, 2002). This section considers the opinions and comments the players have experienced from family, friends and the wider public, how these relate to perceptions of appropriate feminine characteristics and how the girls perceive their own femininity.

### Parental opinions

The majority of players were encouraged to play by at least one parent, often justified on the basis that being involved in football was better than '*anda vaga*' or hanging around and doing nothing - a justification the players also employed.<sup>131</sup> As discussed earlier in Chapter 6, *vagar* means to loiter, be idle, to wander about the streets and is also associated in Nicaragua with smoking, drinking, taking drugs and, especially for males (*vagos*), being involved with gangs. A *vaga* therefore is someone who does not work, is irresponsible and

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<sup>130</sup> Football: 'Macho Marys', 'It's for men' or 'Better than being a waster'

<sup>131</sup> It was uncommon to find parents that saw football itself as a worthwhile sport. I would argue football is not treated with much importance by the majority of the parents because the sporting culture in Nicaragua is dominated by baseball. They were not opposed to their daughters playing but they did not necessarily have any personal passion or interest for the game. Although only based on a small sample, my data from the Mexican Under-20 squad demonstrates that in a country with a strong popular football culture it is common for players to be introduced to the game by their fathers.

spends their lives in the streets. To ‘*anda vaga*’ as a woman represents a devaluation of reputation and status, to be sexually and socially irresponsible, to neglect your home and family and ultimately subvert gender roles, trespassing into the public domain. Essentially to ‘*anda vaga*’ is to display unacceptable behaviours for women and therefore in contrast, for reluctant parents, playing football can be accepted as worthwhile. The use of the term is closely related to gender constructs of appropriate behaviour and the public/private dichotomy of gendered activity (Montoya, 2002: 66).

*Mi papa nunca le gustaba que yo jugara futbol, siempre me regañaba. Porque, decía como que es juego para hombres, o sea, como que hubiéramos marimachas, o algo así. O sea, como que una fuera hombre, o sea, una mujer pero una que quisiera ser hombre o algo así. Entonces yo siempre me enojaba* (Interview Rosa, age 22, 16 May 2008)<sup>132</sup>

While Rosa’s mother was supportive, her father perceived female footballers as trying to be like men, a common attitude amongst the wider public in Nicaragua. Rosa describes a *marimacha* as a woman who wants to be a man. There are limited references to the term *marimacha* in the literature, however it was widely understood amongst the players and other Nicaraguans as slang meaning women who portray male characteristics, and is usually associated with being a lesbian. Chant offers this definition: ‘Marimacha - “Masculine Mary”’. Term used to describe butch lesbian in various parts of Latin America’ (Chant with Craske, 2003: xi).<sup>133</sup> The term invokes an inversion of perceptions of femininity associated with the cult of the Virgin Mary as described by Stevens (1973). Playing football is a masculine activity and therefore inappropriate for females but also brings into question the sexual morality of the players.<sup>134</sup>

Despite her father’s attitude Rosa continuously fought with him until she was in tears and he would allow her to play. She could never understand his attitude:

*Entonces yo siempre me enojaba. Y decía es una locura. Yo siempre estoy en contra de eso pensamiento porque, o sea, porque decía que logra, gracias a dios que yo no ando huelleando pego, no ando en las calles. Solo quiero divertirme con un deporte* (Rosa, 16 May 2008).<sup>135</sup>

Rosa argues that playing football is a worthwhile activity and much better than hanging

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<sup>132</sup> My father never liked me playing football, he always told me off. He said that it is a game for men, how that we were like men or ‘*marimachas*’ or something like that. He said it was weird. It’s like as if you were a man, a woman, but one that wants to be a man or something like that.

<sup>133</sup> In Nicaragua it is also common for women who are viewed as strongly masculine to be referred to as ‘*machas*’ (Babb, 2003: 310).

<sup>134</sup> Caudwell has found that the image of the ‘butch lesbian’ is also associated with women’s football in the UK (1999).

<sup>135</sup> So I always got angry. He said it was crazy (girls playing football). I disagree completely with his attitude because I have managed to avoid, thanks to God, going around sniffing glue and hanging around in the streets. I only want to enjoy myself with a sport.

around in the streets and taking drugs. This justification was common amongst the players and wider public. Those who were supportive of Veronica amongst her friends and family emphasised that taking part in a sport is better than hanging around in the streets, '*Si que les gusta que hago un deporte que es preferible eso, a que estoy haciendo de ando de vaga, que haciendo lo que no vale la pena. ¿Me entiendes?*' (Veronica, age 23, 15 May 2008).<sup>136</sup>

Blanca's mother and father disagreed about her involvement in football but even though it caused arguments between her parents it was her father who had the final decision: '*Los dos se peleaban para ver si podría ir a jugar futbol. Mi padre decía: si. Mi madre decía: no. Ella decía "Tu no vas!" Y mi padre decía: "Vámonos, ya vete!" Te estoy diciendo que te vayas! Soy tu padre! Y al final acabe obedeciendo a mi padre*' (Blanca, age 18, 6 August 2007).<sup>137</sup> Her mother never liked that she played football and would not give her permission to play saying it was a sport that only men played and that her husband had devoted too much time to football and not enough to studying. Her father – who was one of the few parents to actually enjoy playing football himself - would give her money for transport so she could go and play. Since he died two years ago her mother has changed her opinion and gives what little she has financially to support her football, but more importantly she gives her the freedom to decide for herself about her future. Blanca says this is because it was what her father had wanted. While speaking to Blanca at her home near the lake in Managua, her mother came over to proudly explain how Blanca had been offered a number of *becas* to play for different universities but that she would not pressure her into making a decision and would leave it up to her to decide her own future. Blanca was a fast, skilful, and tough player when I met her. However, her football career had started with having to overcome a bad injury. Not long after joining her first team in the Primer División she broke her leg after a bad tackle from behind. It took her a year and a half to recover from the injury and longer for the psychological trauma. Now she says she acts tough so that she avoids bad tackles, '*Ahora si me he puesto fuerte, asi que empece a portarme duro*' (Blanca, age 18, 6 August 2008). Since then she has gone from strength to strength and is a regular member of the national team.

