VOICES AGAINST THE PROHIBITION OF ABORTION

A qualitative text analysis of four women’s rights movements in Nicaragua

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OBJECTIVE AND EMPIRICAL BACKGROUND

During the fall of 2006, a 19-year-old girl visited a public hospital in Nicaragua’s capital, Managua due to troubles with her pregnancy. She was 5 months pregnant with her second child when she started to have uterine contractions, bleedings, and fever. When the doctors found out that the fetus still was alive, they decided to stop the contractions with medication, with the aim of saving the life of the fetus. However, this turned out to be unsuccessful. 12 hours later it was determined that the fetus had died. At this point, the girl had started to hemorrhage, and when she was taken to the operating room it was found that her uterus was filled with blood. The girl died shortly afterward due to these complications. According to some women’s groups and doctors, this girl was the first victim of a law reform regarding abortion that was implemented in Nicaragua the same year she passed away (Replogle, 2007, p.15).

This law reform made abortion illegal under all circumstances, even when the pregnant woman’s life is in danger and when the pregnancy is caused by rape. By this law, Nicaragua became a part of the 2% of all countries in the world that totally prohibits abortions without any exceptions (Replogle, 2007, p.15). Before this reform, abortion had been permitted for ‘therapeutic reasons’ in Nicaragua since 1893. These therapeutic reasons generally involved abortion with the purpose of protecting the woman’s life, when severe fatal malformation was detected, and when the pregnancy was caused by rape or incest (Replogle, 2007, p.15).

This essay aims to gain an understanding of the current arguments against the abortion prohibition in Nicaragua. The objective has been to understand how Nicaraguan women’s rights movements are arguing for extended abortion rights. By concentrating the study on actors against the abortion ban and on women’s rights movements the aim has been to do a close and detailed analysis. The study has been done through a qualitative text analysis where four text documents from different women’s rights movements have been analyzed. The objective with the qualitative text analysis has been to locate the central arguments against the abortion ban.

The results detected in the qualitative text analysis have been compared with results from another study that also investigate how women’s rights movements argued against the abortion prohibition in Nicaragua between 2003 and 2008. By comparing these two time periods the goal has been to
examine if the actors are using the same arguments against the abortion prohibition now as they did ten years ago. The comparison has been based on a framework developed by Silke Heumann in her article *The Challenge of Inclusive Identities and Solidarities: Discourses on Gender and Sexuality in the Nicaraguan Women’s Movement and the Legacy of Sandinismo* from 2014. In this work, Heumann is studying how activists and advocates of women’s rights are arguing for a less strict abortion law. She distinguishes three categories that will be explained further in the Theoretical – Framework section of this essay.

Additionally, the aim with the comparison has not only been to distinguish similarities or differences between the central arguments in themselves. Instead, the objective has also been to gain an understanding and compare other aspects of the movements’ that are linked to how they argue regarding abortion rights. These aspects involve how the movements are positioning themselves regarding feminism, women’s sexuality, the private sphere (as a political area or not), and the central site of power. These factors are taken into account in the study by Heumann. Hence, the aspects were considered to be relevant for the abortion issue and to contribute to make the time comparison as nuanced and complete as possible. In the second research question, the expression ‘standpoints on relevant aspects’ is used as a collective term for the movements’ arguments against abortion and the movements’ perceptions of feminism, sexuality, the private sphere, and the central site of power.

**Research Question**

The following questions have been the basis for this study:

- *What are the main arguments against the abortion prohibition in Nicaragua among women’s rights movements?*

- *What differences and/or similarities can be located between the movements’ arguments and standpoints on relevant aspects and the arguments and standpoints that were central between 2003 and 2008?*
This section will approach the subject of the thesis from three different perspectives to explain why
the abortion debate in Nicaragua is important and relevant to study, both for empirical and for
theoretical reasons. Moreover, the aim with this section is to introduce the reader to studies and
theories by other scholars that in different ways are linked to this essay. By this introduction, the
ambition is to provide the reader with a theoretical ground helpful for the coming analysis.
Additionally, the ambition is also to specify how this essay contributes to the academic field of
Development Studies and to future research. The section has been divided in three categories, based
on the different reasons the specific subject has been understood as important.

