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Female Maquila Workers in Nicaragua

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How can the State Enhance the Women's Human Security?

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Abstract

This thesis explores the insecurities of female maquila workers in Nicaragua in order to derive policy implications for the Nicaraguan state. These workers are deeply embedded in gendered and neoliberal structures of the global political economy. Based on theories of the social contract, the state is identified as being responsible for ensuring human security for its citizens. Using observations, text analysis and focus groups with female maquila workers, the female workers' everyday insecurities are identified. The analysis is guided by the human security framework employing a gender perspective. The results are contrasted to feminist policy proposals by Barrientos and Kabeer (2004). Violence, economy and health have been identified as main insecurities of these workers. As a result it is argued that Barrientos and Kabeer's (2004) proposals are too narrowly focused on the productive and reproductive role of women, but do not consider other issues that seriously constrain the workers' security like violence and health.

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Contents

1. Introduction

Trabajo si, pero con dignidad – Work: yes, but with dignity
Slogan by the Movement of Working and Unemployed Women "María Elena Cuadra"

The Movement of Working and Unemployed Women "María Elena Cuadra" (MEC) in Nicaragua demands better labour conditions in the maquilas[1] of Nicaragua. The main slogan that has been used by MEC for years reveals what they are missing in the maquilas of Nicaragua: a labour offering them good working conditions and a sufficient remuneration. Workers in factories all over the Global South[2] are deeply embedded in the global political economy (GPE). In recent years, it has been argued that the global manufacturing industry has been feminised and employs mainly women since they are cheaper and easier to hire and fire.

This thesis deals with these women working in the maquilas in Nicaragua and is situated within the feminist research project. Feminist claims are very diverse and contested even among each other. Nevertheless, feminist research is also a political project aiming to challenge unjust power relations, alter situations of unequality and promote social change (cf. Ramazanoglu/Holland 2002:165). While the situation of women in the maquilas has frequently been examined not only by scholars (cf. e.g. Caraway 2007; Elson/Pearson 1981; Elias 2005; Wright 2006), but also by civil society organisations in the field of anti-sweatshop campaigns (cf. e.g. Clean Clothes Campaign 2008; CIR 2011), my aim is to go beyond a mere description of the situation and to find strategies how the women's situations can be improved. I do this based on the concept of human security and with a focus on the agency of the Nicaraguan state.

Security has traditionally been defined state-centred; however, human security as a framework has gained attention within recent years putting the individual human being into the focus. The state is called on as provider of security for its citizens. This thesis employs a human security analysis in order to establish the everyday

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[1] Maquila is the Spanish expression for sweatshop or a factory manufacturing consumption goods in export-processing zones. Since this thesis focuses on the situation in Nicaragua, I am going to use the Spanish expression throughout the thesis.

[2] With the term ‚Global South' (capitalised) I refer to a socio-economic and political division between rich and poor countries and refer to structural injustices between them. I am aware that this denomination is not without problems, but I reject to use terms such as developing countries or Third World since they imply certain values of development. With the term 'South' I intend to hint to a critical stance towards these concepts.

experienced insecurities by workers in the Nicaraguan maquilas. Subsequently, I will explore how the Nicaraguan state is able to support the women in the maquila to reclaim their dignity at work. The empirical material for the human security analysis has been gathered with qualitative research methods in Nicaragua, namely observations, text analysis and focus group interviews with maquila workers. In order to achieve a thorough grounding in feminist theory, I derive the policy implications by contrasting the workers' visions on their human security enhancement with existing policy proposals by Barrientos and Kabeer (2004). From a postcolonial point of view, one could argue that these policy proposals that include childcare, education, the strengthening of female participation in unions and a social floor are based on the model of Western societies. I will scrutinise if these accusations can hold or if these proposals nevertheless can meet the requirements of the female maquila workers in Nicaragua.

The main research question for the research is thus:

- *Which policy implications to the Nicaraguan state can be derived from a human security analysis of female maquila workers' situation in Nicaragua?*

Sub-questions that will guide my investigation are:

- *Which insecurities experience female maquila workers in Nicaragua every day?*

- *How do maquila workers in Nicaragua relate to the state authority and what do they expect from their state in terms of human security enhancement?*

- *How contrasts the workers' views and experiences with existing feminist claims within academic research by Kabeer and Barrientos (2004) on how to include women into the global labour market?*

- *How does such an analysis benefit from a human security approach?*

The thesis is divided up as follows: I start with situating female maquila workers in Nicaragua in the GPE. The analysis will be guided by World-Systems Analysis. In the third part, I will scrutinise the human security concept from a critical perspective and derive the theoretical backbone for my empirical material from this discussion. In the fourth part, I will explain my methodology, why and how I applied the chosen methods. The analysis of the material follows in part five: I will first present the results separately for every method and then do the holistic analysis. This analysis is the basis for the next section where I contrast my results with feminist policy proposals on how to include women in the global labour market and derive the policy implications. Finally, I draw a conclusion.

2. The global political economy

In this part, I analyse how women in the Global South are integrated into the production process of consumption goods. This analysis is guided by World-Systems Analysis which provides useful analytical insights into the current GPE. It constitutes the theoretical framework of my thesis.

2.1 Global manufacturing and female workers in the global political economy

Scherer and Palazzo (2010:901) define globalisation as "a process of intensification of cross-border social interactions due to declining costs of connecting distant locations through communication and the transfer of capital, goods, and people". Wallerstein (2004:17) argues on the basis of his World-Systems Analysis that "in 'world-systems' we are dealing with a spatial/temporal zone that cuts across many political and cultural units, one that represents an integrated zone of activity and institutions which obey certain systemic rules". The capitalist world-economy is thus a large geographic zone with a division of labour and significant exchange and flows of capital, goods and labour. This division of labour is what unifies the structure since there is no unitary political structure (Wallerstein 2004:23). Wallerstein (2004:24) furthermore argues that this world-economy is characterised by the *endless* accumulation of capital.

In this system, firms are the main actors in the market (Wallerstein 2004:27). Firms that operate in more countries than their home countries – transnational corporations (TNCs[3]) – are an important, driving factor of the globalisation process. They have stretched their commodity chains all over the world. Due to neoliberal economic policies, world trade and markets have been liberalised and offer TNCs the possibility for cheap production based on cost-effectiveness in labour costs and low environmental standards (Sum/Ngai 2005: 183). This development has been coupled with a strong focus on export-oriented

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[3]   Within the literature, the definition of TNCs differs so that they are called among others multinational corporations, international businesses or industries (although the difference is not always explained). In this thesis, I will constantly use the term TNC as denomination of enterprises "that control assets of other entities in economies other than their home countries" (UNCTAD 2008: 74).

industrialisation in many countries of the Global South (Caraway 2007:15). Export-processing zones (EPZs) were set up in order to attract foreign investors with cheap (often female) labour (Beazley/Desai 2008:360). Through advanced communication technologies, TNCs are able to control the production in terms of e.g. delivery rates, quality standards and design specifications over long distances without ownership (Sum/Ngai 2005: 183).

Wallerstein (2004:28) argues that this is an axial division of labour of the capitalist world-economy. There are core-like products and peripheral products depending on the labour-value, the mechanisation and the profitability (Wallerstein 1984:16). Peripheral products have been core-products at some point, but they have lost their quasi-monopoly due to rising competition. Textiles are an example of that process: "In 1800 these textiles were produced primarily in a very few countries […]; in 2000 textiles were produced in virtually every part of the world-system, especially cheap textiles" (Wallerstein 2004:29). The production of textiles is labour-intensive, mechanised and – by now – not very profitable. Therefore it has become a peripheral product.

Distinct for globalised industries such as textiles, that require labour-intensive manufacturing, are 'buyer-driven supply chains' (Gereffi 1999:41-2). In such settings, large retailers and brands set up decentralised production networks in exporting countries, usually in the Global South. Thus, contracted manufacturers in these countries finish products according to the specifications of the buyer. Gereffi (1999:43) argues that these buyer-driven supply chains are successful through the ability of retailers, marketers and manufacturers "to shape mass consumption via strong brand names and their reliance on global sourcing strategies to meet this demand". Hence, the question of power and authority is significant in these buyer-driven supply chains, as argued by Sum and Ngai (2005:184):

> As dominant buyers, TNCs in buyer-driven chains are able to control production (e.g. delivery dates, quality standards, design specifications) over long distances without exercising ownership. Non ownership of suppliers also enables them to collaborate flexibly on their terms with subcontractors [...]

Thus, the risks of business, one could argue, have to be borne mainly by actors in the Global South who are at the end of the supply chain. The subcontracted firms in the Global South bear the responsibility to meet high demands and, in turn, hand risks and pressures down to their manufacturing workers. The results of this strategy have often been documented by anti-sweatshop movements around the world and include labour and human rights violations. Examples are the case of Ocean Sky Apparel in El Salvador (Institute for Global Labour& Human Rights/Mujeres Transformando 2011); the practices of retailers in four Asian countries documented by the Clean Clothes Campaign (2008) or poverty due to starvation wages as shown in a comparison of wages in the worldwide sweatshop industry (CIR 2011). The sweatshop or maquila has in this sense become the symbol of the least attractive dimensions of globalisation.

The power of TNCs is furthermore enhanced because there is no political order that is able to limit their authority. Recent global developments have led some scholars to argue that the 'Westphalian world order' adhering to principles of sovereign nation states as steering authorities is being replaced by a 'post-Westphalian' or 'post-national constellation' (Scherer/Palazzo 2010:901). Nation states are losing their regulatory power because economic and social interactions do not adhere to national boundaries and jurisdictions anymore. Barber (2000:275) has criticised this development with regards to democratic legitimacy:

> At present, the encompassing practices of globalization have created an ironic and radical asymmetry: we have managed to globalize markets in goods, labour, currencies and information without globalizing the civic and democratic institutions that have historically comprised the free market's indispensable context. Put simply, we have removed capitalism from the institutional 'box' that has (quite literally) domesticated it and given its sometimes harsh practices a human face.

This goes hand in hand with Wallerstein's (2004:24) argument that capitalists are in need of a large market and of a multiplicity of states in order to gain advantages by working with states and circumventing hostile states. Thus, as Koenig-Archibugi (2005:242) argues, the 'exit-option' of TNCs to choose the most beneficial jurisdiction has affected the capacity of governments to hold them accountable for social, fiscal or environmental performances. Cutler (2003:29) furthermore adds that private legal regulation is expanded and domestic policy issues are subordinated under the market order which transforms states from welfare to competition states. Thus, the role of the state has to be seen within a discourse of neoliberalism that has shaped the end of the 20th century and puts the market based on private power and individual actors into the centre. According to neoliberal ideology, global economic integration through liberalisation of trade, investment and finance is needed for economic development (Thomas 2001:167).

Connected to these developments, some researchers have argued that there has been a process of 'feminisation' of labour in the global manufacturing sector, which makes it necessary to problematise the GPE from a gender perspective. Elson and Pearson (1981:92-3) have argued that TNCs have found their suitable labour force for the manufacturing industry in women, because they can be employed cheaper. This is due to their secondary status in the labour market, being regarded as 'reserve labour army' explained by their reproductive role which is assumed to be biologically given. Their inclusion into the workforce is considered to be temporary since they are easily fired and re-hired if needed (Elson/Pearson 1981:96). Thus, the exploitation of female wage labour can be seen as basing on the 'male breadwinner model' assuming that women's wages are an addition to the necessary income of the men and therefore do not need to be remunerated in the same way.

However, Caraway (2007:3) argues that export-oriented industrialisation and cheap labour alone cannot explain the feminisation of labour-intensive

manufacturing, as has been done by researchers in the late 1980s and early 1990s. She analyses cross-national differences in the share of female employment in selected countries in Asia and Latin America. She adds more factors that are important in explaining the feminisation of manufacturing: the supply characteristics of female labour (e.g. fertility rates and educational level) and mediating institutions (e.g. unions, protective legislation and the structure of collective bargaining) (Caraway 2007:23). Furthermore, she argues that gendered discourses of work about what 'men's work' or 'woman's work' is have a strong influence on differences in the composition of the labour force in different labour-intensive sectors. The association of natural 'female' traits useful for some kinds of work has been documented by different scholars in ethnographic studies.

Elias (2005) studied the position of women in a British garment factory in Malaysia and Wright (2006) those in a Mexican maquila. In these studies, certain gendered representations were found. Women's skills as sewers are seen "as innate rather than a product of training" (Elias 2005:103) and it is therefore justified that these 'women's jobs' get less paid. These 'feminine' skills are among others dexterity, attention to detail and patience which makes women perfect for the repetitious and meticulous manufacturing work (Elson/Pearson 1981:92; Wright 2006:83).

At the same time, the value of the women is only represented in their bodies (Wright 2006:72). According to supervisors and managers in the Mexican maquila, these women are untrainable, and thus, their value diminishes. One manager argued that as the job is boring, the workers get tired and have to be replaced (Wright 2006:57). Men on the other hand do not get 'women's work' (assembly line) in the first place, but enter the packaging area and material handling. While Caraway (2007:28) argues that there is no wage discrimination between men and women within low-wage industries – contradicting the assumption that women automatically earn less for the same work –, Wright (2006:57-61) found that the Mexican maquila privileges men by offering them the possibility of receiving training and becoming supervisors – positions that are better paid. Possibilities of training and promotion are closed to women due to the natural order of genders in which the work is allocated to women and men. Women workers are seen as objects: It is not the woman and her skills that represent value, it is her body. However, her body diminishes in value the older (and slower) it gets, but also if it gets 'useless' for the maquila in case of injuries or pregnancy.

Thus, some skills are seen as 'naturally' given either to women or men. As Caraway (2007:30) argues: "these images are important not because they reflect reality, but because they produce it". They influence which labour-intensive sectors are more prone to be feminised. Caraway (2007:22) documents in a cross-national analysis of ten countries that the garments sector is dominated by female employment, whereas the picture is more differentiated in textiles, footwear and electronics. This relates to the findings of Wright (2006) which demonstrate that sewing is considered a woman's job. However, figures differ between countries.

Therefore, an analysis must be contextualised in the national and social environment. I therefore take a closer look on the position of Nicaragua and its maquila industry in the GPE.