Veronica was a member of a folk dance group and also played football. For her part, her mother was supportive of both activities. She thought it was beneficial for Veronica to be involved in a variety of activities as long as she did not neglect her studies. She also recognised football as a good way for Veronica to distract herself by being with the other

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<sup>136</sup> They like that I play a sport and that it is better than me hanging around in the street doing something that's not worth it, you understand?

<sup>137</sup> The two of them would fight [over me playing football]. My father: yes. My mother: no. So she would say: 'You're not going!' My father would say: 'Off you go! I'm telling you to go! I'm your father!' And I took notice of my father.

players, *‘Si es mi hobby, es lo único que me relaje, cuando tengo problema, tengo problemita voy allá, allí por las chavalas entonces me relaja’* (Veronica, age 23, 15 May 2008).<sup>138</sup> Even though they were not getting the *beca* her mother did not put pressure on her to leave the team. Veronica says this is because her mother respects the fact that it is her ‘hobby’ and gives her the space to continue: *‘Pero ella no me dijo saliste pues, porque ella sabe de que ... , es como decirte que es mi hobby, respeta eso pues y me da mi espacio me entendés?’* (Veronica, age 23, 15 May 2008).<sup>139</sup> Veronica’s father does not mind her playing football but he thinks that the dance group she is involved in is a waste of time:

*¡Fíjate! Que él dijo de que esto, de jugar futbol está bien, pero, de bailar no. Que dice eso es pérdida de tiempo. Por eso mismo porque dice por andar bailando, por pintarme, por andar en vestido, por andar bailando así, dice que esta es pérdida de tiempo ... Sí, está bien que juego futbol y todo porque es deporte, pero de andar bailando, no’* (Veronica, age 23, 15 May 2008).<sup>140</sup>

As her father lives in the United States Veronica said it did not matter what he thought. Indeed, it seemed that her life would have been much more restricted had her father and mother still lived together, and even though her father objected she continued to dance. Rosa also commented on what she saw as the greater freedom both Abril and Veronica enjoyed. They were both living in female-headed households and had much more freedom to go out than she did living with her father in Estelí.

Doña Corina has three daughters who play football: Claudia (age 25), Nina (age 18), and Sylvia (age 16). The latter two were involved for most of the 2008 season. Carmen works every day as a *domestica* so usually does not have time to watch her daughters play but she supports them because she sees sport as a healthy activity. Their father does not however, think football is appropriate for women. Often people in her neighbourhood expressed their disapproval that at her daughters play football, saying: *‘Bueno otra gente dice, ‘si yo fuera la mama de mis hijas yo no dejarían a hacer eso’’* (Doña Corina, 22 August 2008).<sup>141</sup> But she always defends her daughters and again uses the justification that they are doing something worthwhile and healthy and not wasting their time in the streets:

*Eso es para hombres me dice y eso es puro vaganza. Pero yo dice una cosa: es que en vez de una muchacha que anda mal espacio en la calle, que va con los chavalos vagando o fumando mariguana, que se yo, mejor que jueguen un deporte más sano. Pero la gente no piensa así. En vez de que ves un chavala vaga, mejor que tiene un*

<sup>138</sup> It’s my hobby; it’s the only thing that relaxes me. When I have a problem I go there (to football), there where the girls are and then it relaxes me.

<sup>139</sup> But she doesn’t tell her to leave because she knows that...It’s like I say to you, it’s my hobby, she respects this and gives me space, you understand?

<sup>140</sup> Imagine that! He said that it’s fine to play football, but to dance isn’t. He says it’s a waste of time. Because of exactly this: to go around dancing, to put make-up on, to get dressed up and to dance, he says it’s a waste of time. Yeah, its fine to play football because it’s a sport, but dancing isn’t [ok].

<sup>141</sup> If I was their mother I wouldn’t let them do that.

*deporte que tiene su mente ocupada en eso. Pero la gente dice que es para gente vaga, entonces que hacer* (Doña Corina, 22 August 2008).<sup>142</sup>

One of her daughters trained with the national squad in Managua for the competition in Mexico and Carman explained that she has been criticised because she missed school '*para andar vagancia*'.<sup>143</sup>

Sara (17, Leon) has a young baby and her mother babysits while she goes to classes or plays football. Being able to continue with her studies and sport helps Sara not get so stressed, '*Gracias a Dios por la ayuda de mi mama puedo todavía. No me hace tan estresada sí, porque para ir a clase o para jugar, ella siempre está conmigo, con el niño, ya si como puedo dar un ratito y ir a jugar*' (Interview, 30 July 2008).<sup>144</sup> Sara explained her mother had always been against her playing football mainly because she was worried about her getting injured, but despite this she still supported her daughter by looking after her baby while she went off to play. Her boyfriend has always liked that she plays football and her father who is a big fan of football is also really pleased that she became a good footballer.

While women's football has gained popularity in Nicaragua, many players reported experiencing opposition from friends and family, often told: '*es para hombres*', (it's a game for men). They are, therefore, well placed to report on whether and how attitudes have changed over their careers. The general perception is that over the period most of the girls had been playing (around seven years) negative comments had decreased. Comments often referred to a perceived association of masculinity and football. Veronica explained how when she first started playing football the local girls and boys on her block would tell her that she was like a 'little man' or '*hombrecito*', they told her that she looked like a little man but she would just laugh.