**WHY STUDY ARGUMENTS?**

On an essential level, it can be argued that the fact that this thesis puts its focus on arguments is a
statement per se. Why is a specific movement’s opinion about a law of any importance? Does it
really matter? There are reasons to believe that it does. An example is the article *Abortion Law
Reform in Latin America: Lessons for Advocacy* by Gillian Kane (2008). In this work, Kane analyses
abortion reforms in different Latin American contexts (including Nicaragua). What she finds is that
how different actors argue about abortion, the discourses they are a part of and the framings they use
can be crucial. These aspects influence the way people perceive the question of abortion hence also
potential policy reforms.

For example, Kane finds that one important starting point for the achievement of a liberalization of
an abortion prohibition is to reclaim the terms of the debate from the Catholic Church. Kane argues
that the Catholic Church has dominated the abortion discourse, by talking about abortion in terms of
religion and morality. In the light of the Mexican and Colombian history of successful abortion law
reforms, Kane claims that framing abortion as a question of reproductive health and rights can be an
effective way of countering the Catholic arguments. Kane also explains that coalition-building
beyond the women’s movement can be beneficial for the development of abortion rights. By talking
about the abortion issue as a question of health, democracy and rights instead of an exclusive
question for women the support base can be expanded. For example, coalitions between abortion-
rights advocates and medical communities have been used to gain broader support, (Kane, 2008,
p.369).
As mentioned above, these examples show that there are scientific reasons to analyze and pay attention to the way actors argue for abortion rights since it can have crucial impact on the legal outcomes. Even if this essay does not aim to predict how future abortion laws in Nicaragua will look like, the ambition is to provide the grounds for future research on the subject. Since the study will present different kinds of arguments during different periods of time and between different actors in a detailed way, the findings can hopefully be used by coming scholars that want to study opportunities for policy change regarding abortion politics in Nicaragua.

Moreover, the importance of analyzing arguments becomes clear when reading Mala Htun, an eminent researcher regarding women’s rights in Latin America. In her work *Sex and the State* she addresses abortion policy in Argentina, Brazil and Chile. Even if she does not take Nicaragua into account in this book, some of her findings can be of relevance for this thesis. Htun makes it clear that it is problematic to speak about gender issues as one, unified question. She explains that these issues are complex and that different issues will be received and responded to differently, that they follow different logics. Based on this, Htun argues that we have to acknowledge the differences between issues within the broader term of ‘women’s rights’ (2003, p.12-14), which is one of the ambitions with this thesis. Htun’s argumentation about the complexity of women’s issues has been an essential starting point for this study and the way the relevant arguments will be understood and analyzed.

Htun’s work also shows another example of the importance of arguments. She states that feminism revolutionized the way people think about and understand abortion. Before abortion became an issue for feminism, it was mainly framed as a subject of criminal law, public morality, and medical discretion. Moreover, law makers, doctors and criminologists were understood as the central decision makers regarding abortion. Htun argues that feminism changed this view on the issue by framing abortion as a question for the independent woman and that access to abortion was necessary for women to enjoy equal opportunities in the society (Htun, 2003, p.41-42). Based on the strong link between feminism and abortion that Htun depicts in her work, it was considered of importance to investigate the relevant movements’ standpoints on feminism in this study and see if they link the abortion issue to feminism or not. Hence, the movement’s standpoint on feminism was one of the ‘questions’ that has been asked to the different policy documents in the text analysis. This also shows that arguments have been important earlier. Since the involvement of feminism in the abortion debate, changed the essential grounds according to Htun.
Another research project highly relevant for this study is found in the article *Talking Rights or What Is Right? Understandings and Strategies around Sexual, Reproductive and Abortion Rights in Nicaragua* written by Bradshaw et al. The study by Bradshaw et al. draws on a number of interviews with female leaders during 2005 and 2007 (Bradshaw et al. 2008, p.57). What becomes clear when reading Bradshaw et al. is that even among different women activists, a common understanding of what gendered rights constitute is impossible to assume. Instead, a lot of understandings and discourses are competing within these movements. (Bradshaw et al. 2008, p. 59). This aspect, reveals the deep complexity of this subject that Htun’s work already depicted once again.