2.2   Nicaragua in the global political economy

From the point of view of World-Systems Analysis, Nicaragua is a country in the periphery of the GPE. According to the Human Development Index (HDI) for 2012, Nicaragua is the second less developed country in Latin America (UNDP 2013:146). In 1990, the country was devastated due to the civil war from 1979-1990 and economically imbalanced by a mixed-economy approach of the Sandinista government in an unfavourable national and international environment. Since then, Nicaraguan governments have applied structural adjustment and market-oriented policies in terms with neoliberal thoughts (Aravena 2001:18; Agosin 2002; Ruckert 2009:143-4). Also, like all other Central American countries, Nicaragua adopted an export-oriented model of development (Agosin 2002:220). Therefore, integration into the world market has been one aim of economic policies. As such, Nicaragua is a member of the Central American Common Market (CACM), has free trade agreements with different countries (e.g. DR-CAFTA[4]) and is negotiating new ones (e.g. the association agreement between the EU and Central America). Thus, the economically unified area is expanding, leaving less political scope for the Nicaraguan government.

In order to attract foreign investment, Nicaragua established the first EPZ in November 1991 with Decree Number 46-91. The aim was the generation of employment, foreign investment, export of non-traditional products, acquisition of technology and the reactivation of external trade (after the civil war in the 1980s) (Decreto Número 46-91: I). The so-called "Zonas Francas Industriales de Exportación" are to be considered outside of the national territory in financial effects. The aim of the EPZs is to increase export; therefore, only companies that produce goods and services for export are allowed to operate within the EPZs. These companies dispose over substantial financial benefits like tax exemptions (see Appendix I for financial and further regulations concerning EPZs).

As of 2009, the relative majority of the 138 companies operating in the EPZs in Nicaragua produced garments (64 companies; 46.38%), followed by tobacco (16; 11.6%) and telecommunication services (11; 8%). The others produced goods such as furniture or textiles (INIDE n.d.:317). The garments sector also produced 72.6% of the aggregated value within the EPZs (INIDE n.d.:315, V.7.1). The EPZs have, as intended, attracted foreign investors. In 2009, only 14.5% of the

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[4]   DR-CAFTA is the regional free trade agreement between the United States, Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua and the Dominican Republic that took effect 1st January 2009.

companies were financed by domestic capital. 34.1% of the companies originated from U.S.-American investments, followed by 25.4% from Asian funds (mostly South Korea and Taiwan) (INIDE n.d.:318, V.7.4). However, South Korean firms produce the highest share of the aggregated value within the EPZs (40.2%), followed by the U.S. (19.3%) and Mexico (18.8%) (INIDE n.d.:316, V.7.2).

Thus, there are mainly TNCs operating in the EPZs of Nicaragua. Applying the World-Systems Analysis, these TNCs benefit from low wages and tax exemptions and extract the surplus from the periphery. As Nicaragua does not have any core-like products, but mainly produces peripheral products in the EPZs as well as agricultural products and raw materials, it can be categorised as a periphery country. According to Chase-Dunn, Kawano and Brewer (2000: Table A2 of Appendix), the investing firms are mainly from the core (U.S.) or semiperiphery countries (South Korea, Mexico, Taiwan).

Considering the 'feminisation' argument, it has to be examined in which way women are included into the Nicaraguan workforce in the manufacturing industry. The national statistic for 2009 indicated that women workers are slightly in the majority in the maquilas. They composed 55.8% of the workforce (INIDE n.d.:319, V.7.5). However, these statistics do not display in which positions women and men are placed, or in which sectors they work. MEC's socio-demographic data of their consultations with workers in the EPZ also show considerable differences between companies (MEC 2009a:8, 137; 2009b:12, 75). This data does not give any hints about whether women are in better or worse paid positions than men and if they can be found in branches that are traditionally defined as feminine. However, compared to general employment statistics, the occupation of women is disproportionately high in maquilas. In 2009, the overall employment rate for men was at 83.6%, for women only 53.1% (INIDE n.d.:113). Of the economically active population, women make up only 39% (own calculation for June 2009 according to INIDE n.d.: 113, II.4.1; 34, II.1.2). Thus, while women make up a considerably smaller portion of the general workforce than men, they are in the majority in the maquilas which points to the maquilas giving preference to the employment of women. However, it does not necessarily sustain the argument that there has been a 'feminisation' of manufacturing industry in Nicaragua[5].

2.3 Concluding remarks

According to World-Systems Analysis, Nicaragua is situated at the periphery of the world economy. TNCs from core or semiperiphery countries extract a surplus based on the exploitation of low wages and other low standards. The female

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[5]   Following Caraway's (2007) argument, there is a need to analyse the different sectors within the EPZs in order to sustain the feminisation claim. However, this data is not available.

maquila worker is deeply embedded in these structures of the world-economy which are also gendered. What this means for these workers in everyday life will emerge from the analysis of my empirical material. However, before turning to this part of the thesis I will discuss the human security approach and its relevance for my work, with focus on my fieldwork.

3 Human security

Traditional security studies put their focus on 'national' or 'international security'. In each case, the state is in the centre of security thinking. Critical security studies, in contrast, shift the referent object from the state to the individual and "extend our moral horizons beyond national-based conceptions of citizenship" (Dunne/Wheeler 2011:13). The concept of human security emerged within this critical discourse on traditional security approaches. Bosold (2011:31) argues that the concept, as it was developed within the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) report, merged from two strategies: calls for a broader understanding of security in the Brandt, Palme, Brundtland, and Nyerere commissions, and the need to find new sources of funding for development issues in the area of 'low' politics.

But what does human security entail? Although there are many contestations around the concept, many scholars see one 'narrow' and one 'broad' version (cf. Richmond 2011; Shani 2011). The narrow version focuses on the physical security of individuals and, thus, conceives it as the absence of threats (Shani 2011:57). A broader version has also been defined as 'freedom from want' and 'freedom from fear' (Richmond 2011:45) and has been voiced by the Commission on Human Security (CHS) that was sponsored by the Japanese government (Bosold 2011:37). The CHS was headed by Amartya Sen and Sadako Ogata, and the similarities between Sen's capabilities approach[6] and the broader approach to human security are striking (Shani 2011:57). CHS argues for a positive definition of human security that encompasses the 'vital core' of human life; thus, a set of elementary rights and freedoms that people consider being vital to their well-being (CHS 2003:4). However, there are many contestations between different approaches in terms of content and theoretical implications.

Exemplarily, one can compare two primary texts on human security: the 1994 UNDP report and the Human Security Now report by CHS. The UNDP report (1994) can be accounted for within the broader framework and lists seven categories that need to be considered to achieve human security: economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (UNDP 1994:24-5). The report addresses not only insecurities in the developing world, but also within rich countries, and acknowledges the interdependence of all nations and, among others, explicitly "disparities in economic opportunities" as a threat to human

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[6]   See Sen (2001): Development as Freedom.

security (UNDP 1994:24). The report explicitly links economic realities in the South to Northern consumption and market patterns.

The CHS report (2003:4) on the other hand puts the focus very much on the individual and which capabilities s/he needs to be able to live a fulfilled life: "[…] human security starts from the recognition that people are the most active participants in determining their well-being." Human security attempts to protect people from threats that are beyond their control, like financial crises, violent conflicts, terrorist attacks, HIV/AIDS, etc. (CHS 2003:11). The report stresses that human security must be seen as a complement to national security (CHS 2003:4-5). It argues that economic security is important for human security and that economic crises impede human security (CHS 2003:73-93). It misses, however, to acknowledge that many countries in the Global South are placed in a structurally vulnerable position within the GPE (as seen in chapter 2). The CHS report rather reflects the so-called 'Security-Development Nexus' whereby security in the North is tied to prosperity in the South (cf. Roberts 2011:69). Thus, power and asymmetry are neglected in global relations and the cause is disconnected from the effect. Therefore, Bosold (2011:29) argued that the original, emancipatory UNDP approach has been watered down (cf. also Richmond 2011:44).

This example shows that it is difficult to find a consensus about the concept apart from the fact that it focuses on the individual's instead of on the state's security. And that is one main point of criticism: While proponents have celebrated the inclusiveness of the concept, it has been criticised "for being a security theory of everything and nothing" (Hudson 2005:164) that is difficult to operationalise. Indeed, a lot of different security sectors have been included in the concept or defined as being vital for people's survival and well-being (cf. Basch 2004).

On a theoretical level, the process of broadening the agenda to include other issues than military ones has been conceptualised as "securitisation". By securitising issues, it has been argued, they "automatically gain [...] a level of governmental attention and policy response previously limited to military issues" (Sheehan 2003:45). Furthermore, securitisation has been used to attract more financial resources for an issue since traditional security areas had always assured state funding (Sheehan 2003:52). However, securitisation also speaks to the socially constructed and intersubjective nature of the concept 'security' whereby powerful actors are able to identify, define and shape threats as 'real' (Buzan et.al. 1998:30-2). Human security can also be seen within this process to bring important issues of poverty, health, etc. to the forefront.

In the next section, I engage with the concept from a feminist point of view and derive the theoretical approach for this thesis from this discussion.

3.1 Feminist engagement with human security

Feminists have generally welcomed human security as a challenge to established ideas of traditional, national security. They have challenged these traditional notions of security because they favour the 'sovereign man' and 'hero warrior' as the "exclusive symbol of power" which leads to a duality in citizenship rights (Chenoy 2009:44). However, as Hudson (2005:158-9) describes, there is not *one* feminism, but rather different schools of feminist thought which deal differently with issues of security. Their common goal is to transform unequal power relationships between women and men in theory and practice (Hudson 2005:156).

This implies that there are different interpretations of human security within feminist scholarship. Christie (2010:187-9) sees some crucial points of resonance between feminists and human security. First of all, there has been a thematic convergence, most importantly concerning issues that are being rendered invisible within traditional security studies. Furthermore, it has been possible to place the focus on women and children specifically. However, as Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006:216) note, this bears the danger of essentialising or naturalising female identities.

The main critique emerging from feminists has been that the concept itself is gendered. Relating to the CHS report, some feminists argued that women should be taken up as subjects in the concept; otherwise it risks invisibilising women again (Basch 2004:7). This can lead to the situation that policies that are directed to 'all individuals' favour men since they do not take into account power relations. Marhia (2013) goes even further and adds a postcolonial perspective by dealing with the implication of 'human' in human security from a critical feminist perspective. She argues that the human is a projection of the Western, liberal model of rationality that is not gender-neutral, but highly masculine. The 'Others' – women, colonial subjects, other races – are thereby excluded since they are deemed to be incapable of reaching the rational-mastery that is associated with the White male (Marhia 2013:26-7). This human subject is furthermore embedded in a masculinist system of binaries which also points to the division between developed vs. underdeveloped, modern vs. traditional world (Marhia 2013:27-8). Hudson (2005:159) adds that this kind of binary thinking is fuelled by radical feminists who essentialise women and their role which "perpetuate[s] a dichotomized universalism". This approach of 'global victimhood' has been especially challenged by feminists in the South who contested Western feminist thinking warning against imperial dominance of this one feminism and adding other standpoints to the debate (Hoogensen/Stuvoy 2006:216). Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006:216) relate this discussion to the human security debate arguing that it is perceived as an issue for the South and that this approach denies inequalities and power relation within the North.

Nuruzzaman (2006) criticises the concept of human security by comparing it to critical and feminist theory. He argues that although there are similarities between human security and critical/feminist theory (like the overarching objective of human emancipation, the commitment to normative values and the referent object of security), there are substantial differences. For Nuruzzaman (2013:299), it is not yet clear where the human security paradigm is positioned methodologically, but he argues that it rather shares many basic assumptions of the realist paradigm than with critical theory, since "it supports the global and national status quo rather than challenges it". He does, however, not substantiate this claim with empirical evidence. I argue that there is no clear empirical evidence to substantiate this claim, since the human security discourse is very diverse as has been shown exemplarily with a comparison of the CHS report (2003) and the UNDP report (1994). The latter one points to the possibility of challenging the status quo. As other feminist scholars have done, I argue that an interpretation from a feminist standpoint is possible.

Hudson (2005) and Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006) argue for the inclusion of gender into the human security concept. Gender refers to the social constructions of the sexes and how socially learned behaviours idealise what it means to be a men or a woman. The gendered meanings which are ascribed to sex differences naturalise and enforce the binary between men and women (Peterson/Runyan 2010:3-4). Therefore, it is important to recognise that gender does not equate with women (Peterson/Runyan 2010:3; Hoogensen/Stuvoy 2006:216). Due to the differently ascribed roles in society, women and men face different insecurities. Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006:216) argue that "[t]he concept of gender speaks to relationships of power" and, thus, "informs security theory about structural relations that go largely unnoticed, relations of dominance and non-dominance".

Hudson (2005:157-8) argues that only including women into a human security analysis creates even more silences, and risks to mask differences between women. Therefore, she argues to include gender into the analysis which speaks to power relations and how they inform (in)security. She furthermore argues that "gender as the unit of analysis promotes integration across levels and dimensions" (Hudson 2005:162). It is possible to use a gender lens in every sphere of social analysis, although it may not in all instances be the most important factor impeding security. Still, a gender analysis reveals a complex and fluctuating mix of social constructions and practices at all levels. Thus, a gender analysis also provides the possibility to link the global level to local implications. Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006:224) argue that the strength of integrating gender into human security is that it takes into account that security is experienced and realised through social practice. It is a process of social interaction and, thus, heavily shaped by social constructions of masculinities and femininities. A gender analysis that is based on the human security concept allows the identification of different ways in which insecurities develop as a result of gendered power relations (Hoogensen/Stuvoy 2006:219). I furthermore add that the concept with the inclusion of gender has the potential to blur divisions between the public and the private since it reaches into all the different levels. This has been one of the

main claims by feminists for a long time (Peterson/Runyan 2010:87). Human security has the individual as the focus and coupled with a gender lens, it highlights power relations on different levels: the global, the national and the personal (cf. Truong et al. 2006:xxv).

3.2   Human security and the state

In this thesis, I argue that the state is the foremost provider of security. This line of thinking has a long history within political theoretical thinking which I will shortly outline.