Monica (aged 22) talked about how when she first started playing football, '*es para hombres*' was a phrase she heard a lot from people, especially other females. She explained these comments were less common since more girls and women had started to play. Because the perception exists that football is a game for men Lizbet thought some girls were put-off playing, but in her opinion everyone had the right to play: '*La mayoría de las mujeres ya se ven el futbol es para los hombres y pues se crean con eso. ¿Porque soy mujer no puedo*

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<sup>142</sup> It's for men they tell me and it's for wasters. But I say one thing: that instead of a girl that goes around in bad places in the street, that goes with boys hanging out or smoking marijuana; that I know it's better they play a sport that's safe. But people don't think like this. Instead of you seeing a waster girl it's better that she has a sport to occupy her mind in and not in other things. But the people say it's for wasters, so what do you do..?

<sup>143</sup> To just waste time.

<sup>144</sup> Thanks to God for my mum's help I'm not so stressed. So that I can go to class or to play (football) she's always with me, with the baby. So I can have a little bit of time and go and play.

*jugar futbol? Pero eso no es así. Todos tenemos los mismos derechos y todos pueden ser mejores*' (Lizbet, age 17, 22 August 2008).<sup>145</sup>

There were apparent differences in reactions between male and female friends. In general, female friends saw football as a waste of time and a distraction from more important things such as friends and school. Female friends also comment on how football alters body shape and 'will make it ugly'. Male friends tend to be both shocked and impressed that they play such a physical sport.

Veronica's friends outside of football generally had a surprised reaction to her playing football, often saying: '*Que barbaridad!*' which is something like 'How freaky!' Male friends tended to be shocked as they found it hard to believe she played because of her small stature and they assumed that she would get hurt, '*Se asustan, asustado, si, porque, 'no te puedo creer que juegas futbol, sos es pequeña. ¡Te van a votar! ¡Te van a golpear! Así se ponen a decir*' (Veronica, age 23, 15 May 2008).<sup>146</sup> Female friends would often comment that football was a waste of her time. Sylvia is also criticised for playing a sport that '*es para los hombres*' and instead she should be putting more effort into her friendships than football. She is told that she will get an ugly body, '*Que me pone el cuerpo feo*' but she says that she does not let them bother her, '*No les pongo menta*'. Sylvia's male friends are a little more supportive she says and will comment on how much she loves to play, her physical strength, and even ask her to teach them football skills. Tania similarly mentioned how her friends would make comments about her getting hurt and looking less feminine; some men associated women playing football with being a lesbian, '*Pienso que hay cierta persona o hombres que hablan de: "¿Por qué andas jugando?, o "Son mujeres que andan jugando, tienen que ser lesbiana o tienen formas de hombre" Yo creo que no*' (Sara, age 18, 5 July, 2008).<sup>147</sup> Instead she describes how she does not feel any different to other women because she plays football and it does not change who she is, '*Yo pienso de que este, la característica de una mujer no tiene nada que ver ese, o sea, por lo que haga, que te vayas cambiar porque hagan otra cosa, no creo que sí*' (Sara, age 18, 5 July 2008).<sup>148</sup>

That football is often considered a waste of time and a distraction from their responsibilities at home and study reveals how more traditional notions of women's

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<sup>145</sup> Most women see football as a man's game and they believe this. Because I am a woman I can't play football? But it's not like that. Everyone has the same rights and everyone can improve themselves.' Not only is it a right to play, she also sees it as a way of improving herself.

<sup>146</sup> It shocks them because they say "I can't believe you play football, you're only small, they are going to knock you out, they are going to hit you" That's how they say it.

<sup>147</sup> There are certain people or men that say because you play football or are women that play football you have to be a lesbian or look like a man. I don't believe that.

<sup>148</sup> I think that the characteristics of a woman don't have anything to do with this, like, with what you do, you're not going to change because you do another thing, I don't believe that.

behaviour remain dominant in people's evaluations. However, though this perspective was common there were contrary opinions especially from the players' male friends who tended to be more positive while female friends were more critical. This indicates on the one hand, the importance of recognising the role that females play in the maintenance of stereotypical ideologies of appropriate behaviour, and that alternate femininities are being constructed.

## Sexuality

None of the players on the team openly admitted to being gay and it was only through other players that I was told that some of the players on the León team, and other teams in the league were lesbians. Silence by lesbians in sport is one of the most common manifestations of homophobia, '[m]aintaining silence is a survival strategy in a society hostile to women in general and lesbians in particular' (Griffin, 2002: 195). That they were private about their sexuality then is unsurprising.<sup>149</sup> Claudia explained that she knew some of the players on the León team were lesbians but that they would not be open with her and she would not ask them either. She could understand that they would be afraid to be open because Nicaraguan society, she explained, was really homophobic, though she thought it was more acceptable for men to be open about their sexuality than women.<sup>150</sup> Babb notes - having followed same-sex politics in Nicaragua for ten years - lesbians have not been able to gain the same social space as gay men. Key to understanding this situation is both the greater financial autonomy of gay men and the gendering of public spaces. Gay men have more money to socialise while lesbians have more family responsibilities and have to contend with the 'perception that bars are a male space; even in gay and lesbian culture, Nicaraguans associate men with la calle (the street) and women with la casa (the home)' (Babb, 2003: 31'1).