**Why Study Abortion?**
The question of abortion has been studied and acknowledged in academia in a widespread of forms by different scholars. Abortion is understood as a controversial question in huge parts of the world. The subject is an object for debate for both for religious and political reasons internationally. At the same time, according to the World Health Organization (WHO), the lack of access to safe abortions is causing serious harm to women. Up to 13% of all maternal deaths were effects of unsafe abortions in 2008. These deaths could have been prevented if the right health skills and a safe environment had been available (WHO, 2008, p.1). Due to these numbers, the empirical reasons for a closer study of a country that prohibits all types of abortion are obvious.

Another aspect that confirms the subject’s relevance for the field of Development Studies becomes clear when United Nations’ sustainable development goals are being studied. Goal number 5, (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), involves a paragraph about access to sexual and reproductive health. The current situation in Nicaragua regarding abortion can be understood as an example of the challenges the world stand in front of if we want to achieve this goal. This also confirms that the subject is highly relevant for the Development Studies field (United Nations).

**Why Study Nicaragua?**
There are many examples of countries with notable abortion laws, so why Nicaragua? The most important reason was found when reading a report from The Guttmacher Institute (a leading policy and research organization committed to advancing sexual and reproductive health and rights). According to this organization, it is possible to speak about a slow but steady trend toward liberalization of restrictive abortion laws in the world. Between year 2000 and 2017, 27 countries in the world expanded the legal grounds for abortion. Only one country did the opposite and changed
its law from restricted access to a total prohibition – Nicaragua (Guttmacher Institute, 2018). The fact that Guttmacher institute describes Nicaragua as the single exception from a steady trend provide natural reasons for arguing that the abortion situation in Nicaragua can be understood as an ‘abnormal case’ and therefore also an interesting and relevant research object. In other words, the fact that Nicaragua’s development is very different to the majority of the countries in the world when it comes to abortion laws makes the country’s abortion debate exceedingly interesting to study closer.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

In this section, the framework that will work as a tool for the qualitative text analysis will be described, explained and illustrated. As shortly described in the introduction, in her article published 2014 Silke Heumann analyzes how actors within the women’s rights movement in Nicaragua are framing particular issues related to their work. One of the issues Heumann looks at, that will be given specific attention in this study, is the right to abortion. Heumann distinguishes three groups of actors by evaluating material from 30 in-depth interviews with women’s rights, sexual rights and reproductive rights activists conducted between 2003 and 2008. She explains that the groups have a lot of common features and are crossing over in many aspects. These categorizations will be the comparison point for this study and therefore a more detailed description of them was considered to be necessary.

THE NEEDS-BASED APPROACH TO ABORTION, “THE POVERTY FRAME”

To begin, it is important to mention that Heumann describes this group of actors as the ones dominating the debate in Nicaragua during the time she conducted her material (2003-2008) (Heumann, 2014, p.338).