Theoretical arguments on the state's responsibility towards its citizens go back to theories of the social contract by Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant. Hickey (2011:428) differentiates among two strands of social contract thinking: the social/rights-based approach and the liberal/interest-based approach. The notion of the individual differs between the two strands. While liberal approaches assume that the individual tries to maximise advantage for the individual, social approaches see the individual in relation to others and the society and motivated by a notion of fairness. However, all social contract thinkers see the state based on the idea of reciprocity where cooperation is to mutual advantage (Hickey 2011:429). Already Hobbes (1991:134-5) – in the liberal tradition – invoked here the notion of the state established for the sake of security of the single citizen. In contrast to the social tradition, Moses (2013:121) argues that "[Hobbes'] model of sovereignty implies that law and morality follow the establishment of sovereign power". This contrasts with the Kantian notion of 'people as ends, not means'. States are in this view the means, while people should be treated as ends (Sheehan 2003:77). It thus implies a morality on which the state bases. Within the social contract, the citizens have certain advantages (security), but also duties (obedience) (Hobbes 1991:138; Rousseau 1977:75-7). Lesnoff (1990:11) argues that social contract theories have been used differently: either to justify sovereign rule or to justify resistance to it (in case the sovereign does not meet its obligations).

Rawls (1971) explicitly ties his social contract theory to the notion of justice. By choosing the principles "behind a veil of ignorance" (Rawls 1971:136) it is assured that even people in favourable conditions agree to fair principles. This line of thinking has been taken up by feminist scholars. Nussbaum (2011:27) argues for the responsibility of the state in terms of justice: only a government that secures capabilities can be called just and Tickner (1992:129) claims that this social justice also implies gender justice.

Within the framework of the human security debate, the notion of the social contract has been revoked with a focus on the social tradition and the state's

responsibility towards its citizens. In this debate, sovereignty has been conceptualised as responsibility (cf. Moses 2013; McCormack 2011). This concept has become prominent in another context, namely with regards to humanitarian intervention and has been termed 'responsibility to protect' (R2P), giving the international community the legitimacy to intervene in national conflicts. It has been argued that it undermines state sovereignty since this sovereignty is dependent on the extent to which states are able to fulfil their R2P. Since the international community is neither a cohesive actor nor able to be held accountable this leads to further entrenchment of global power inequalities (McCormack 2011:106-8).

The state as security provider has furthermore come under critique by different postmodern writers. Shani (2011:59) argues that human security legitimises greater state control over its citizens in the name of protection. In this process, powerful western states and institutions have used the concept as a biopolitical tool[7]. From a postcolonial reading, Duffield (in Shani 2011:59) argues that human security attempts to secure the West while entrenching global inequalities and the exclusion of the post-colonial South and thus, legitimises new imperial practices. Barkawi and Laffey (2006:346), however, criticise that security studies have been Eurocentric by locating agency, rationality, power and morality only in the great powers. I take this thought up for this thesis by stressing the agency of the Nicaraguan state. While I do not deny that there are structural inequalities and relationships of power and dominance in the international system, I argue that states in the South have the possibility to resist such forces. Only by acknowledging this, we are able to find strategies to provide human security in the face of vulnerabilities which are partly due to the GPE.

Thus, I argue in the tradition of social contract theories that the state has the responsibility to provide security for its citizens. I am aware that the conceptualisation of the state as main provider of security is rooted in Western, liberal thinking and subject to postcolonial critique[8]. Therefore, I will explore in the fieldwork with the maquila workers their own perception of the state and its responsibility, in order to scrutinize if this is in line with my argument.

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[7]   According to Grayson (2011:174), Biopolitics refers to "a means to rationalize the problems presented to governmental practice by the phenomena characteristic of living human beings constituted as a population" and thus, aims to promote the 'right ways' of living.

[8]   Draude and Neuweiler (2010:11) e.g. argue that Western social sciences are centred on the state and overlook communities that are differently constituted and how they relate to the national state.

3.3 Concluding remarks

The discussion of human security has shown that there are many ambiguities and contestations surrounding the concept. Within this thesis, I draw on a feminist notion of the concept as it has been envisaged by Hudson (2005) and Hoogensen and Stuvoy (2006). Thus, I include a gender focus in the human security concept which acknowledges power relations on all levels of analysis (the global, the national and the individual). I have furthermore argued for the responsibility of the state to provide security for its citizens – especially with regards to the insecurities deriving from the GPE. However, security needs to be contextualised; engagement with local communities and stakeholders is necessary. Therefore, my field work in Nicaragua with maquila workers targets their concerns and needs based on their everyday experienced insecurities.

4 Methodology

In this part, I explain the choice of my methods and their application in detail and discuss the limitations of these methods. In order to explore the realities of maquila workers in Nicaragua, I used three different methods: observation at a conference with about 1000 workers, text analysis of publications of a women's organisation that works with maquila workers and focus groups with maquila workers. Using this bottom-up approach, I want to find out what specific insecurities female maquila workers experience everyday due to their position in society as workers and as women. I start by presenting the "Movement of Working and Unemployed Women "María Elena Cuadra" (MEC) that supported me during my field study.

4.1 The Movement of Working and Unemployed Women "María Elena Cuadra" (MEC)

MEC was founded in 1994 by members of the union Sandinista Worker's Central (CST) as a response to the gender-based conflicts between the Women's Secretariat of CST and its male-dominated leadership. The aim was to visibilise women and their role on all levels of society (Bandy/Mendez 2003:179). Bandy and Mendez (2003:179-81) and Peterson (2002:35) describe MEC's work strategies as based within the current system of the GPE. As such, MEC does not support boycotts of certain brands and rejects to attack the real powers in the system, but rather provides integral services to the maquila workers on the local level and lobbies state officials as well as negotiates with factory owners across the country (Bandy/Mendez 2003:179-81). This strategy was reflected on the conference that I attended as well as in the documents studied for the empirical part. Every year, MEC organizes a conference that mobilizes around 1000 workers in order to discuss the current agenda. MEC, however, also works on a transnational level in order to counter the mobility of TNCs (Bandy/Mendez 2003:179). This was also reflected in the conference I attended.

Thus, MEC's aim is to create better working conditions for the women in the maquilas themselves (Peterson 2002:35) by adhering to legal frames that have been signed by the Nicaraguan state: Nicaragua's National Labour Code, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), and the Universal Declaration on Human Rights as well as the 1997 Apparel Industry Partnership Agreement (AIP) (Bandy/Mendez 2003:180).

4.2 Methods

4.2.1 Observation

The conference was a good start for the field study because it gathered about 1000 workers. I could see the current topics that are important for these workers. Furthermore, I could get in touch with some workers to establish contacts to organise focus groups. Apart from the interactions in the breaks in order to get in contact with workers, I limited myself to observations and did not participate directly.

During the conference, I sat with the workers and other women who attended the conference and listened to their different presentations and discussions. I furthermore observed the workers and how they reacted to some of the issues brought up. During the whole time, I took notes focusing on the important issues. The reactions of the audience helped me to identify what was important and what not.

4.2.2 Text analysis

The text analysis of documents by the women's organisation helped me to gain a broader understanding of the realities of workers in Nicaragua. The organisation publishes extensive reports about the state of labour rights in the maquilas. They do surveys and consultancies with up to 4000 workers in order to get their insight and demands.

Due to time limitations, I decided to focus on the published documents and not to take into account other, internal documentation. Thus, I analysed all the documents concerning EPZs, maquila workers or economic questions that are openly accessible, either on the webpage of MEC, or in the office displays in MEC's office in Managua. For the analysis, I did not use any specific analysis

method, but followed the bricolage approach using different methods at hand. This eclectic form of generating meaning (Kvale/Brinkmann 2009:233-4) was useful to bring different patterns in the texts to the forefront. During my stay in Nicaragua I took notes and copied important quotations relating to (in)securities or recommendations on how to address these from the publications. Afterwards, I analysed the document with the notes from the publications following the questions: What causes insecurities for the workers? Which issues are most frequently named? Are there any patterns or symbols concerning certain themes?

4.2.3 Focus groups

I also did focus groups with maquila workers to inquire their everyday insecurities. These focus groups add to the text analysis since they gave me the possibility to take a personal approach to the workers as well as to investigate issues that were not directly discussed in MEC's publications.

Focus groups are "a method of interviewing that involves more than one, usually at least four, interviewees" (Bryman 2008:473). Focus groups focus on one specific topic and want to establish a discussion with the participants on "a certain issue *as members of a group*" (Bryman 2008:473, emphasis in original). This is the main advantage of focus groups for the aim of my study in contrast to individual interviews: I am not interested in the views of single workers, but want to explore the experiences of a specific group of people – female maquila workers. Flick (2009:197) also argues that focus groups have an advantage over individual interviews since interviewees in individual interviews are "detached from everyday forms of communication and relation. Group discussions on the other hand correspond to the way in which opinions are produced, expressed and exchanged in everyday life". By responding to each others' claims within the discussion, it is possible to ascertain whether a point of view is an individual one, or indeed is important for the others in the group as well. The participants in the group might challenge each other on certain views, so "they are forced to think about and possibly revise their views" (Bryman 2008:474). This might end up in a more realistic account of what the participants think. The focus group method is furthermore able to establish the meaning that is given to certain experiences within the group (Bryman 2008:476). I want to establish the insecurities by maquila workers, and these insecurities derive from the meaning that is given to a situation.

It was not easy to set up the focus groups, since the women usually work at least 50 hours per week and have other responsibilities. First, I did a focus group with "promotoras" from MEC[9]. The promotoras are women who work (usually non-

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[9]   An anonymised overview over the participants of the focus groups can be found in Appendix II.

remunerated) for the MEC and are the connection between MEC's offices and the workers. They constantly keep in touch with workers and establish the contact in the first place. They do not only bring news from the workers to MEC, but also hand out information on rights or other important issues to the workers. The focus group with four promotoras was very useful from two point of views: first, all of them have themselves worked in a maquila and, second, due to their work as promotoras they have an aggregated view of the workers' situation. Furthermore, they received trainings in rights, gender and other issues and are therefore able to reflect on this situation.

Second, I used personal contacts to get in touch with workers. The neighbour of a colleague's mother was able to gather three co-workers for a focus group. For my study it was helpful to have this group which was not directly related to MEC. These workers had heard from MEC and its work, but not received any training. This might lead to differences in the answers in comparison to the group of promotoras. My colleague was my gatekeeper, which can be seen as an advantage in the context of my study. She knew the worker who contacted her co-workers for a long time and had confidence in her. This confidence helped me to gain closer access to the women in the group. With the short time frame for my study, I would on my own not have been able to establish such a trustful environment for the focus group.

As interviewer, I used the approach of mediation and followed Fontana and Frey's (2000:652) recommendation of being "flexible, objective, empathic, persuasive, a good listener." I left as much room as possible for the workers to explore and discuss the issue of insecurities. One challenge of focus groups can be that one person dominates the discussion and/or that other persons are recalcitrant to participate (Fontana/Frey 2000:652). I was therefore prepared to mediate such situations. This was however not necessary. All participants were very open and talked about their experiences. The discussions were very balanced between the different participants.

To structure the focus groups, I used the UNDP approach to human security which rests on seven pillars economic security, food security, health security, environmental security, personal security, community security, and political security (UNDP 1994:24-5). I explained to the participants in the focus group how UNDP understood the different pillars and then gave room to them to discuss it[10]. The use of this concept is not meant as a specific or universal operationalisation, but rather to give the participants starting points to think in different directions and to ensure that the breadth of the topic is covered.

After discussing the human security framework, I asked some additional questions concerning security providers as well as Barrientos and Kabeer's (2004) policy propositions on how to improve the situation for working women. In the case of

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[10]   In the discussion of the results, I also introduce the different pillars with the UNDP definition in order to give the reader the same orientation as the participants of the focus group. I will then explain how the workers understood and interpreted the different areas.

possible security providers, I contrast the workers' views with my theoretical considerations on the subject. In the case of existing policy proposals, the workers' views contrasted from a very practical point of view with theoretical considerations on the role of women in society and the labour market.

The focus group discussions were recorded and transcribed for analysis which was done in a similar way as for the texts by MEC, following the same questions. After reading each text and interview in itself, I approached the material in a more holistic way, looking for patterns and symbols, contrasts and comparisons between the different texts and interviews. This allowed me to identify discourses that were prevalent in all the material.

4.3 Limitations

As mentioned, using MEC as a starting point for my research gave me a thorough insight into their long experiences of working with maquila workers and also had some organisational advantages for the focus groups. Due to their tight working schedule, it is otherwise very difficult to get in contact with the workers. To search open contact with the workers within/in front of the maquilas is not advisable since they might get problems with their company and may therefore rather be reluctant to talk to a stranger at this exposed place. Also, some of the areas are very dangerous, especially at night (and in Nicaragua it is night by 6pm when work finishes).

Besides these advantages, there are some limitations due to the strong connection to the women's organisation. It is unclear, in which way the published documents really reflect the workers' view and how genuine the voices are that I get from the workers. Many of them have gone to different workshops concerning labour or human rights organised by MEC. They have thus been influenced by the organisation. As one worker told me in informal talks: "Before I joined MEC, I did not know anything about my rights, but during the workshops I learned a lot." It is thus difficult to distinguish between the voice of the workers and the voice of MEC. This is balanced by the focus group with workers who had not received any training from MEC (although all of them had heard of the organisation). The combination of different methods gave me the possibility to access a broad range of opinions and point of views and to compare them. I could thus gain a thorough insight into the realities of maquila workers, which provides ground to develop possible strategies to meet the insecurities they experience every day.

Reflexivity

Most feminist research is rooted in an epistemology that rejects the notion of an objective reality that can be written down as truth (cf. Jackson 2011: 184-5). Ramazanoglu and Holland (2002:54) furthermore argue that all attempts to social science are politically and, therefore, "all researchers are politically engaged, have personal biases and limited experiences, and are situated in particular cultures, locations and languages". In that sense, the researcher is always implied in his own research material and may influence the researched subjects. By acknowledging this, the researcher is able to take that into account during the analysis of the material.

Generally, a White foreigner in Nicaragua receives a lot of attention, and young White women even more. Being White and visibly a foreigner goes – in the Nicaraguan minds – hand in hand with being rich. This is understandable since for most Nicaraguans a journey even in a neighbour country is unaffordable and means richness. Furthermore, many Nicaraguans are dependent on the remittances that come into the country from migrants into the richer parts of the world. For my focus groups this meant that participants might exaggerate their misery in expectance of some sort of gain from me, or someone who might read about their experiences. As one participant of focus group 2 said in the end of the interview: "[...] and maybe, someone hears this interview, feels moved by it and helps us."