Theberge argues, 'the preoccupation with femininity in sport is one of the most powerful manifestations of homophobia' (2002: 330). Socially constructed gender roles and sexual identities serve to maintain masculine dominance in sports and 'women who defy the accepted role or reject heterosexual identity threaten to upset the imbalance of power' (Griffin, 2002: 194. Although Griffin situates her analysis in a Western context her argument is still salient in the context of the lives of female footballers in Nicaragua. This section will present and analyse a number of incidents that demonstrate the potential and real prohibitions young lesbian footballers faced from their coaches and from the national governing body FENIFUT, should their sexuality become public.

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<sup>149</sup> In 1992 the Chamorro government reactivated through Article 204 of the Penal Code a sodomy law that criminalised same-sex sexual activity (Babb, 2003: 309).

<sup>150</sup> Lancaster's research in a Managua barrio revealed how sexual activity between men only becomes stigmatised for the passive partner while the active, penetrating partner is not (1992: 241).

One particular incident affecting two of the girls on the team demonstrates how being identified as a lesbian could lead to exclusion from the team:

I was away for a week doing research in Honduras and on my return to Leon met with Diego to catch up on events that I had missed whilst away. He told me that there had been an incident with a concerned parent of one of the team members. The player's mother had rung him to say she did not want her daughter (age 18) to play anymore if another player (age 17) continued to play for the team. On another occasion (that I had been unaware of) she had complained this player had taken her daughter out drinking beer, that she was a bad influence, and that she did not want them to spend time together. Apparently Diego had been able to appease the mother on that occasion and they had both continued on the team. Now the parent was complaining the other player on the team was a lesbian and she did not want her daughter to be around her. Diego had taken an attitude of what could be described as football pragmatism and decided that if the parent was serious about withdrawing her daughter, then he would tell the other player to leave as in his opinion she was not as important to the team. To the parent he had explained that it was nothing to do with the team and that he could not control what they did outside of football. He decided to do nothing and hope that the problem went away (Field notes, 2 July 2008).

The older player had been looking to leave the team to play for one in Managua and half-way through the season stopped coming to training and only turned up for matches very occasionally. This had more to do with her wanting to leave and play with friends she had on a team in Managua than with her parents concerns. Though this incident did resolve itself, it does demonstrate the consequences for some players should their parents become aware of their sexuality.

FENIFUT also maintained a strong stance towards lesbian footballers. During the interview I conducted with Dalila López, the Director of Women's Football for FENIFUT, I was interested in how FENIFUT viewed the differences between women's and men's football and whether they had a different approach for the women's game. López explained that she had been on courses organised by FIFA and the approach was to not differentiate between men's and women's football, quite simply it was the same game and the same rules. However, she went on to explain that differences do appear at a cultural level in Nicaragua in attitudes towards women's football. She explained that this resulted in restricted spaces for women to participate in sports, and also the stigmatisation of women who play football as lesbians. For FENIFUT the biggest issue they faced with women's football, she explained, was to rid the game of this stigma so that more girls would participate:

*De repente en Nicaragua, por su cultura, han sido muy cerrado los espacios para la participación de la mujer. Entonces, cuando inicio el fútbol femenino, te estoy hablando ya federado, pues era complicado porque había mucha la gente que estigmatizaba la muchacha. Como, ella jugaba futbol, como te digo, tenia tendencia lesbiana o era sin varona o cual quiere cosa que decían. Era un problema, pero ya hoy no, se ve un poquito mejor. Entonces, esa es la idea, de ir sacando esa estigma*



(Interview, 11 August 2008).<sup>151</sup>

Though she said that the stigma was somewhat less now for women footballers she went on to explain a number of incidents on the national team that suggested otherwise:

*Pero, para nosotros es un problema, esto le digo así sincero, no quiero equivocarme. Cuando estamos trabajando con la selección Sub-17, o cuando tenemos que combinar la mayor. Como te dije, con niñas que tienen 15 años, que de repente nosotros vemos que no tienen identidad definida y te encuentras con una muchacha mayor de 23, 24 años que si tiene definido lo que quiere ser. ¿Como hacer en ese caso? Nosotros encontrar, yo me encuentro con padres de familia y me dicen 'mira yo no quiero que mi niña siga porque está pasando esto y esto. A ella la llama, ella recibe mensajes, y nosotros no queremos que siga' (Interview, 11 August 2008).<sup>152</sup>*

López explained there was no 'problem' with players being lesbians as long as they kept their sexuality separate from their time with the national team, '*Si vos traes tu problema de afuera y lo metes allá adentro, nosotros nos vamos a meter en tu problema. Si tu problema lo dejas allá, querés que te ayudemos que vamos a personalizar eso*' (Interview, 11 August 2008).<sup>153</sup> They have resolved the situation by completely separating the age groups and keeping a close eye on the players when they are away from home.<sup>154</sup>

She explained that a coach had removed three of his players because he had been told there were lesbians on the team. On another occasion a scandal broke out when the women's national team were away in Venezuela and two players had been caught kissing. The incident made it into the newspapers and on the radio in Nicaragua, after which FENIFUT themselves made a public announcement, '*Fuimos a algunos medios a hablar, pero nos dimos cuenta que no teníamos de no criminalizar nadie. Pero si se trata con dar las reglas y que todo el mundo respeta esas reglas. Si alguien se va, no es por*

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<sup>151</sup> In Nicaragua because of the culture, the spaces for women to participate have been really closed. So, when women's football started, at a national level that is, it was tricky because a lot of people stigmatised the girls. Like, she plays football, like, she must be a lesbian or because she hasn't got a boyfriend, or things like that they would say. It was a problem, but now it isn't, it's a little better. So, this is the idea, to go along taking the stigma away.