According to Heumann, these actors note that women in Nicaragua are deprived access to sexuality education and contraceptives, that the available possibilities for illegal abortion can cause serious harm, and that women often are forced to carry the burden of motherhood alone due to male irresponsibility. Heumann explains that it is in the light of these factors that the actors within the “poverty frame” are arguing for access to abortion. Therefore, the main argument for abortion within this group is that it solves a serious public-health problem in the context of poverty (Ibid).
Heumann explains that respondents in this group made a moral separation between what they saw as a ‘necessary abortion’ and the practice of repeated abortions or abortions when contraceptives were available. The respondents from Heumann’s interviews also separated themselves from what they saw as ‘radical positions’ in the debate, including people that argue for abortion as a woman’s right to choose (Heumann, 2014, p.338-339). Heumann argues that according to these actors, the fight for reproductive rights should not focus on the right to abortion but rather on the prevention of abortion. This is because abortion is understood as a harmful and painful experience that should occur as little as possible among these actors (Heumann, 2014, p.339). Heumann also clarifies that the main approach within this group includes a separation between themselves and feminism and that the majority of the actors within the ‘poverty frame’ not identify with feminist activists (Heumann, 2014, p.338).

According to Heumann, the general perception of the private sphere among the actors within the ‘poverty frame’ is as areas not related to politics. The state and the legal institutions are understood as the privileged sites of power, and therewith also the main actors that can enforce transformation regarding abortion. Moreover, sex is mainly thought about in relation to the problems and threats it poses for women. Regarding sexual rights, respondents generally view these issues as certainly narrow and mostly as personal concerns. Hence, these rights were not prioritized in the work among the actors within the ‘poverty frame’ according to Heumann (Heumann, 2014, p.341).

**The Rights-Based Approach to Abortion, “The Autonomy Frame”**

According to Heumann, there is a separate, less prevalent, group of actors who, contrary to the ones within ‘the needs-based approach’, mainly identify themselves as feminists (Heumann, 2014, p.340). Regarding abortion, Heumann describes that the respondents within ‘the autonomy frame’ not only focus on the health aspects of the prohibition. Instead, they also see the prohibition as a symbolic aspect of women’s oppression. In other words, the right to abortion, or the lack of this right, can be a way of measuring how much control women have over their bodies and sexuality. Heumann explains that it is in this light these actors argue for a legalization of abortion, (as a matter of female autonomy and control) (Ibid).

The main reform that these actors argued for was a total and unlimited legalization of abortion according to Heumann. Moreover, she explains that this group made a clear distinction between themselves and other activists who did not identify themselves as feminists and who did not support
unconditional abortion rights. This absolute unconditionality was even expressed to be the dividing line between the actors within the ‘autonomy frame’ and others according to Heumann (Ibid).

Some similarities Heumann notices with the respondents categorized within ‘the poverty frame’ and these actors are their views on sex and sexual preference. To start with, both the groups mainly think about sex in relation to the problems and threats it can pose to women. Heumann calls this a ‘sex-negative’ approach. Moreover, the actors within the ‘autonomy frame’ also have an apolitical perspective on the private according to Heumann. Hence, this sphere is not understood as an area for political debate or transformation. Instead, the state is perceived as the most influential actor regarding potential reforms. Lastly, in line with the actors within the ‘poverty frame’, sexual rights are framed as specific and narrow among this group of actors. They give lower priority to these issues than to feminist rights, that are framed as more comprehensive according to Heumann (Heumann, 2014, p.341).

THE COLLECTIVE RIGHTS APPROACH TO ABORTION, “THE PERSONAL-IS-POLITICAL FRAME”

Heumann argues that she identified another group of actors within the women’s rights movement that she describes as the “least influential” out of the three (Heumann, 2014, p.335).

Just as the actors within the ‘autonomy frame’, this group also identifies with feminism according to Heumann. They also share the feminist analysis made by the actors within ‘the autonomy frame’ regarding the problematization of abortion as an expression of female oppression. However, she argues that the group differs from the others regarding their view on the private and emotional sphere that they, in contrast to the others, understand as exceedingly political (Heumann, 2014, p.341-342). This means that even if the actors within the ‘personal-is-political-frame’ also acknowledge the power of the state and the need of legal reforms to achieve change, the group also demands ‘bottom-up’ work on a personal level. According to Heumann, these actors argue that there are internalized negative values and associations in the personal and emotional context, that do not disappear automatically because of a law reform. The acknowledgment of the private sphere as a medium for political debate can be understood as the biggest difference between this group and the two earlier groups (Heumann, 2014, p.343).