Just as my race, my class as an academic makes me in the eyes of many Nicaraguans something 'better'. Educated Nicaraguans often like to impress with their degrees and this might be intimidating for others. However, this was counteracted by my young age and that I – although I am fluent in Spanish – cannot express myself like a native Nicaraguan in Spanish without an accent. My age was helpful since the women in the focus groups were mostly older or of similar age. Usually, older persons are more respected and if I would have been older, this might also have intimated. However, as a young person it is from their understanding well possible that they have experiences that I do not have and that they can tell me about.

Most importantly was my gender. Being female, the participants and I shared a for Nicaraguans important part of identity. As will be seen later in the analysis, many Nicaraguans have an essentialised understanding of being female (or male). Therefore, they see me as a person that shares this important part of their identity. Furthermore, it gave me an advantage in terms of talking about sensitive topics, such as violence. These women feel constant insecurity from violence and me being a woman makes me an unlikely aggressor.

I also need to position myself within the anti-sweatshop movement, having worked for the Clean Clothes Campaign before. The advantage of this is that I have previous knowledge that helped me to formulate this research. However, I do have certain ideas and thoughts about the maquila industry which are very critical up to questioning the necessity, worthiness and legitimacy of maquilas. Just as my

situatedness as young Westerner, my anti-sweatshop and feminist position influenced how I led the focus groups, how I read the publications and how I interpret the gained material. Being aware of my own positions helped to take a critical distance towards them, nevertheless, I think it is necessary for the reader to understand from which standpoint I departed.

Ethical considerations

Doing the kind of qualitative research as I have done in this thesis, there are a few ethical questions involved. Bryman (2008:118) names four main ethical areas that need to be considered: harm to participants, informed consent, invasion into privacy, and deception.

By 'harm' to participants, Bryman (2008:118) means physical harm but also e.g. stress, loss of self-esteem. Although my research touched upon some sensitive issues like violence, I don't think it caused harm to the participants since the discussion did not go deep into such issues. I did not pressure them to tell something if they did not come up with it themselves. During the research, I informed MEC, my gatekeeper and (possible) participants about my study and its aim, in order to not deceive anyone. This included the opportunity for them to withdraw from the research. Thus, all the participants of the focus groups as well as MEC employees gave their consent to my research. Always questionable in terms of informed consent are the information gathered through participant observation. During the conference, I remained anonymous for most of the women attending it. They were thus not able to give their consent. However, I had the permission of MEC to participate at the conference which was – with about a 1000 participants – not a closed space where I could be seen as an intruder. Furthermore, even if I was anonymous for most of the women, they were to me as well. To all the workers I spoke to during breaks, I disclosed my intentions and left them thus the choice to talk to me or not.

One can furthermore question my aim to approach the topic of maquila workers from a postcolonial influenced perspective, since I myself am situated in a non-postcolonial perspective, disposing over all the possible privileges. I argue, however, from the political side of feminist research that this engagement with different perspectives that challenge also the researcher's point of views are essential in order to advance in the bridging between different perspectives. This is not to claim that there must be elaborated one common, feminist perspective, but to further understandings between different realities of women. Additionally, I want to stress that the researcher's identities as influencing the research may not be overstated. Otherwise we run the danger of not being able to study anything but ourselves, and differences may be made so big that we overlook the similarities and common grounds.

5 Empirical material

The empirical material that I gathered through observations, text analysis and focus groups is presented and analysed in this part. First, I present the results of the different methods individually. Second, I analyse the material together.

5.1 Results

5.1.1 Conference

On 3rd March 2013, the MEC held in Managua its conference that has been organised annually for 15 years. The topic was "Collective Construction of an Agenda of Maquila Workers' Rights". Different presentations on topics such as the state of women's labour in Nicaragua, health and prevention of diseases within maquilas and labour conditions in the maquilas of Mexico and Asia were held. There were themed workshops on different topics, where the workers had the opportunity to voice their concerns and proposals. The proposals from the workshops were presented in the plenum session.

The main issues on the agenda were transnational networking and health. As reflected in the title of the conference, the aim was to create a collective agenda of maquila workers in Central America. Therefore, delegations from Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras as well as a union representative from Mexico attended the conference. Sandra Ramos, MEC's director, stressed the importance to establish strategic alliances with unions and other organisations across Central America, because the problems were the same and it therefore would be necessary to speak "with one voice".

The presentation on workers' health by Mexican scholar Dr. Luis Manuel Pérez Pantoja showed that the Central American countries need to take into account the health damages caused by the work in maquilas. According to the particular scholar, many of the workers are not aware that a lot of diseases are caused by different risk factors at their working place, like chemicals, ergonomics as well as the organisation of the labour (assembly line, repetitive movements, short resting periods). Pérez Pantoja called on the authorities and the companies to prevent such health damages since they produce considerable costs for the social security.

Another recurrent issue debated throughout the conference was violence against women. Sandra Ramos claimed that "workers receive macho aggression" and are often seen as "sexual objects". She referred in that context to the relatively new law 779 (Ley 779) that specifically targets violence against women and that has been elaborated with participation of the MEC.

5.1.2 Text analysis

MEC has produced a vast amount of literature on the situation of women working in the maquila and the general situation of women in the Nicaraguan society. I scrutinised the documents concerning women, the economy and maquilas. In this part, I present the most recurring issues emerging from the publications.

The Workers' economy

The first issue often is the workers' economy and salaries. The most common reason for the women to enter work in a maquila is the need to obtain an income for the household (MEC 2009b:36; 2006:119). However, the salaries the workers gain are often insufficient. In 2009, about 50% of the workers had household expenses between 2900 and 4900 Cordoba. At the same time, the minimum wage was at 2556 Cordoba. While there are big differences between the workers' incomes, MEC's data show that nearly 40% of the workers earn only up to 2700 Cordoba, earning thus the minimum wage or even less (2009b:33; 52). In this context, MEC also refers to the costs of the basic food basket to show that the minimum wage is insufficient to secure a family's life (MEC 2009a:42; 2008a). When the minimum wage was raised to 2556 Cordoba in October 2009, the costs of the basic basket were with 8430 Cordoba more than three times higher than the minimum wage[11] (Banco Central de Nicaragua 2009:44).

Therefore, MEC (2009b:43) argued that extra hours are an important source of income for the workers, since they are to be paid twice as much as normal hours. They criticise however the complicated systems of incentives and payments. Incentives can contain payments for high production or for coming punctually every work day. Other payments can include daily transport allowances. MEC argues that the different wage policies lead to different outcomes in different companies, including that the minimum wage may not be reached. It is often the case that the workers do not understand how the system works (MEC 2005:131).

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[11]   The basic basket contains 53 food and non-food products that are estimated to be the minimum consumption of a household of 6 members (Banco Central de Nicaragua 2009:44).

Work environment

MEC (2005:129) relates this last point about the salaries to the work environment and work productivity in general. They argue that such difficulties to understand the payments and incentives create a lack of motivation and productivity. However, the work environment is especially important for the productivity: "Experience has shown that companies with major productivity through manpower are those that provide comfortable and safe working conditions"[12] (MEC 2005:126). MEC discusses these conditions in the publications.

The questionnaires indicate a high turnover rate. In 2009, 48% of the women said that they had worked in other maquilas before (MEC 2009b:36), and 65% of the workers have been working less than one year in their current maquila. This indicates that there is a high turnover rate and that young women enter the maquila and often do not stay much longer than one or two years. The questions arising with these data is whether the women leave the work in the maquila voluntarily or whether they have to leave the maquila at some point because they are to slow/old/not any more suited for the work. From the scrutinised publications it is not possible to find an answer to the question why the women leave work as fast as they do. However, it indicates that the working environment is not safe: either the workers leave the company because they are not satisfied with the work and/or the salary, or they are fired frequently which probably leads to a lot of pressure and insecurities among the workers.

Also, the working hours have been examined in the Diagnostics. The weekly working hours according to the contract were usually 49 hours per week. However, 64% of the workers said they do between one and 16 extra hours per week[13]. MEC notes that these extra hours are important for the workers, since they are to be paid double and signify thus a considerable income generation (MEC 2009b:41-3). However, the companies do not always comply with this rule and pay extra hours like normal hours (MEC 2009b:45; 2008b:18) or as a part of production goals (MEC 2005:132). MEC furthermore adds that the long working days reduce the productivity of the workers.

Another issue concerning the working environment is how the work is organised. 74% of the workers said they work with production goals, and 46% of those said that these goals are either very high or unreachable. The consequences of not reaching the goals are different; the workers mostly named deduction of the salary (MEC 2009b:50-1).

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[12]   All the quotes from MEC publications as well as from the focus groups have been translated into English by myself.
[13]   The data shows big differences between the companies.

Social security and health

Workers in Nicaragua have to pay their monthly social security to the Nicaraguan Institute of Social Security (INSS) which covers certain costs in case of sickness, maternity, accidents and professional risks (INSS n.d.). According to the latest MEC Diagnostic, 97% of the workers are insured by INSS. However, workers have often problems to access a doctor or the hospital in case of sickness. The first reason is that some workers receive the so-called "colilla de seguro social", the document proving that the monthly insurance has been paid in order to access health care services, late and not as required on the first day they start work (MEC 2009b:60-1). Second, there is an economic dimension involved. Nearly 70% of the workers indicated that there are considerable deductions from their salary emerging from visits to the doctor. 21% of the workers stated that they get the absent time deduced from the salary; another 18% said that they get at least the payments for the whole day deduced. (MEC 2009b:66). Thus, they lose a considerable part of their income if they leave work for a doctor's appointment. Since their income is already very low, sickness puts workers into even more economic constraints.

Violence

Within its publications, MEC recurrently refers to two types of violence. First, there is violence at the working sites in the maquilas. In 2009, 23% of the workers indicated that they suffered verbal violence and/or psychological pressure. Another 3.6% said they suffered physical violence and 3.1% declared having experienced sexual harassment (MEC 2009b:114-7). In studies from 2008 (MEC 2008b:60-1, 130) the share of women having experienced violence goes up to 14.5% in case of sexual harassment and around 50% for verbal violence and psychological pressure[14]. The share of women that declared having experienced violence had risen between 2001 and 2005 (MEC 2006:135-6). There is thus psychological pressure on the workers as well as sexual harassment and physical violence in the maquilas.

Second, MEC refers to violence against women in general and within the family (cf. MEC 2009b:7, 12, 123; 2009a:111; 2001:42). As such, MEC affirms that domestic violence "is an important factor in the diagnostic", among others because it "affects the labour productivity" (MEC 2009b:7). The diagnostics include a chapter on violence at work and a chapter on domestic violence identifying the share of women who experience violence at home (MEC 2009b; 2008b; 2005; 2001). In the latest diagnostic, 15% of the workers acknowledged to experience domestic violence (2009b:123). MEC is very clear that the issue of domestic violence needs full attention and to be tackled (MEC 2009a:110-1; 2001:52).

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[14] These numbers differ considerably between different companies.

Reproductive work

The reproductive work is an important issue for the women working in the maquilas. MEC (2009a:69) argues that although women in Nicaragua have always been incorporated into the productive work, they have solely been responsible for the reproductive work, mainly the care of children and homework. Thus, the sexual division of labour is discriminating and hindering women. Women are assigned to the private space, while men dominate the public space. At the same time, certain labours are considered to be feminine like repetitive movements with high speed that require patience (MEC 2008a:1-2). In that sense, MEC argues similarly as Wright (2006) and Elias (2005) in their studies (see section 2).

The different publications show a high rate of working mothers. The 2009 Diagnostic found that 77% of the questioned workers were mothers, and of these 35% were lone mothers (MEC 2009b:29; cf. also MEC 2008a:9, 75, 138; 2008b:12). Also, 85% of the women questioned in 2009 said that they had persons that depend economically on them (MEC 2009b:35). MEC (2009b:34) concludes from this that "the woman is the essential pillar of the majority of the Nicaraguan households." On the other hand, 27% of the workers said that they receive financial support from relatives in Nicaragua or abroad (MEC 2009b:7). This indicates the importance of the family network and how much these women workers are implied in it both through reproductive and productive work.

Hand in hand with the responsibility for the reproductive work goes that women have less access to productive resources (land, companies, capital, and credit) than men. According to MEC (2008a:3), "this constitutes a vicious circle that keeps them removed from wealth and economic power."

The Role of the state and Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR)

MEC addresses the role of the Nicaraguan state and CSR. The organisation demands from companies to be aware of the crucial importance of human rights in the current situation of the globalised economy. They argue that the national economy just as the companies themselves would benefit from socially responsible behaviour by the companies (MEC 2009b:59). They have observed that the topic of CSR is still new in Nicaragua and that the companies operating in the EPZs do not fulfil with CSR, but risk with their behaviour the health and well-being of the Nicaraguan population in general. They criticised the companies for benefiting from the tax exemptions, but are not willing to give something back to the country (MEC 2009a:34).

The question around CSR also involves the role of the state. While they ask for a CSR, MEC acknowledges the importance of the state: "We recognise that there is an urgent and critical need to [...] assure that the governments are responding to the rights and the necessities of the women – in the labour market as well as in the home" (MEC 2009c:2). They ask to construct variables to measure the impacts of

corporate behaviour on the social and economic situation of those women which should then be used for the design of labour policies with gender equality (2009a:113). This hints to the conclusion that MEC still sees the state in a stronger responsibility to regulate the market than the companies to implement corporate social responsibility.

In different instances, MEC is very clear on what needs to be done by the state. In their latest Diagnostic, they put a focus on the judicial system and ask to strengthen state institutions in order to assure access to justice for the female workers (e.g. in case their maquila closes and their indemnity is hold back) (MEC 2009b:14). Thus, they do see the responsibility of the state to ensure the functioning of their institutions on behalf of its citizens.

5.1.3 Focus groups

I conducted two focus groups using the Human Security approach by UNDP which rests on seven pillars. I will present the results according to these seven pillars.