<sup>152</sup> But, for us it is a problem, I say this sincerely, so you understand me, when we are working with the Under-17 team, or when we have to combine with the older team. As I told you, with girls of 15 years, that we realise are without a definite identity [sexuality] and you find yourself with an older girl of 23, 24 years who does know her identity and what she wants to be, what do you do in this situation? We find ourselves, I find myself with parents and they say to me 'Look I don't want my child to continue because this and this is happening. She's calling her and sending her messages and we don't want her to carry on.

<sup>153</sup> If you bring your problem from outside and put them inside [the team], we are going to get involved with your problem. If you leave your problem away from the team and you want us to help you, we will personally help.

<sup>154</sup> Griffin argues the 'lesbian sexual-predator' stereotype has been evoked to powerful effect despite a dearth of evidence (2002: 202).

*discriminación, es porque faltaste de estar dentro de las reglas, falta de respeto*' (Interview, 11 August 2008).<sup>155</sup>

Lesbian footballers who are open about their sexuality, risk losing their place on the team and in some circumstances are publicly denigrated. Interestingly López told me of a similar scandal involving two male footballers from the national team. Though the incident became public it attracted very little attention.

In contrast to the above prohibitions of lesbians, some of the players mentioned friends and team mates on the national team or on other teams in the league that they knew were lesbians, but that seemed to have the freedom to socialise and have relationships without risking being thrown off the team or punished by parents. Some of the teams paid their players up to US\$50 a month to play for their team, study at the university, and also provided them with accommodation. Blanca explained that there were many players in Managua who were lesbians and they would often go out together drinking after matches. She similarly talked of two players on the national team who had been swapping 'love notes' and flowers. There were indications then that football could also represent more freedom for lesbian players to socialise and have relationships with other women (Interview, 6 August 2008). Babb notes similar consequences of women's mobilisation during the revolution. As there is very little privacy in the household unit in Nicaragua, it is very difficult for gay relationships to be open, but during the revolution active involvement meant time away from the home when sexual transgression was often overlooked (Babb, 2003: 307).

## Body shape and skin colour

Interestingly, the players themselves never expressed any concern about the possibility of injuries and I was impressed by the commitment the players generally showed in terms of physical battles with the opposition. Veronica seemed to relish tackling more than any other of her team mates and was extremely efficient at breaking up play in the midfield – by fair means or foul - despite being almost the smallest on the team.

Though they were not afraid of getting hurt some of the players were worried about their body size and most of them were concerned about having darker skin as they were exposed to the sun whilst training and playing matches. Sylvia was one of the youngest on the team and probably the best and most promising player. Though only 16 years old she had

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<sup>155</sup> We went to different media to make a statement, but we were aware of making sure we didn't criminalise anyone. We continue with the rules and everyone has to respect them. If someone has to leave it's not because of discrimination, it's because they didn't keep to the rules. It's a lack of respect.

already represented her country at Under-17 and Under-20 levels and was able to compete in older age groups because of her athletic and muscular frame as well as speed and power. Her speciality was long-range shooting and free kicks. She was a particularly popular player on the team and was liked by everyone. She was often accompanied to training by male friends from school who would regularly stay and watch the training session. However, she often worried about her skin colour and body shape and size. Her female friends would tell her she would get an 'ugly body' playing football and although she said she paid no attention to their comments, she would often complain that she was overweight and blamed her body size and shape on playing football. She was often embarrassed that people thought she was the eldest in her family, and she put this down to her size. In an effort to lose weight she would sometimes train wearing a plastic jacket designed to make you sweat. These jackets could be bought on the street stalls in the town centre for a couple of dollars and were also popular with both males and females around the gyms in León. Another player occasionally wore a 'slimmer's corset' in an attempt to lose weight from around her waist. She was also concerned about sun burn and having dark skin saying, 'no me gusta ser negro' because she did not like to be really dark and it was bad for her skin. She says it is something that her and her friends think is important and they talk about. She says she likes her colour but not a real lot, '*si me gusta pero no taaaanto... yo soy morena pero estoy negra... y es malo para la piel también...*' She could not buy sun block and instead would wear a baseball cap to train in to protect her face. Often she would train in long-sleeved t-shirts and occasionally she would wear tracksuit bottoms.<sup>156</sup>

## Conclusion

Pervasive notions of gendered activity and behaviour are apparent in the players' experiences of playing a traditionally masculine sport. Commonly these notions were associated with the gendering of the public/private and casa/street dichotomies whereby female footballers were seen as neglecting their responsibilities in the home by wasting their time playing football.

Women's football in Nicaragua represents an arena where dominant notions of femininity and masculinity and gender relations are produced and contested. Some players were able to access male-dominated spaces and challenge masculine hegemony of football. In doing so, however, they also had to become tougher and be as good as, if not better than, the other male competitors and in this sense reproduced dominant notions of masculinity in sports.

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<sup>156</sup> See Cox and Thompson for an analysis of the contradictions sportswomen feel between the 'feminine' and 'athletic' body (2000).

Chapter Four considered the implications of women's involvement in collective movements without an overtly political agenda, and the potential of such activism to challenge dominant gendered notions of appropriate behaviour. Of particular interest was Bayard de Volo's analysis in which she argued that women's involvement in such organisations was important because though it 'does not change the world in an immediately perceptible way [it] does change the worlds of individuals as well as challenges dominant codes upon which traditional gender relations are based' (2003: 92). Similarly, though football for the majority of the players did not represent a conscious rejection of ascribed characteristics of femininity, though it is not consciously political the meanings they attach to playing and the criticisms they faced do demonstrate that their involvement has implications for their worldviews, opinions and expectations.