Heumann argues that these actors consider sexuality and sexual rights a top priority in the political debate. Consequently, sexuality is not only thought about in relation to problems and threats among
this group. Instead, the actors argue for ‘the right to pleasure’, which can be understood as a ‘sex-positive’ approach compared to the approaches dominating the other two groups (Heumann, 2014, p.342).

Based on Heumann’s article, an analytical framework has been developed that was used when the relevant documents were analyzed and organized. Hopefully, this framework can also be useful to get a comprehensible overview of the three approaches and how they differ and are linked to each other. It is of importance to emphasize that the following analytical framework is a simplification and a generalization of Heumann’s study. It is solely based on my interpretation of Heumann’s text, hence misunderstandings can possibly been made. Moreover, as already mentioned these categories are not this separated from each other in reality, rather they should be understood as relatively fluid.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>“The Poverty Frame”</th>
<th>“The Autonomy Frame”</th>
<th>“The Personal is Political Frame”</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>The view on feminism:</td>
<td>Not self-identifying with feminism</td>
<td>Self-identifying with feminism</td>
<td>Self-identifying with feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The main argument against the abortion ban:</td>
<td>A public health problem - Endangers the safety and health of women, especially the poor ones</td>
<td>A feminist problem - an expression of the oppression against women, a matter of autonomy and control</td>
<td>A feminist problem - an expression of the oppression against women, a matter of autonomy and control</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Supports unconditional abortion access:</td>
<td>No</td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The perception of the private sphere:</td>
<td>An apolitical sphere, not an object for debate</td>
<td>An apolitical sphere, not an object for debate</td>
<td>An exceedingly political sphere</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>The privileged site of power and reform:</td>
<td>The state (top-down perspective)</td>
<td>The state (top-down perspective)</td>
<td>The state (top-down perspective) + the</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Level (Bottom-up Perspective)</td>
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<td>--------------------------------</td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>General View on Sex:</strong></td>
<td>Negative - in relation to problems and threats</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Positive - acknowledges ‘the right to pleasure’</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>View on Sexual Rights:</strong></td>
<td>Narrow, not prioritized</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Prioritized and of importance in the political debate</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

**The Cases**

To find relevant and useful cases and material was a demanding process in this study. To start with, it took time to get an understanding of what actors that are active in the modern abortion debate in Nicaragua. An overview of all the movements and organizations mentioned in Heumann’s article has been made but many of them were impossible to find or had websites that had not been updated in many years. Considering the time that has passed since Heumann conducted her study, this is not that surprising. However, after an active period of research four documents from four different movements were found. These documents come from the different websites and involve policy documents, declarations, informative and argumentative texts. These documents do not necessarily come from the most influential movements in Nicaragua but the relevant movements are still established and serious associations that are working actively for women’s rights.

Another acknowledgment that should be made before presenting the movements in detail is that abortion is a deeply controversial and complex subject in Nicaragua. To argue publicly against the abortion prohibition can be dangerous and has earlier resulted in persecution (Zuniga et.al. 2016 p.143). The deep controversy of the subject is portrayed in the following excerpt from the article of Heumann:

“(...)Nonetheless, Sandinismo and its legacy continue haunting the women’s movement in multiple ways. The Sandinistas ratified the abortion ban and started persecuting and conducting smear campaigns against feminist leaders, accusing them of everything from money laundering to conspiring against the Sandinista regime at the service of the political right”.
This is also the reason why Heumann keeps her respondents anonymous in her work from 2014, which becomes clear in the following statement: “As a result of the ongoing persecution of feminist leaders, respondents are not named (…)” (Heumann, 2014, p.336).