Economic security

The UNDP report (1994:25-6) states that economic security is constituted by a assured basic income "from productive and remunerative work, or in the last resort from some publicly financed safety net". This basic income is often threatened by job insecurity through temporary and insecure contracts. In the focus groups conducted, I found that there are two main problems for the workers in the maquila in the field of economic security: the salary is precarious and they constantly fear to lose their work. In both focus groups, the women said that the salary is insufficient to cover the basic needs of their families. The women in focus group 2 (FG2) argued that the salary is not appropriate considering how much and hard the work is. Exemplarily, they counted their expenses they have every day compared to the minimum wage. They said that the minimum wage is around 112 Cordoba a day, while they have expenses for food at work (around 45 Cordoba), a refreshment drink (5-6 Cordoba), the transport (10 Cordoba). Thus, already the basic expenses for getting to work and eat and drink there are at least 50 Cordoba. The promotoras from MEC in focus group 1 (FG1) compared the minimum wage to the costs of the basic basket arguing that the basic needs are getting more expensive every day, while the minimum wage is not raised accordingly. The workers in FG2 furthermore made direct linkage to health security, since they argued that they lose a considerable part of their income in case they are sick and have to leave work to go to the doctor.

The second issue is that the labour contracts the workers receive are insecure. In both focus groups, the women told that the companies easily fire women. The women from FG2 had a recent example where their company cancelled five workers from one day to the other regardless of the law which prescribes a cancellation notice of 15 days. According to them, the company does not care if a worker is good or bad, if s/he does not follow the strict rules, s/he gets fired immediately. Another example concerned the payments of vacation. The workers had one week of vacation which should have been paid, but on the day of payment (every 15 days) the company intended to pay only one week (excluding the week of vacation). When the workers rebelled against that, some of them got fired. The women from both FG1 and FG2 added that once fired it is quite difficult for the workers to find work in another maquila since the companies circulate lists with fired workers who are unacceptable to employ.

Thus, all participants agreed that there is no economic security for maquila workers.

Food security

According to UNDP (1994:27), food security entails physical and economic access to basic food. The focus groups show that the women working in the maquila lack economic access to food: "There is no nutrition neither for [the women] nor for their children. Why? Because the salary does not allow them to" (FG1). The women in FG1 and FG2 agreed that the nutrition the women can provide for their children and themselves is "very basic" and "cheap". One woman in FG2 told that "my girl drinks milk in the morning only when I got my payments recently, after that it is only a little coffee and bread." They have to accommodate with the means they have at hand, which means that they frequently only eat rice and beans – and sometimes they are hungry. The money is often not sufficient to buy healthier food like milk and vegetables.

Especially the promotoras in FG1 see strong relations to other aspects of human security: "If we stand economically bad, then there cannot be a good nutrition. And then our children have illnesses like anaemia or parasites. Why? Because we eat beans here." This shows the direct linkage between economic, food and health security. They do not earn enough to buy nutritious food and get therefore sick.

The women conclude that there is no food security because of lacking economic access. The workers did not mention that there is a lack of physical access.

Health security

Health problems and the access to health were part of the major themes during the focus groups. The UNDP report (1994:27-8) names as health security secured access to health care and the prevention of diseases.

Access to health care is formally given, but the women experience a wide array of problems if they need access. They have to ask for permission from the supervisor or company administration to go to the doctor. According to the women in the focus groups, permission is not always given. One woman in FG2 said she usually has to fight hard to get permission, also if she needs to go to the doctor with her child. In FG1 and FG2, the woman referred to a recent case where a woman with a respiratory sickness died after a permission to go to the doctor had been denied to her. The promotoras in FG1 also addressed problems to access medical check-ups. If workers get the permission, they usually only get a limited time, but they lose a lot of time with waiting in the clinics. They also addressed the issue of pregnant women who often miss their medical checkups. According to them, there have been different cases where women had a miscarriage in the maquila for failing to attend their checkups.

The women criticised the quality of the health care and that it is too expensive for them. "We pay a lot for social security, but we are not provided with good medication" (woman in FG2). The workers explained that some doctors prescribe expensive medication not covered by the insurance.

Another issue is the prevention of diseases. This issue was running through the whole discussion with the focus groups, not only when discussing the point of health security – either as the mentioned food-health nexus, or in connection to the (work) environment. Mostly mentioned were dust and fluff of the wool in the air that cause respiratory damages.

The workers thus stated that health security is not given.

Environmental security

UNDP (1994:28-30) names under environmental insecurities all issues that damage the environment humans are physically relying on, like water scarcity, deforestation and pollution. The promotoras in FG1 said that there are considerable environmental damages in and around the maquilas that also affect the workers. Inside the maquilas there is often a lot of dust and fluff from the wool. Outside, there is pollution. The women in both focus groups mentioned residual waters leaving the maquilas which they call "black waters" since they are heavily contaminated by chemicals from the factories. The workers are affected by this when they eat their lunch outside the factory where they are surrounded by this contamination and bad smell. Furthermore, the workers from FG2 named smoke from the waste that is burned, especially textiles and clothes that cannot be

sold. Within this category they referred to the work environment, like the high pressure within the maquilas and that some of the workers have to eat their lunch in full sun since the dining area is too small.

The women in FG1 related the environmental problems to health issues and referred to missing protection measures for the workers, like masks against the dust and fluff. The women in FG2 also referred to the fact that the chemicals, dust and smoke produce a lot of health problems.

Generally, the women stated that there is a lot of contamination and that there is thus no environmental security.

Personal security

Under personal security, the UNDP (1994:30-1) understands freedom from all sorts of physical violence like torture, war, street violence and domestic violence. According to the women in the focus groups, personal security is seriously constrained in Nicaragua: "No one is free of violence. Primarily, if we talk of the street, we do not have security. If we talk about the circle within the family, we also have problems. [...] There is violence in their homes, there is violence on the street, there is violence at work, violence of labour rights" (woman in FG1). The women in FG1 thus talked of a "generalised violence" affecting everyone. They relate this violence to patriarchy and machismo that even reach into the relations at work. The women in FG2 specified this by stating that abuse within the maquilas is more common towards women: "There is always abuse. – And even more with the women. Because if the supervisor is a man and he yells to a man, the man defends himself, while the woman is not doing that. It is rare that a woman is doing that." This quote reflects the gendered understandings of how women in contrast to men are expected to react to aggression which makes them more vulnerable to violence. All the women in FG2 had some experiences of violence, be it from the street, domestic violence or sexual harassment at work. How this violence affects the women's and workers' lives was described by one of the promotoras in FG1: "I was a supervisor at night and I left work at three or four in the morning towards a bus station. [...] We were in a group [...] and we went to stay overnight in the house of [...] the one who lived nearest. Because there were colleagues who lived quite far away. You cannot go home at that time."

When I asked at the end of our discussion which one of the discussed insecurities the women considered to be worst, the women in both groups agreed that it was the different types of violence they experience every day. There is thus no personal security for women in Nicaragua.

Community security

The UNDP report (1994:31) writes that "[m]ost people derive security from their membership in a group – a family, a community, an organization, a racial or ethnic group that can provide a cultural identity and a reassuring set of values." In contrast to the other areas, this pillar is not clearly defined. This influenced the group discussion. When I explained this definition to the participants of my focus groups, they had difficulties to relate to the concept. The women in FG2 referred to the insecurities within their municipalities (in Nicaragua, the village or quarter where you live is called 'comunidad', just as in 'seguridad de comunidad' – community security). When I asked them specifically if they feel more secure within their families, they said they would feel more secure against burglars if they don't have to be alone in the house. The promotoras in FG1, when I asked them for their relation to MEC and if that makes them feel more secure, argued that they feel more secure and acknowledged through all the workshops and trainings they have received. Those gave them important capacities that help them during their work as promotoras and to get recognised within their communities. I also asked about the role of trade unions and if they are able to provide security to the workers, but the promotoras in FG1 answered that the existing unions are so-called "white unions" which means that they mainly defend the rights of the employer.

Thus, the women had difficulties in relating to the concept of community security. However, seeing the group discussions in a holistic way, it becomes clear that the family plays an important role for these women. There is an economic dimension involved as is reflected in these quotations concerning the salary: "If a woman is alone [...] I can imagine that it is very difficult [for her]. Maybe a person that has a partner, we have the salary of our partner as well, we help each other" (woman in FG2). "And it is true, with the salary that we earn I survive with my daughter and with my studies, because I have the support from my parents. If I was alone, I would not study" (woman in FG2). The family, especially the mothers of the workers, are also important when it comes to childcare. For most of the women in FG2, it is their mothers who take care of the children while they are working. This shows that the family forms an important part of community security, even though it needs to be enquired why the women could not relate to the concept. There was maybe a need to further clarification, or, the importance of the family network is so obvious to them that they did not consider it in their answers.

Political security

For the last of the seven pillars, political security, the UNDP report (1994:32-3) relates to the freedom from human rights violations. When I explained this to the promotoras in FG1, their first answer was that there is no political security and they pointed to the labour policies by the government: "I believe that if the state was really preoccupied with the people, the citizenship, people like us who need

work [...] they would look for ways to attract other types of investment into the country which is not EPZ." They did not relate to any specific human right that is constrained, but rather argued that due to this ineffective labour and economic policy, there is no political security. This indicates an understanding of a strong responsibility of the state towards the workers. The women in FG2 also argued in a more holistic way than only focused on human rights, but rather discussed current political processes in Nicaragua. One of the women argued that there is no political security, since there is no help or support towards the people from parts of the government. She thought that the political elite is divided and this hinders the country to take a route towards a future with more well-being for the people. However, this caused considerable discussion among the women. The other women argued that the situation and the help that is given to the people have improved since Daniel Ortega from the Sandinistas is president again (since 2006). They referred to different small projects that have been initiated since and improved their lives in very concrete ways. They were however concerned about how these helps are given out. They felt that the people responsible for giving them out help their friends or whom they like, but not to those who need it.

The women concluded that there is no political security; however, they interpreted it quite differently than the UNDP concept of human security. They referred to political security with a strong emphasis on economic policies and how the political elite is supporting the people.

5.2 Analysis

In this section I analyse and discuss the results that have been presented above. I identified the three most pressing insecurities as violence, economy and health. I furthermore discuss a few other issues that are important considering the role of female maquila workers and have to be taken into account when thinking about how to enhance the human security of female maquila workers from a gender perspective. These issues include gender essentialism, discourses about the economy and the notion of solidarity. Finally, I will reflect on the usefulness of the human security concept.

Human insecurities: violence, economy and health

The women in both focus groups stated that the *violence* they experience every day represents their biggest insecurity. One of the promotoras in FG1 summarised the whole problem:

> If the woman would not experience domestic violence [...], she would not have to go through all these things that happen to her. Additionally, she would not have to adopt this work because she would have the empowerment of herself and the capacity to think that she can be different from those in the EPZ and she would not enter into this role of abuse and she could solve the daily life at a different manner.

Thus, she argues that this violence constrains women in leading their life in a fashion they choose themselves. Once the women fall into a circle of violence, they are disempowered and not able to take their own decisions. If one follows this argumentation, one has to believe that every women working in a maquila experiences domestic violence. This is certainly not the case. Still, according to an official study from INIDE (2008:376), about 20% of the women in Nicaragua experience physical violence. For women living in a relationship, the share was with 33% much higher[15]. It is also surprising that in a discussion on maquilas, the women in two focus groups agreed that the violence is their biggest insecurity[16]. This shows the magnitude of the problem and the urgency to it. The cited argument of the promotora illustrates that this violence has more consequences than just physical injuries, but affects the life of affected women considerably. This also runs through nearly all the publications of MEC. They argue that domestic and sexual violence affects the labour productivity of the workers (MEC 2009b:7). During the conference, MEC's director repeatedly referred to violence against women and its consequences. Thus, the different material shows that violence against women is a serious security problem for the women in Nicaragua. This violence can be found in different spaces (at home, at work, on the street) and includes physical, sexual and psychological violence.

The second most pressing insecurity was within the realm of *economic security*. When we started the focus group, one woman in FG2 said concerning economic security "this is the most insecure that exists". Evaluating the discussion later, they ranked violence as the biggest insecurity, but added that the economy is also very insecure. The insecurity in economic terms is shown by the fact that most of the insecurities in other pillars of the human security concept were related to economic issues. The women are only able to provide a very basic nutrition with their salary and they have difficulties to cover costs for medical treatments and medicine. Additionally, they restrain themselves from going to the doctor in order not to lose working time and salary. Talking about environmental security, they related to the protection measures they need at work, which is not always provided and which is too expensive for them to buy themselves. Concerning political security, they argued that it does not exist because they think that there is not enough support for them, also in economic terms, by the government.

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[15] Such numbers are usually underestimated; high numbers of unreported cases are estimated.

[16] The topic of violence has been high in the media for a couple of time during the time of this study. One of the women in FG2 talked about "all the murdered women in the news". It is possible that this has influenced the high ranking of personal security. Nevertheless, as mentioned, all of the women have experienced some form of violence which supports their argument.

Health is the third most significant insecurity. The problems with sicknesses caused by work as well as the access to the health care system were especially present in FG1. This might be influenced by the fact that one of the promotoras herself had experienced becoming incapacitated for work due to sickness. However, the other material also hints to how much health security is constrained for the workers. The women in FG2 had different health problems that were difficult to solve for them. The topic had also been prominently placed during the conference, especially with a focus on the work environment as cause of diseases and how to prevent them. The Diagnostics by MEC (2009b; 2009d; 2008a; 2008b; 2006; 2005) covered issues concerning the work environment that may lead to diseases (e.g. working hours, breaks, production goals, etc.) as well as the access to the health system. As mentioned, the problems to access the health system relate to economic reasons as well as to missing permissions from part of the companies.

Essentialising women's role

> When we educate a woman, we educate a family. This is not the case with men (Conference 2013)
>
> If you give work to a woman, you guarantee the survival of a family (MEC 2009b:34).

Both sentences imply certain ideas about gender roles and represent the essentialised understanding of women and men that can often be found in Nicaragua. In this case, it is implied that women use their education and their income for the families, while men are using it solely for themselves. Such kinds of essentialism were represented on the conference, in the publications by MEC and in the focus groups. Frequently, there are small sentences like "because we [women] are weaker" (FG2, similar statement in FG1) and "men are more hot-headed" (FG2) indicating that women or men do have 'by nature' certain characteristics.

Challenges towards these traditional role models can be found. The promotoras in FG1 argued that women are challenging these essentialised roles when it comes to education and labour. The workers are – according to the promotoras – demanding technical careers and more options to get an education within for women non-traditional fields.