## Conclusion

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Nicaragua has reached a point of extraordinary demographic potential. The social and economic challenge for the nation is to ensure the substantial proportion of the population aged below 30 years are given the tools and opportunities to control their futures. However, economic scarcity, poverty and inequality continue to shape young people's experiences and opportunities. Young women in particular are increasingly responsible for the domestic burden whilst at the same time their incomes are crucial to the maintenance of the household. The consequences of this situation for their education and personal hopes and expectations can be devastating. The consequences for the social and economic development of the nation are also implicated.

This thesis has examined how economic, political and social processes converge within the spheres of the household, paid employment, education, and on the football field. Economic hardship and the precariousness of everyday life have come to characterise the everyday experiences of many Nicaraguans. Within this context people struggle, survive, interpret and give meaning to the world around them. Nicaragua's recent history has been one of dramatic social and economic fluctuations - although poverty has been an almost constant for the majority population. Decades of economic and political marginalisation were met by massive and intense popular resistance and revolutionary mobilisation. The unprecedented scale, and forms, of women's mobilisation, included active involvement as combatants, in health and education campaigns, and their increasing integration into paid labour. The hope and expectation that had been raised during this period of profound and widespread activism, was eventually crushingly defeated by US economic and military pressure and followed up by devastating political and economic transformations of the last few decades that have seen a return to a situation of marginalisation for many.

Though the subject of intense academic scrutiny and debate especially during the period of revolution and immense social upheaval, gender issues in Nicaragua have more recently, received much less attention. Moreover, very little focus has been given to the particular ways in which gender continues to play a fundamental role in structuring hierarchies of inequalities in Nicaraguan social life that adversely affect young women. This thesis has demonstrated how exploring notions of femininity and masculinity in the context of economic restructuring, neoliberal development policy, and continuing marginalisation and hardship, are still as important today. Indeed, I argue that the consequences of these processes and the ways in which they are experienced by young women, have been largely left unexplored. By using qualitative feminist methodological approaches, the complicated, diverse, and adverse effects for young women's everyday lives have been identified. In this context of neoliberal economic development, poverty, inequality and the precariousness of everyday life for the majority population, why is it important to examine the lives of a group of young female footballers? What have their everyday experiences of life in León contributed to theoretical debates, conceptions, and our knowledge of gender and youth?

Before continuing I would like to make a point regarding the structure of the thesis. Though the topics of the household, education, work and the football field were nominally separated into chapters, the separation is somewhat artificial and in no way implies that they operate in distinct ways in the lives of the young women. Indeed, of central importance throughout has been to demonstrate the complexity and precariousness of these young women's lives and how social and economic processes are determining factors in the opportunities and obstacles they face. From this position the discussion moves on to evaluate the contributions this thesis has made to approaches and theoretical debates, and potential areas for future research.

In Chapter One the overall aims and objectives were outlined and it is useful therefore to return to these in making some conclusions. This chapter will evaluate the findings in this thesis on the relationship between gender, youth and inequality in Nicaragua as experienced by these female football players. Furthermore, the chapter will reflect on what a focus on young women's roles in the household reveals about the differentiated and complex effects of poverty, the precariousness of education and work, the role of football in the players' lives and the significance gender constructions hold to their choices, opportunities and experiences. Above all, this chapter examines how the important findings of this thesis reflect and add to current theory and debates.

The first section looks at the particular findings a focus on youth and gender can reveal and how it redresses some of the absences in the literature. Following this the

differentiated approach to women's experiences reveal a number of limitations of current gender and development focus and policy. Finally, I suggest some areas of research that would be interesting to explore for future research.

## **The importance of a focus on gender and youth**

In elaborating the conceptual framework for this thesis it was necessary to review developments in studies and approaches to youth in the social sciences. I have argued that while contemporary approaches have begun to analyse the diversity of young people's experiences, research on Latin America tends to emphasise male experiences through a focus on street children, youth gangs and violence, and has tended to marginalise those of young women. Identity and resistance have been key concepts in the sociological study of youth culture which have largely been defined by class and style in research on British youth. However, Wulff proposes a broadening of understandings of youth culture not restricted to resistance and delinquency but instead defining youth culture as what young people themselves are concerned with (1995: 15). Feminist contributions to this discussion have been noted and incorporated into the approach of this thesis:

Feminist efforts have aided in critiquing power structures that continue to devalue certain kinds of knowledge and have demonstrated the importance to consider subjective ways of knowing. This work has reoriented the focus on women's experience and agency in their everyday lives' which has had positive consequences for youth studies (Caputo, 1995: 37).

This thesis had contributed to redressing this imbalance and demonstrates how a focus on everyday life can reveal much of the constraints and opportunities young women face. Though exploring their everyday experiences in the household, in education and paid labour may be 'unspectacular' in comparison to the dangerous and violent experiences of crime and violence or living on the street, but nonetheless are extremely difficult:

The emphasis on resistance and spectacular forms of youth cultures has led to a neglect of the young people who conform in many ways to social expectations. We have an inadequate understanding of young people who perform well at school, have good and positive relationships with their parents and other adults, who participate in a range of activities which do not cause harm or annoyance – who basically get on with their lives as young people, but who at the same time have to face an enormous range of social, cultural, educational and financial pressures' (Valentine *et al*, 1998: 24).

As we have seen in Chapter Five and Six, young women's responsibilities and daily activities are shaped by the combined forces of economic crisis, poverty and gender ideologies. For the majority of people in Nicaragua daily living is characterised by the effects of poverty and inequality that serve to compromise the stability of the household and render everyday life precarious. In the household people eat less and are unable to afford health care. The players' reproductive and productive labour is increasingly important to household maintenance in the face of economic restructuring, increasing numbers of female headed households and women's greater integration into the labour force. Economic scarcity and the domestic burden are shared by all females, and daughters in particular, are responsible for cooking, cleaning, shopping and childcare.

In Chapter Six we saw how young people are often forced to drop out of school because of the necessity to find paid work or contribute to reproductive labour in the household. Labour market opportunities are restricted as global crisis means increasing unemployment. Young women are worst affected as their already prejudicial experiences of employment face further challenges. Gendered norms and values restrict the scope of employment opportunities available to young women. While the ability of the players to complete school and higher education courses was often dependent on the ability of relatives and their willingness to fund enrolment costs. However, the players also demonstrated agency and control over decision-making in their lives.

In Chapter Six the players also demonstrated agency and control over choices and actions in their lives. All prioritised football in their lives and despite pressure from family members to work or contribute to household, almost all were able to resist these pressures. Similarly, these players are extraordinary in that they prioritise completing their schooling and intend to delay parenthood. With limited work opportunities in León some were keen to pursue the possibility of migrating for better work opportunities. Moreover, they saw migration as offering new and exciting experiences.

The public/private dichotomy is still an important prism through which people perceive and pass judgement on what is important, valuable, and appropriate behaviour for men and women. This is reflected in the prejudicial opportunities in the labour force for women and the disproportionate burden of household responsibility. In Chapter Six and Seven we saw how '*anda vaga*' was used to describe both how young women neglected their families and responsibilities and took part in inappropriate and worthless activities, in this case both hanging-out with friends in the street and playing football were described as such. The use of the term *vagar* reflects the separation of male and female activities delineated by the public and private distinction. However, that these young women continue



with what is perceived as inappropriate behaviour in the public sphere I argue represents how young women's participation in football can possibly transcend the public private distinction and transgress notions of femininity and masculinity.

## Football and Revolution

Research on women's revolutionary experience and the consequences of neoliberal reform in the 1990s have revealed the often ambiguous and contradictory ways in which gender shapes women's experiences. Chapter Four set the context of the important social, political, and economic transformations in Nicaragua from a perspective of women's experiences. It demonstrated the pervasiveness of deeply entrenched and widely held perceptions of appropriate gender roles that continue to have concrete material, social and emotional consequences for women. Though much of the feminist analysis concludes that challenges to unequal gender relations largely went unaltered during the revolution, of particular interest to this thesis were the more subtle and individual changes that some women experienced through collective activism. The latter, more differentiated analysis, revealed how collective activism for some, had destabilised local forms of patriarchy and gendered norms and resulted in a positive experience of achievement and personal change (Bayard De Volo, 2003; Montoya, 2003). As their experience in the revolution demonstrated, dominant values and norms pertaining to women's, and young women's behaviour, are pervasive, and direct challenges were often unsuccessful. However, women's mobilisation during the revolution had the potential to empower individuals and transgress gendered constructs through their greater voice and visibility, which I argue is reflected in the experiences of the players through their participation on the football team. Such changes are also evident in some women's experiences of paid employment. In chapter Seven an examination of the meanings the players attach to football revealed the predominantly social importance of training and matches in their lives. Though their motivations for initial involvement were more personal and based on their enjoyment of the game, the players now stress the importance of friendships, freedom, social networks and social space. Through football they have been able to travel nationally, and internationally, and this has broadened their expectations and plans for the future. Their involvement has brought them into contact with other opinions and sources of knowledge and support. A collective sense of commitment and responsibility to the team is reflected in personal efforts on the pitch, deeply felt emotions, and critical appraisals of inadequate efforts on the part of other team mates. This collective sense of commitment and belonging mirrors to some extent the experiences of women's collective participation during the revolution.

## Contributions to gender and development literature

The intersection of youth and gender and the particular experiences these social variables produce for young women's lives has represented the unique focus of this research. Of central importance was to utilise a gendered lens to build on feminist critiques of development approaches that tend to homogenise and essentialise women's experiences. Instead, the approach of this thesis shared the objective of centralising previously marginalised voices and to also pay attention to the differentiated experience amongst women. In so doing the thesis has revealed a number of limitations in mainstream approaches to gender and development. Chapter Five demonstrated how development policy tends to rely on poverty measures that fail to take into account gender inequalities and gender power relations. In effect they ignore the differentiated contributions of family members to household maintenance and how daughters are expected to take on the burden of domestic responsibility.

In Chapters Five and Six, it was shown that development policies tend to focus on women's identities as actual or potential mothers, and therefore serve to reinforce the gender division of labour and gendered notions of femininity and female domestic responsibility. The narrow focus of such mainstream development approaches to gender, treat women as a homogenous group and essentialise their identities as mothers and carers. Chapter Six argued that the assumed link between education and fertility deserves greater scrutiny and interrogation. The emphasis these young women placed on education was based on intensely personal decisions to delay motherhood that were circumscribed by economic and social factors. Both young men and young women face economic barriers to accessing higher education courses. However, despite the fact that young women in Nicaragua are often better educated than young men, pervasive gendered notions of appropriate behaviour create particular barriers and difficulties for young women to access education and work opportunities. Moreover, many of the players were dependent on family and relatives for economic support to complete schooling and higher education courses, while perceived transgressions of gendered notions of appropriate behaviour resulted in the withdrawal of economic support. These findings would suggest that gender and development research and policy should focus more on the barriers to young women's access to education and better paid work.