However, especially the women's role as mother is often seen in essentialised terms. In FG2, it became clear that their children are the biggest concern for the women. They are working that hard and accept the bad labour conditions in order to secure their children' well-being: "If not unemployed, then you work in the EPZ. I prefer the EPZ of the two. Because in the EPZ, I have at least the insurance for me and my girl" (woman in FG2). Another woman in FG2 stated that "sometimes it hurts me because you want that your children are fine". The women

in FG2 also expressed that they have to accommodate to their means. They do that by passing on what they have to their children. They thus expressed that they make a lot of sacrifices mainly for the sake of their children, not for themselves. One of the promotoras in FG1 similarly said that "because if they are lone mothers, to maintain their household, to feed their children and give them a bit of well-being within what their salary allows, they forget about their own health." The following quotation from FG1 also shows how much women are tied to their role as mother: "So we women in Nicaragua are the fundamental pillar of the society, we are the backbone of our households, but at the cost many sacrifices. [...] we leave our children the meals, leave them the washed clothes, --- leave them there and search for someone to look after them". On the one hand, this ascription of the mother role can be seen as a social construction, however, it also implies that in reality it is the women who do the reproductive work. It has become clear within the material that this reproductive work and the homework additionally to the work in the maquila are a heavy burden for the women.

From a gender perspective, this essentialising is dangerous since it risks naturalising differences and in the long run also inequalities. Assuming that women are 'by nature' more apt to do the reproductive work at home leaves no room to challenge these traditional roles (cf. Crompton/Lyonette 2005:616; Heilmann 2011). As discussed above, gender theory argues that these roles are socially constructed and thus not given by nature. The question is then, how can we address and challenge this essentialism from a gender perspective but still take into account the women's attitudes and wishes as is intended in this thesis? I will come back to this in the next section.

Discourses: the economy, the nation, solidarity

Considering that this thesis deals with the role of female maquila workers in the GPE, it is important to consider how MEC and the women discuss the Nicaraguan economy and their own role in it. Within this discussion, I identified three issues: the 'non-alternatives discourse[17]', the 'national discourse' and the notion of solidarity.

In its 'Economic Agenda' (2009a), MEC includes one chapter on an analysis of the country's economy, drawing on gender theory and arguing that such analyses need to include power relations between women and men because gender equality is inevitably tied to social equality. They argue in this instance thus against essentialism and challenge the assertion that gender differences are 'natural'. They furthermore argue that gender needs to be taken into account for future policies since such policies and their effects cannot be gender neutral (MEC 2009a:1-12). Concerning the maquilas, they address the power relations in the supply chain

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[17]   I understand ‚discourse' in this context as "a particular way of talking about and understanding the world (or an aspect of the world)" (Winther Jørgensen/Phillips 2002:1). Thus, they represent certain patterns or motives to talk about a subject.

where foreign companies are able to put the companies producing in Nicaragua under pressure to meet the demands of the market in time (MEC 2005:134). Connected to that, they refer to the globalisation which offers opportunities to create new employment, but also needs to be regulated "to avoid unfair international competition; due to differences in resources and because it is expected that the exports from developing countries to developed ones concentrate on goods that require intensive use of unqualified labour" (MEC 2005:134). Thus, although not explicitly state, they followed the same critical reasoning concerning the buyer-driven supply chain as has been done in this thesis.

However, a contradictory discourse on EPZs and possible alternatives emerges within this discussion. MEC repeatedly states in different publications that most of the women in the maquila do not have any other option than to go work in a maquila since there simply are no other permanent and formal jobs to be found (MEC 2009a:45; 2009b:126). This discourse was also represented in the focus groups: "At least there are EPZs. Because when Daniel [Ortega] was not there, the zones were all closed. –All of them closed. [...] –The problem is that it is horrible and everything, but we have at least this opportunity" (FG2). In FG1, one woman argued that the only other option to find work was migration. MEC also argued that "the EPZs have converted into an important economic agent and into one of the axes of the development of the nation, generating an important basis of formal labour, representing about 25% of the contributors to the social security of the country" (MEC 2008b:7). Furthermore, they point to the importance of the maquilas in giving work to women, especially those without or little education (2009d:39). From this point of view, the EPZs and maquilas are a driving factor of the Nicaraguan economy and offer work for many women.

At the same time, while it is purported that there is no alternative to the work in maquilas, the maquilas are not presented as an alternative either: "It results that this sector does neither offer decent work, nor labour stability and income security for the Nicaraguan workers" (MEC 2009a:45). They even question the possibility of maquilas to contribute to the country's development (MEC 2009a:34). MEC thus criticises the economic system that bases in their point of view on the exploitation of the Nicaraguan population, since the country attracts foreign investment with cheap labour. However, MEC itself joins the discourse of international competition by hinting to the fear that the "economic giant China" is threatening the maquila sector in Central America (MEC 2009a:45) and by arguing that "the globalised world requires major efforts to increase the productivity, quality and competitiveness in order not to collapse on the globalised market" (MEC 2005:33).

This *'no-alternatives discourse'* is connected to what I call the '*national discourse*'. During the conference, different speakers highlighted the wealth that is produced for the country through the work in maquilas. They also touched upon the costs that are caused for the country by e.g. the many sicknesses and health issues of the workers. Thus, they claim that the work by the women in the

maquilas is not adequately valued since the work is so important for the country, but does not pay off sufficiently. However, this discourse was very much centred on the country and the nation as can be seen in the following quotation: "The existence of a EPZ regime is of *national* interest, with the aim of promoting employment generation, foreign investment, export of non-traditional products, adquisition of technology, and the reactivation of *our* external trade" (MEC 2005:34, my own emphasis). During the conference, the "sacrifices for the country" by the workers were mentioned. Also, the conference started with the singing of the Nicaraguan national anthem which contrasted with the topic of the conference itself and its aim to construct a collective agenda for maquila workers within Central America.

Within all the material, however, it emerges that the women workers lack a sense of *solidarity* within the present economy. During the colloquium, MEC officially thanked all its supporting institutions, using among others the sentence "Solidarity does not have a price." In their publications, they highlight the importance of the "solidary family network" (MEC 2009b:7) and, finally, they argue that new strategies are needed within the global supply chain, strategies that are "fairer and more solidary" (MEC 2005:33). The promotoras in FG1 argued that the economy is not fair, since their salary is so low that it does not even cover basic expenses. The women in FG2 did not use the word solidarity or justice, but they recurrently related to the term 'to be in need' ('tener necesidad'). Talking about the fear of being fired, they argued that they can never be sure they get to keep their jobs because the companies fire people regardless of how good they work or "if one is in need. Because if you work there because you are in need, you bear with everything. That does not interest them. […] One has to work as they want. If not, they cancel you." Also, discussing political security and the different aid programmes by the government, the women argued that it often happens that the people responsible for giving out the aid only help those people they know and/or like, but not those who are in need. This shows that the workers demand an economy and society that base on the principles of solidarity and justice. This can be linked back to theories of the social contract and of justice. The workers expect from their government a politics to the benefit of those who are worst off. This vision of more fairness and solidarity extends to the economy in general and the behaviour of the companies producing in Nicaragua.

Responsibility

Seeing the state as the main provider of security can be seen critical from a postcolonial perspective (cf. Draude/Neuweiler 2010). Since the premise of this thesis is that the state should be the foremost provider of security, I inquired the question on whose responsibility it is to provide human security in the focus groups in order to meet this critique. In the focus groups, I referred to all the different stakeholders that are involved in the maquila industry (the workers, the company, the state, the consumers) when asking the question of responsibility.

The answers were a bit different in the two groups, but in both groups the state together with the companies were identified as being the actors that ought to be responsible. For the promotoras in FG1, it was the state in the first place, and the companies in the second place. For the women in FG2, it was the other way round. However, the women in FG2 also clearly stated that the state has to be on their side to defend their rights: "The government hast to fight for the rights, for our security." They explicitly connected that to the fact that they worked in a company from foreign capital. Their government should ensure that the workers as citizens of Nicaragua have gains from their work, and not only the foreign company. They named the company first since they are gaining so much and do not hand that further down to the workers. They compared in this instance how much they earn a month with how much the manufactured pieces cost in the U.S.

The promotoras argued that the state is responsible because it let the companies into the country in the first place. Thus, just as the workers in FG2, they referred to an imagined contract that the government has with its citizens that implies that it has to provide security. They ask the government to elaborate laws concerning the workers' security based on consultations with the women who work there.

MEC called for the state to strengthen its institutions so that it is able to execute the existing labour laws. They make recommendations to different state institutions on what needs to be done in order to enhance the workers' situation (cf. MEC 2009a:104-19). However, they also demand from the companies to implement a CSR that benefits the workers, the country as well as the companies themselves.

In this sense, the postcolonial critique has to be rejected since the women do see the responsibility by the state to provide for their security. Although they also see the companies in their responsibility, they argue in favour of better controls by the state and a stronger state towards the companies. Interestingly, the promotoras hinted within this discussion to different levels within the state referring to successful projects in the municipality of Ciudad Sandino in terms of transport. Thus, it has to be seen what can be done on the local level rather than on the national one.

Human security as methodological tool

To conclude my analysis, I will reflect on the usefulness of the human security concept. The human security framework proved to be a fluid approach to assess the needs of the women working in the maquila since it was able to give room for different interpretations and meanings by them. This has been seen in the discussion of political security in the focus groups where the women described their own understanding of the category. In this sense, the human security framework with the seven pillars developed by UNDP has proved to be a useful tool to bring the perceived insecurities to the forefront. Using a gender lens for the

analysis has, as intended, highlighted issues of gender relations and has been able to bridge the division between the public and private. This can be seen by the discussion of violence: The workers' arguments showed that the violence that constrains their lives considerably is found in the private as well as in the public space.

However, it is necessary to discuss some of the pillars. The women in the focus groups had problems to relate to the idea of community security. The UNDP description of this pillar is rather fluffy, thus, further clarification is necessary. Also, relating to "cultural identity and a reassuring set of values" (UNDP 1994:31) is a social scientific way of explaining the world. An easier explanation is required. After all, the analysis has identified at least one of these communities that is an essential and supporting network (the family) and it is possible that further inquiry identifies even more of such communities. This pillar should therefore not be completely discarded, but reformulated and explained so that people without higher education are able to relate to it and discuss it.

Additionally, it is possible to establish another pillar, especially in the context of labour. The promotoras in FG1 used the expression "seguridad laboral" (labour security) several times. They were mainly referring to the labour conditions that touch upon different areas: they included the work environment that often causes diseases for the workers, like the working hours, the production goals and repetitive movements. The psychological pressure and sexual harassment in the maquilas have also been discussed by the workers. However, the missing protection measures which have been discussed by the women in FG2 under environmental security can also be taken into this category. Thus, labour security touches upon issues from health security, personal security as well as environmental security. I argue that this is more than an interconnection between these areas, but constitutes a whole new dimension. Taking up labour security as an 8th pillar would reflect the importance of the working place as another space where human life is taking part for a considerable amount of time. The workers in the maquilas often spend more than half of the day in the maquila. The dimension of labour security acknowledges this and also how important good labour conditions are, not only to prevent diseases, but for the general well-being of a person.

It has to be added, that the concept can be problematic by being too much focused on the individual. As has been seen in MEC's publications, one of the biggest burdens for the women is the reproductive work and how they can combine it with paid work. Although this was mentioned in the focus groups, it is not necessarily reflected in the seven pillars. Thus, the method with which one inquires human security is essential. It cannot be used like a check list. The focus groups have been an appropriate method to capture the fluidity of human security, to be sensitive to different topics and to identify issues beyond the seven pillars.

5.3 Concluding remarks

While the women in the focus groups agreed that they lack security in all of the seven pillars, violence, economy and health have been identified as main insecurities for the maquila workers. From the different material studied here, it has become clear that the women see the state, together with the companies, as the main actors invested with the responsibility to protect them and enhance safe working conditions as well as their well-being. I have furthermore identified different issues that became apparent in the material. There are discourses concerning the economy and the nation. I also highlighted the essentialised understanding of gender roles that were expressed in the publications and in the focus groups and the problems attached to that. However, it has to be noted that none of these discourses is uncontested. There are many contradictions.

Such contradictions were most present in the publications by MEC. The influence of neoliberal discourses is very clear in these publications. They often argue in terms of productivity; e.g. that violence or bad labour conditions constrain the labour productivity. The workers, on the other hand, seemed to be less influenced in this way and focused on the human being. As such, one of the promotoras in FG1 said: "we demand that it is complied with what the women ask for, *because they are human beings*." Both MEC and the focus groups hinted to another kind of economy that is rooted in justice and solidarity.

6 Policy implications

In this part, I contrast my findings from the analysis as well as the workers' own ideas on how to secure their lives with policy proposals on how to include women into the labour market by Barrientos and Kabeer (2004). They have argued that women's incomes are often crucial for a household's survival and, therefore, there is a need to find effective policies to enhance women's integration into the global production in more equitable ways. They especially ask how the combined productive and reproductive roles of women can be addressed and how female employment can be enhanced in terms of increasing opportunities and quality of women's work in global exports (Barrientos/Kabeer 2004:153). I scrutinise their arguments by situating them within the human security approach and by contrasting them with the worker's opinions on how to address their insecurities. I structure this part following Barrientos and Kabeer's proposals: childcare, education, international law, organisation and social floor. Additionally, I address issues that have not been considered by Barrientos and Kabeer.

Childcare

First, Barrientos and Kabeer (2004:154) argue that the old breadwinner model needs to be replaced by a multiple breadwinner household model. "[...] women's continued responsibility for domestic work and childcare suggests that they need policies that will support them in their dual responsibilities". Therefore, *childcare facilities* need to be developed.

As identified in the material, the reproductive work and how to combine it with paid work is a heavy burden for the women working in the maquilas. MEC found out that a high share of women working in the maquilas are lone mothers. Therefore, it needs to be considered how they can be supported in their double role. The question of childcare facilities was differently debated. While MEC was clearest in criticising this double burden, they did not touch upon the possibility to create more childcare facilities. They referred mainly to the "Law on maternal and paternal responsibility" (MEC 2009a:97; 111). This law from 2007 promotes the shared responsibility of both the mother and the father towards their child[18] (LEY

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[18] The law understands under "responsible paternity and maternity the link that couples fathers and mothers to their children, which includes rights and obligations, exercised conjointly

No.623). MEC argues that state institutions as well as women's organisations need to start information campaigns in order to promote compliance with the law. It is however questionable if such a statement about the father's responsibility can have a significant influence on the fathers to take over considerable part of the reproductive work without any further support. There is a need for incentives for the fathers to stay at home with their children, like for example parental leave in which both mother and father need to stay at home for some time in order to receive the financial support for the whole time.