Young women's experience of education and work are both precarious and circumscribed by gendered constructions of femininity and masculinity. Economic insecurity means that enrolment fees are beyond the ability of many of the players to afford, while paid work conflicts with their ability to study. Moreover, the nature of paid work for

young women is often precarious, short-term and poorly paid. Informal and service sector work are commonly the main areas of the labour market in which young women are employed. However, gender inequalities serve to prejudice their ability to access more skilled and better-paid jobs. Though traditional approaches to young people's transitions have analysed education and work as separate institutions, the players' experiences reveal how they overlap and sometimes conflict in their lives. The structuring force of gendered notions of appropriate activity and behaviour that the player's lives reveal, would suggest the institutional focus of traditional transitions studies is perhaps too rigid to account for the complex reality of young women's experience. Notions of 'interdependence', prolonged transitions and overlapping experiences would seem to be more relevant to these young women's lives.

There is continuity between young women's experience of responsibilities in the household and the types of employment they are able to access in the labour market, both of which are inscribed with notions of female domestic responsibility that devalues their contributions in the public sphere in comparison to men. From an early age girls and young women are expected to contribute to reproductive tasks and the player's often accepted these roles unquestioningly. There were signs though that some of the players were frustrated by the limits of these responsibilities and demonstrated a desire to negotiate and avoid these responsibilities in their own lives. Greater freedom and independence were dependent on success in education but as we have seen this did not necessarily translate into greater prospects in the labour market.

## **Future research**

This thesis began from the premise that studies of youth have placed less attention on the experiences of young women in the context of Latin America. The subsequent research has provided a perspective of important areas of the players' lives. As such it has been difficult to make broad conclusions rather I have attempted in this conclusion to point out interesting findings from my empirical data. The approach has been fruitful and there are a number of areas and issues that deserve more profound analysis. Migration appeared as an important and growing trend for young Nicaraguans however this study was only able to capture their intentions and attitudes rather than actual experiences. It would be interesting to explore whether the players' optimism regarding better work opportunities and standard of living would be met in reality. Therefore research that followed the migrants to their destination could reveal much about the process and its gendered effects. Little research exists on gendered experiences of transitions in Latin America and it would be interesting to analyse in more detail the particular contextual effects of historical and cultural processes. Will the

players' hopes of a financially secure future and stable family be a reality? The focus on sport, again unique for the Latin American context, revealed interesting results that pointed to the strength of football as a potential tool for social development and to challenge gender inequalities. Most importantly I would broaden the analysis to include the experiences of young men. A more holistic approach was beyond the scope of this research but would, in future research, generate a more detailed picture of social life and the challenges and opportunities young men face themselves and in relation to young women.

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| <b>Players with CFF León</b>  | <b>Date</b>   |
|---|---|
| Abril, Female, 22 years old,  | 23/07/08, 25/07/08                                  |
| Blanca, Female, 18 years old  | 05/08/08, 06/08/08                                  |
| Claudia, Female, 25 years old   | 16/07/08  |
| Delfina, Female, 18 years old   | 14/08/08  |
| Fernanda, Female, 23 years old  | 31/07/08  |
| Josefina, Female, 18 years old  | 02/06/08  |
| Laura, Female, 22 years old   | 25/05/08, 25/07/08                                  |
| Lizbet, Female, 17 years old  | 22/08/08  |
| Monica, Female, 22 years old  | 03/07/08, 24/07/08                                  |
| Nina, Female, 18 years old  | 12/05/08, 18/07/08                                  |
| Rosa, Female, 21 years old  | 16/05/08, 31/06/08, 16/07/08, 29/07/08,<br>31/07/08 |
| Sara, Female, 18 years old  | 05/07/08, 30/07/08                                  |
| Susana, Female, 17 years old  | 15/04/08  |
| Sylvia, Female, 16 years old  | 22/08/08  |
| Verónica, Female, 23 years old  | 15/05/08, 16/07/08, 29/07/08                        |
|   |   |
| <b>Primera División Coaches</b>   |   |
| Coach of the UAM  | 15/07/08  |
| Coach of Kol-8  | 05/04/08  |
| Diego Pesara, Coach of CFF León   | 15/08/08  |
|   |   |
| <b>Players with other Primera División Teams</b>  |   |
| Wanda, Female, 21 years old   | 05/08/08  |
| Liza, Female, 20 years old  | 05/08/08  |
|   |   |
| <b>Players' Family and Friends</b>  |   |
| Doña Corina   | 22/08/08  |
| Mother of Lizbet  | 17/08/08  |
| Mother of Delfina   | 14/08/08  |
|   |   |
| <b>FENIFUT Officials</b>  |   |
| Dalila López Sanchez, Female, Director of Female Football   | 11/08/08  |
| Florencio Leiva, Male, Nicaragua Women's Under-20 Coach   | 04/08/08  |
|   |   |
| <b>Alcaldía de León</b>   |   |
| Vieca Guitierrez, Female, Comisión de la Juventud, La Niñez y Deporte del Gobierno Municipal del Alcaldía de León | 24/07/08  |
| Don Silvio Perex Carillo, Jefe del Departamento Deporte del Alcaldía Municipal de León                            | 20/08/08  |
|   |   |
| <b>Movimiento Comunal football project</b>  |   |
| Cirilo (Organiser)  | 20/08/08  |
| Five male participants  | 18/08/08  |
|   |   |
|   |   |

| <b>Under-20 World Cup Qualifying Competition</b> |          |
|--|----------|
| <b>Mexico Under-20 Squad</b>                     |          |
| Mexico Coach                                     | 19/06/08 |
| Three players                                    | 19/06/08 |
| <b>Cuba Under-20 Squad</b>                       |          |
| Two members of coaching team                     | 22/06/08 |
| Two players                                      | 22/06/08 |
| <b>Canada Under-20 Squad</b>                     |          |
| Canada Coach                                     | 20/06/08 |
| Two players                                      | 23/06/08 |