Within the focus groups, there were different opinions about the usefulness of childcare facilities. With the promotoras in FG1, I discussed the question of childcare facilities connected to a kindergarten which can be found in one of the EPZs. The women argued that "this lets the women work calmly" since they don't have to worry about their children. However, this kindergarten only offers places for very few children. With the workers in FG2, I discussed the topic more in general. Their direct answer to the question if a kindergarten for their children would be a help for them was "No." They argued that they would not send their children there, because they would not have the confidence that they are in good care. According to the workers, there is a lot of abuse of children in Nicaragua, even in schools and kindergartens. They had most confidence to leave the children with someone of the family, mostly their own mothers. They added however a practical reason for the rejection of childcare facilities: "If we have the children in a kindergarten, we have to get up very early, because we start early at work. – At five in the morning we have to be there. – We would have to drop the children early. We have [...] to give them their food. – And pass by [the kindergarten] to bring them. – That is spending double as well." They thus argued with time pressure and having to spend double for all the transportation. Instead, they favoured the model of getting a small financial support in order to pay their mothers or a nanny respectively.

There is, thus, a demand to address the childcare necessities. The question is: How can the practical requirements be met – which means acknowledging that it is the women who are responsible for the childcare – and this sole responsibility for the children by the mother be challenged? This question reflects the tension between practical and strategic gender needs. Practical gender needs are formulated based on the concrete conditions of women, whereas strategic gender needs "are formulated from the *analysis of women's subordination to men*" (Moser 1989:1803, emphasis in original). A strategic gender planning would then enhance a renegotiation of childcare in the households. Considering the preferences of the women in the focus groups, the challenge is to combine practical with strategic gender needs. I argue that by meeting the practical needs, a first step in terms of strategic needs can be done. The kindergarten in the EPZ seems a possible alternative to meet the working schedule of the women as well as the mistrust of

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and responsibly in the care, alimentation, protection, living, education, recreation, and medical, physical and mental attention of their children, with the aim to achieve their integral development" (LEY No.623, Art. 2).

the women towards the existing childcare facilities because they are close by and have the possibility to pass by if something happens[19].

This alternative can also be a first step in order to unravel the role of women as mothers in Nicaragua, since it is other people taking care of the children than the mother or the grandmother. Since there are not only working women in the EPZs, there is also a possibility to promote that fathers can bring their children as well which would again challenge the reproductive role of the mother[20]. However, this requires considerable investments into childcare facilities and into qualified staff. Considering that these facilities would be built within the EPZ which is a space that can be considered as being outside the national territory in some terms (e.g. regarding the payments of taxes) it is unclear if that has to be done by the government or the companies.

In terms of strategic needs, the idea of the workers in FG2 to receive a financial support for the childcare does offer possibilities to challenge some traditional notions about childcare. Most of all, it can contribute to challenge the understanding of reproductive work and childcare being unpaid and unremunerated. It might also enhance the women's empowerment if it is them who receive this support – which at the same time means purporting the fact, that it is the women who are responsible for the childcare. However, it cannot be secured that the money is actually used to pay for the childcare.

Thus, the policy implication for the Nicaraguan state is to enhance childcare facilities in or close to the EPZs and to promote the role of men as fathers, e.g. by information campaigns and financial incentives.

Education

Second, Barrientos and Kabeer (2004:156) argue that investment in the long-term accumulation of human capital of women workers must be made. They argue for greater education efforts for women because they observed that within the manufacturing sector women are replaced by men once factories move up the value chain or enter into higher technology. They relate that back to gender disparities within the educational systems.

The claim for more and better education is in line with all the material. The education the Nicaraguan women demand is very diverse: On the conference, the workers mentioned better access to education, but also educational centres for the

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[19]   Barrientos and Kabeer (2004:155) give a successful example how a women's NGO in Bangladesh convinced employer's to support this model with different arguments like e.g. less absenteeism by the workers

[20]   Moser (1989:1806) argues that in order to challenge the reproductive role of the mother, nurseries should be located at the father's workplace. This overlooks that not all father are (formally) working and that there are many lone mothers and could therefore only partially address the female workers' needs.

children of workers, human rights workshops for supervisors in the maquilas as well as trainings for workers to be able to work in unions. MEC (2009a:104-5) argued in line with Barrientos and Kabeer for more investment into human capital, thus focusing on children's education. They demand that school material as well as nutrition within the schools be provided. The women in FG2 expect more opportunities to study at university, which includes access to credit so that they are able to pay for university courses. They thus do not aim for the higher technology manufacturing – which only has a small share in the manufacturing industry in Nicaragua (see section 2b) –, but rather want to find better jobs or have their own business. In this sense, they see their occupation in the maquila as temporary and as a help to finance their studies.

But this requires more opportunities for better jobs. As the women and MEC (2009a:45; 2009b:126) stated, there are few alternatives to the maquilas in Nicaragua, even for those who have studied. The women in FG2 argued for access to credit which allows them to open a small business (such as a tailor or a barber shop). They even connected that to the possibility to stay home with their children, if they are able to run the business from home: "It is something for you. You are at home, work and care for the children." MEC also promotes the support of small and medium ventures (MEC 2009a:115). The promotoras in FG1 argued that many women they work with demand more vocational education and the possibility to access technical careers. According to them, the government mainly offers traditional educations like baking and dressmaking. This is in line with arguments by Barrientos and Kabeer (2004:156) who demand the promotion of women's participation "in more technical subjects that will equip them better for the market place." While their argument can be situated within a market-centred discourse, I highlight that this measure helps to challenge gender stereotypes.

Thus, investment in education needs to be coupled with programmes that capitalise the women and give them opportunities to open small businesses. There are already credit programmes by the women which could be used to aim specifically at women, 'Hambre Cero' ("Zero Hunger"), 'Usura Cero' ("Zero Usury") as well as a bank to favour small and medium producers ('Banco Produzcamos')[21]. However, as the workers in FG2 mentioned, the selection of participants is often intransparent. Furthermore, the workers expect from the government to attract other, better investment that is able to offer them more decent working conditions.

Additionally, the women as well as MEC (2009a:107) have argued to integrate gender issues in formal education. Considering the prevailing essentialising attitude, this can be an important tool to change gendered attitudes. This would be a measure that is not only aimed at the workers, but to the general population. As

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[21]   So far, only Hambre Cero is specifically targeted to women while Usura Cero and Banco Produzcamos do not have a gender component. However, Hambre Cero targets the rural population (thus, excluding maquila workers) and aims to reduce the family's poverty (IMF 2010:16, 19, 36). It has to be added that there are challenges towards a rapid capitalisation of women, for an overview of the critique see Peterson and Runyan (2010:189-90).

the women on the conference claimed, it is important to start with such education even for children.

The Nicaraguan state thus needs to strengthen resources within the educational sector, especially with a focus on gender issues. The education the women ask for is very diverse, should support them in their technical capacities in order to get better jobs, and needs to be coupled with programmes to give them access to productive resources.

International law

Third, Barrientos and Kabeer (2004:157-9) argue that the implementation and enforcement of ILO conventions on national level is necessary. They see, however, a danger of pushing the informal economy. Also, ILO conventions provide only the minimum standards and need to be contextualised in national law.

I did not discuss this issue with the workers and it did not come up at the conference, but MEC's publications demand compliance with international conventions (MEC 2009a:113; 118). Again, they see the government in the responsibility to guarantee this compliance. As such, the proposal is quite straightforward and can possibly enhance the human security of the workers especially in terms of work environment, considering for example Convention Nr. 1 regarding the working hours (ILO 1919) or Convention Nr. 131 on the fixing of the minimum wage (recommending to fix the minimum wage among others according to living costs and to establish appropriate sanctioning mechanisms in case of non-compliance) (ILO 1970). However, as Barrientos and Kabeer (2004) mention, these can only provide a minimum standard.

Organisation

As a fourth point, Barrientos and Kabeer (2004:159-60) stress the need for organised collective action by the workers. Since women are usually underrepresented in unions, there is a need to strengthen the organisational capacities of women, so that they are able to enter unions (which are traditionally male-dominated and therefore often miss 'women's issues').

This claim was also made by the workers on the conference. Yet, unions are not very often mentioned in MEC's publications and during FG1 with the promotoras it became clear that they mistrust the unions in Nicaragua. According to them, the unions in the EPZs are all 'white unions' that rather support the employers than the employees. However, as Barrientos and Kabeer mention, newer forms of collective action are gaining importance. They name the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) in India as an example, and I add MEC as another successful

example of women's organisations. The high-profile guests they could attract for the conference (members of the National Assembly, a former minister, etc.) reflect how well established MEC is by now and which institutions it is able to reach. Different testimonies in their publications show how they successfully negotiated with companies for liquidations etc. (MEC 2009c:32-8). Also, one of the workers in FG2 explained that MEC helped her to get her liquidation from her former company. For the Nicaraguan state, this implies that it should take such newer forms of organising – especially from women – seriously and support them to strengthen their credibility.

However, there are a few problems involved. One of them relates to issues of working hours and reproductive work. The amount of hours the women work as well as the burden of reproductive work constrain the women's time for additional, voluntary work considerably. Thus, a strengthening of women's capacities in organisational work and of their share in collective action organisations requires action in these areas as well, in order to give those women more time resources. Furthermore, MEC is still dependent on the financial support from external donors. In the long run, a way must be found for such entities to be self-sustaining. This relates to economic aspects of the women workers. In a state where they can hardly afford a good nutrition for their children, only few of them will be willing or able to pay for services provided by MEC or for a membership.

For the Nicaraguan state, this implies that it needs to strengthen civil society organisations on behalf of the workers and especially support women for being able to enter them.

The idea of a social floor

Fifth, Barriento and Kabeer (2004:160) argue for the introduction of a social floor like a basic citizens' income, microfinance programs, basic foods, state subsidized health insurance, or public works program. Their idea is to overturn the traditional division between formal/informal work and traded/non-traded sectors. When focusing on maquila workers, however, there is an easier way to address the economic insecurities by the workers: by increasing the minimum wage and establishing a *regional minimum wage*.

MEC (2005:4) has argued that "the labour costs transform into a central factor for the decision on the localisation of activities and sectors; in this way, countries that seem immensely backward can attract sectors as diverse as informatics (assembly of microprocessors) and clothing (sewing)." Therefore, MEC asks the government to adjust the minimum wage to the Central American level (2009a:117). Considering that there is already farreaching economic cooperation between the countries of the region as well as attempts to unify the area economically (with e.g. CAFTA), the labour costs may be the determining factor in the region and can lead to a race to the bottom. A regional minimum wage would annul this

competition. So far, Nicaragua offers the cheapest labour in Central America (see Appendix III). Raising the minimum wage can address the economic insecurity of the workers which has been identified as one of the most pressing issues. This needs also be coupled to macroeconomic stability (cf. MEC 2009a:104) since the raises of the minimum wage have often partially been eaten up by inflation (see Appendix IV).

The Nicaraguan state can aim at establishing a regional minimum wage with other Central American countries in order to a) minimise competition between these countries on the grounds of cheap labour and b) address the economic insecurity of the workers by reaching a level that covers the basic needs for a family.

Thus, while Barrientos and Kabeer (2004) address important issues for the workers, this discussion shows that the answer on how to tackle their insecurities is not easy to find. With their proposals, they address issues of economic security and community security as well as issues that are not explicitly categorised in the UNDP human security approach (reproductive work, education, labour rights based on international law). However, they miss two important insecurities. The everyday violence experienced by the women has been named as worst. It hampers the women's empowerment and needs to be tackled by the government. The analysis has shown how all-embracing this violence is. UNIFEM (2008:9) argues that "violence against women and girls persists because of structural gender inequality and discrimination". Thus, apart from responding to cases of gender-based violence, it is necessary to address these inequalities. UNIFEM (2008) identifies four priority areas: implementation and upscaling of national commitments, aligning of national rights with Human Rights, addressing sexual violence in conflict and post-conflict situations and intensify the focus on prevention and the work with men and young people. It is not possible to provide a thorough discussion on the state of the country's work against violence at this place. Nevertheless, a few comments can be made.

In January 2012, Nicaragua has approved a law that is specifically designed to address violence against women (Integral Law against Violence against Women). This can be seen within the first priority area and the upscaling of national law. Although the law was received positively by women's organisations (among others MEC, cf. MEC 2012), there has been critical awareness that the implementation of the law is decisive. And only recently, the law has come under debate and critique by conservative forces. It is thus essential that the government stays committed to implement such laws and also to implement international conventions.

Prevention work in Nicaragua seems, from my observations, so far to be limited to the awareness raising campaigns carried out by women's organisations using different kinds of media as well as public spaces (e.g. manifestations on International Women's Day) (cf. Fehling/Fehling 2011). At this point, it can be

referred back to the investments that need to be made in education and the possibility to work on the issue of gender-based violence with young people in school years. The promotoras in FG1 also referred to self-defence courses that the MEC provided to workers and other women experiencing violence. According to the promotoras, these courses help the women to defend themselves in case of aggression, empower them and make them feel more secure.

Another insecurity that has not been addressed by Barrientos and Kabeer is health. The workers and MEC repeatedly stressed the missing prevention as well as hindered access to health systems. They also argued that health services are of bad quality. The government needs thus to improve the quality and improve access to health systems for the workers. This dimension is strongly related to economic security since workers restrain themselves from going to the doctor in order to not lose a whole day's income. Thus, legal protection for sick workers as well as for caregivers needs to be improved and implemented. Furthermore, the government needs to strengthen labour security and protection measures for the workers in order to prevent diseases. This must be coupled with higher quality in inspections. The women in the focus groups argued that inspections are announced to the companies. These prepare the workers then for the inspections, by e.g. equipping them with the required protection measures. Also, as one of the women in FG2 experienced herself, the workers are threatened to speak well about the labour conditions in case they are interrogated by the inspectors.

To conclude, it is clear that Barrientos and Kabeer (2004) address important issues and some of them are able to address insecurities that the maquila workers in Nicaragua experience every day. However, as the empirical material of this thesis has shown, there are insecurities beyond working place related issues that are overlooked, but constrain the women's security considerably. These insecurities are highly interrelated and need therefore to be addressed holistically. Most importantly, education has been pointed out as an important tool to address different issues, from gender-based violence to formal studies and training in order for them to enter better jobs.

7 Conclusion

This thesis has identified the insecurities that female maquila workers in Nicaragua experience every day based on observations, text analysis of a women's organisation's publications as well as focus groups. I focused on gendered insecurities and the aim was to derive policy implications for the Nicaraguan state on how to enhance those women's security. I contrasted my findings with policy proposals by feminists Kabeer and Barrientos (2004). To conclude, I argue that their proposals are too narrowly focused on the productive/reproductive life and tend to overlook insecurities of the workers that constrain them in their daily lives, like violence and health.

The policy implications to the Nicaraguan state derived from the study are the following: Violence against women in the society needs to be addressed with different measures. The worker's access to health services as well as the quality of these services need to be enhanced. A regional minimum wage with other Central American countries needs to be established. Childcare facilities close to the maquilas need to be established and father's commitment to their children to be promoted. Resources for education in different issues (above all gender) need to be strengthened and coupled with programmes that give women access to productive resources. As a minimum requirement, international labour law needs to be implemented and compliance with it enhanced. From a feminist point of view, one of the challenges is to reconcile the aim to promote gender equality with the essentialised understanding of women's roles – especially with hindsight to their reproductive role.

On theoretical grounds, I have argued that the human security concept has been useful to identify these insecurities. It is a fluid and open-ended approach that allows for local interpretations. The method is hereby essential. The focus groups have proven successful to find such local interpretations. While I have used the seven pillars of UNDP (1994) to guide the focus groups, the women expressed different understandings of some of them. I have furthermore argued that an 8th pillar consisting of labour security is useful for the concept. I used the concept to focus on gender issues by especially inquiring the insecurities of female maquila workers. As Hudson (2005:162) has argued, gender is not in all cases the main factor impeding security for the women, but without this gender focus the burden of reproductive health as well as the gendered violence against women might have been overlooked in the UNDP human security concept.

The thesis has put the focus on the state as provider of human security following theories of the social contract. Both MEC and the maquila workers have supported this reasoning and call for the state to meet this responsibility. They add that the companies have to address the well-being of their workers as well and establish a corporate social responsibility. The analysis has shown that it is possible and advisable to include local stakeholders in this process. This may be done on the municipal level. However, this dimension was beyond the scope of the paper and needs to be addressed separately. What can be done on the municipal level? What is the responsibility of the central government? How can the different levels work together in the globalised structures of the GPE? Concerning the responsibility of the companies, it needs to be addressed in which way public and private actors can collaborate in order to enhance human security. Research on how companies can organise childcare in the EPZs is necessary. It is also relevant to investigate how companies can address the newly established 8th pillar labour security, meaning insecurities at the working site. Especially interesting is also the role of subcontracted firms in the GPE. They are, just as the workers, at the weaker end of the buyer-driven supply chain. It therefore needs to be addressed what their scope of action is and how they relate to the state.

This thesis has shown how the female, maquila worker in Nicaragua is embedded in distinct gendered and neoliberal economic systems. The neoliberal discourse on labour productivity and competition among the countries has also reached local women's organisations and the workers. From a critical feminist point of view, such discourses need to be challenged. MEC does so in instances by criticising the current political economy as being based on exploitation of cheap, female labour. However, there are many contradictions in their different discourses. The workers as well as MEC hinted towards another possible economy that bases on solidarity and justice. They thus see themselves embedded in society, which furthermore supports theories of the social contract. However, further research needs to be conducted on this issue in order to find out how they understand solidarity more concretely and how it can enhance the women's security.

While these women asked the state to attract other, "better" capital and to enable them to establish their own businesses in order to leave the maquilas, it has to be highlighted that an improvement of labour conditions in the maquilas is essential. Manufacturing in labour-intensive industries is unlikely to disappear from the global market, even though some peripheral countries might be able to reach the semi-periphery. It is therefore essential to improve labour security in the EPZs. This thesis has shown that there is scope for the Nicaraguan state to enhance the human security of maquila workers. In order to slip international competition in the GPE, concerted efforts from the countries that offer labour-intensive manufacturing are needed in order to establish common principles of labour ethics and to challenge political fragmentation in the light of unified economic areas.

Executive Summary

In recent years, some researchers have claimed that the work in the factories located in the Global South and producing for the world market (so-called maquilas) has been feminised. Studies from e.g. Elias (2006), Elson/Pearson (1981), Wright (2006) and Caraway (2007) have shown that the work in certain maquila branches is highly gendered and, thus, assigns certain tasks to women or men. Women play a subordinated role and experience precarious labour and living conditions. They are thereby embedded in the global political economy, where brands from the North are able to control sub-contracted firms in the South through buyer-driven supply chains. These firms are often located in export-processing zones (EPZs) which have been established in many countries of the South in order to attract foreign investment. In Nicaragua – where the field study for this thesis was carried out –, these EPZs grant tax and tariffs exemptions to firms producing for export.

This thesis is situated within the feminist research project. It departs from the human security framework with a focus on gender in order to establish the insecurities experienced by female maquila workers in Nicaragua and, subsequently, to derive policy implications for the Nicaraguan state. These policy implications were derived by contrasting the workers' views with existing proposals by Barrientos and Kabeer (2004) on how to include women better into the global labour market. The research question was thus: *Which policy implications to the Nicaraguan state can be derived from a human security analysis of female maquila workers' situation in Nicaragua?* This question was answered with empirical material that was gathered during a field study in Nicaragua. Three different methods were used: 1) observation at a conference attended by about 1000 maquila workers in Managua, Nicaragua; 2) text analysis of publications of a women's organisation called Movement of Working and Unemployed Women "María Elena Cuadra" (MEC); and 3) focus group interviews with maquila workers. The focus groups were based on the human security approach by UNDP (1994) which rests on seven security pillars. The material was analysed following the bricolage approach using different methods at hand in order to bring different patterns of understanding and meaning production to the forefront.

The Nicaraguan state was targeted in this study based on theories of the social contract which argue that the state has a responsibility towards its citizens to offer them security. By situating agency in the Nicaraguan state, I furthermore address the critique by Barkawi and Laffey (2006) that traditional security studies are Eurocentric and see agency and rationality only located in the great powers. Applying this to the framework of human security, it means that the state has to ensure not only national security, but also security in a broader sense (economically, politically, etc.) to the individual citizen. The empirical material showed that the women workers in Nicaragua support this theory, although they

also highlighted the responsibility of the companies producing in the EPZs towards the workers.

As a result of the research, three areas have been identified that produce the biggest insecurities for the workers: gendered violence, personal economy and health. Women in Nicaragua experience violence on a daily basis – at home, on the streets and at work. Concerning the economy, the women showed how their income lies considerably below the threshold to be able to afford basic necessities. And their health security is hampered by bad quality of health services and difficult access to them as it is difficult to gain permission from the company to go to the doctor and because they lose a big share of their daily income when they do go to the doctor. These insecurities as well as the other issues like the reproductive role of women form the basis for the policy implications.

While Barrientos and Kabeer (2004) focus on public policy proposals on how to include women in the labour market on childcare facilities, better (technical) education, the promotion of women in unions, the implementation of international labour standards and a social floor, I argue that their proposals are too narrowly focused on the reproductive role of the women and the economy. According to my findings in Nicaragua and the women's views, violence and health issues constrain the women in their daily lives and until these issues are tackled, it is not possible for them to be included in the labour market on an adequate and equal basis. Furthermore, the women expressed mistrust towards existing childcare facilities since there is often child abuse to be found and argued in practical terms that such facilities are not able to meet their time schedule. This shows that such general policy proposals as development of childcare facilities need to be contextualised and that their usefulness is highly influenced by contextual factors.

By contrasting the workers' claims with Barrientos and Kabeer's policy proposals, I derived the following policy implications to the Nicaraguan state: address violence against women in the society with different measures; enhance the worker's access to health services as well as the quality of these services; establish a regional minimum wage with other Central American countries; enhance childcare facilities and promote father's commitment to their children, strengthen resources for education in different issues (above all gender) coupled to programmes to give women access to productive resources as well as implement and enhance compliance with international labour law. From a feminist point of view, one of the challenges is hereby to reconcile the aim to promote gender equality with the essentialised understanding of women's roles that is prevalent in Nicaragua – especially with hindsight to their reproductive role.

On theoretical grounds, I argue that the human security concept has been useful to identify these insecurities. It is a fluid approach that allows for local interpretations. To do so, the method is essential. The focus groups have proven successful to find such local interpretations. While I have used the seven pillars of UNDP (1994) to guide the focus groups, the women expressed different

understandings of some pillars. I have furthermore argued that an 8th pillar consisting of labour security is useful for the concept. I used the concept with a focus on gender issues by especially inquiring the insecurities of female maquila workers. As Hudson (2005:162) argued, gender was not in all issues the main factor impeding security for the women, but without this gender focus the burden of reproductive health as well as the gendered violence against women might have been overlooked in the UNDP human security concept.

This thesis furthermore identified contradictory discourses in which the female maquila worker is embedded. A neoliberal discourse on labour productivity and competition was found which in itself has the potential to undermine the human security of the workers. From a critical feminist point of view, such discourses need to be challenged and they partly are. The workers, just as MEC, expressed a notion of another possible economy and politics based on solidarity. This links back to theories of social justice. However, this notion needs to be further examined.

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Appendix I

Regulation of the EPZs in Nicaragua

Companies operating in the EPZ of Nicaragua receive the following financial benefits (Decreto Número 46-91: Capitulo II, Art. 20):

a. 100% tax exemption on income generated by activities within the EPZ within the first 10 years of operation, 60% exemption during the 11th year. This exemption does not include exemption on salaries paid to the Nicaraguan or foreign personal residing in Nicaragua. It does, however, include different payments like for example interests on loans or payments for legal services to foreigners who do not reside in Nicaragua.

b. Tax exemption on real property, including tax on capital gains, in case the company closes operations in the EPZ and the land property continues attached to the EPZ.

c. Tax exemption on constitution, transformation, fusion of reform of the company, including stamp duty.

d. Exemption on all custom taxes and charges concerning the import of raw material, materials, equipment, and other accessories necessary for the operation of the company as well as for the installation and operation of canteens, health services, medical assistance, childcare facilities and any other good necessary for the satisfaction of the personal of the company.

e. Exemption on custom taxes on transport equipment.

f. Total exemption of indirect taxes.

g. Total exemption of municipal taxes.

h. Total exemption of taxes on the export of products produced in the EPZ.

Nicaraguan EPZs can be either privately administered or state-run. Private EPZs have to be operated by a limited company having similar fiscal benefits as the companies operating within the zone (Decreto Número 46-91: Capitulo II) and national EPZs are to be administered by a corporation ("Corporación de Zonas Francas"). The latter one should not be confused with the commission on EPZs ("Comisión Nacional de Zonas Francas") which is the governing body of EPZs in Nicaragua (Decreto Número 46-91: Capitulo V).

Decree No. 46-91 has been more specified by decree No. 50-2005 from 18th August 2005 defining more exactly the duties and functioning of the different actors (commission, corporation and company) (Decreto No. 50-2005). It furthermore divides the companies in the zone in either goods producers or service suppliers. As the latter ones, they may also provide international services like for example call centres for foreign firms (Decreto No. 50-2005: Capítulo VI, Art.22).

Appendix II

Participants of the focus groups

Focus group 1	20th March 2013	Managua, MEC office
Promotora 1	Organisational promotora in Ciudad Sandino	
Promotora 2	Maquila worker and organisational promotora in Managua	
Promotora 3	Organisational promotora in Ciudad Sandino	
Promotora 4	Organisational promotora Mateares/Los Brasiles	
Promotora 5	Organisational promotora Tipitapa and maquila worker	

Focus group 2	24th March 2013	Ciudad Sandino	
Worker 1	27 years	One child, not married	5 years working in a maquila
Worker 2	27 years	One child, married	12 years working in a maquila
Worker 3	--	Three children	7 years working in a maquila
Worker 4	--	Three children, married	1,5 years working in a maquila

Appendix III

Minimum wages in Central America within the financial regime of EPZs, 2013, in US-$

Nicaragua	El Salvador	Guatemala	Honduras
152.16$	195$	292.29$	249.84$

Notes: In Honduras, the minimum wage depends on the size of the company. Wages are higher in bigger companies. This table indicates the lowest minimum wage (in companies up to 10 workers).

Exchange rates: Currency exchange from 2013-07-11 according to www.oanda.org: 1$ = 19.9416 HNL (Honduran Lempira); 1$ = 24.3686 NIO (Nicaraguan Cordoba); 1$ = 7.6849 GTQ (Guatemalan Quetzal)

Sources: Nicaragua: Ministerio de Trabajo, online available: http://www.mitrab.gob.ni/documentos/salario-minimo (accessed 2013-07-11); Honduras: Secretaría de Trabajo y Seguridad Social, Gacetas sobre salarios mínimos, online available: http://www.trabajo.gob.hn/organizacion/dgt-1/direccion-general-de-salarios/decretos (accessed 2013-07-11); El Salvador: Decree n° 56, online available http://www.ilo.org/dyn/travail/docs/1745/decreto%2056.pdf; Guatemala: Ministerio de Trabajo y Previsión Social, http://www.mintrabajo.gob.gt/index.php?option=com_content&view=article&id=75&Itemid=473

Appendix IV

Monthly minimum wages in Nicaragua 2001-2013, in Córdoba

Year	Minimum Wage	Change in %	Inflation in %
2001	895		5.97
2002	960	7.26	3.75
2003	1037	8.02	5.3
2004	1129	8.87	8.47
2005	1298	14.97	9.6
2006	1487	13.87	9.14
2007	1745	18.06	11.13
2008	2006	14.97	19.83
2009 (May)	2367	18	3.69
2009 (Oct)	2557	12	
2010	2863.50	12	5.45
2011	3092.58	8.00	8.08
2012	3370.91	9.00	7.19
2013	3708.00	10.00	--

Notes: "Inflation as measured by the consumer price index reflects the annual percentage change in the cost to the average consumer of acquiring a basket of goods and services that may be fixed or changed at specified intervals, such as yearly. The Laspeyres formula is generally used" (World Bank Data).

Sources: MEC (2009b:52); Ministerio de Trabajo (Nicaragua), online available: http://www.mitrab.gob.ni/documentos/salario-minimo (accessed 2013-07-11); World Bank Data, online available: http://data.worldbank.org/; Indicator: Inflation, consumer prices (annual %) (accessed 2013-07-11)