In the following section, a brief description of the cases and the documents will be made.

**MOVIMIENTO AUTÓNOMO DE MUJERES DEL NICARAGUA**

The first document that has been looked at comes from the organization Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres de Nicaragua or the Autonomous Women’s Movement as it is called in English (MAM). MAM is a movement that has been studied by other scholars interested in women’s rights mobilization in Nicaragua. It is for example mentioned and studied in the previously presented article done by Heumann 2014, but also in an article by Nadine Jubb from 2014 *Love, Family Values and Reconciliation for All, but What about Rights, Justice and Citizenship for Women? The FSLN, the Women’s Movement, and Violence against Women in Nicaragua*. Moreover, Bradshaw et.al. describes MAM as “One of the leading and most vocal groups around the issue of abortion” in their article (Bradshaw et al, 2008, p.62.).

Based on the work from these scholars, it is possible to argue that MAM’s arguments against the abortion ban are of importance in the debate. The latest document that was found on the movement’s website was a declaration published in conjunction with 8th of March 2014 called *Este ocho de marzo, día internacional de las mujeres: ¡En rebeldía, por nuestros cuerpos, por el país que queremos!* (My translation: This 8 of March, the International Women’s day: The rebellion’s day for our bodies, for the country we want!). This document will be the basis for the analysis of this movement.

**CATÓLICAS POR EL DERECHO A DECIDIR**

Another document that has been analyzed is derived from an organization called Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (Catholics for the Right to Choose, CDD). Even if Heumann does not take this organization into account in her article it is reasonable to think it could contribute to an interesting and relevant perspective. Moreover, it seems to play a significant role in the debate.

In Marysa Navarro’s and Maria Consuelos chapter of the book *Women’s Activism in Latin America and the Caribbean: Engendering Social Justice, Democratizing Citizenship*, a detailed description of
Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir is given. The movement is described as an international network composed of organizations from many countries in Latin America, including Nicaragua. Navarro and Mejía define CDD’s participation in feminist conferences as ‘highly valued’, because of the combination of feminism and Catholicism they use in their language (Navarro and Mejía, 2010, p.312).

In the light of this description of CDD, it is possible to understand the movement as relevant to my study. On CDD’s website, a document from 2016 was found, called Aborto Terapéutico: una decisión de vida (Therapeutic abortion: a life decision). In this document, the movement describes their opinions on the abortion prohibition. Considering the late character and relevance of this document, it has been used as the basis for my analysis of CDD.

**MOVIMIENTO FEMINISTA DE NICARAGUA**

Movimiento Feminista, (Feminist Movement from Nicaragua, MF) is a cooperation network between 17 different women’s rights movements in Nicaragua, all with different origins and compositions. The network includes a wide range of movements, for example, a movement that is focusing on young girls’ rights, one that is focusing on women working in the ‘informal sector’ and one with focus on rights for Caribbean women. On the platform that the 17 movements share a document from 2016 was found, called El Estado de Nicaragua viola la libertad y seguridad de las mujeres (The Nicaraguan state violates the female liberty and security). This document represents the movement as a whole and not a particular sub-movement. In the text, MF describes their ideas and opinions about the prohibition of abortion, hence, it was understood as relevant for this study.

**PROGRAMA FEMINISTA CENTROAMERICANO LA CORRIENTE**

One of the 17 movements involved in MF is Programa Feminista Centroamericano La Corriente (Central American Feminist Program La Corriente). La Corriente is a relatively young movement, founded 1994 in Managua. The movement only consists of 6 workers, but do a lot of collaborations with other smaller associations across the country (Portocarrero, 2014). Despite the modest size of the movement it seems to be at least one person who is good at updating websites in La Corriente’s team. It was easy to find well-formulated and modern documents at La Corriente’s website, which was not the case with all of the movements that have been looked at. By the 17 movements mentioned at the web page of MF, La Corriente was the only one who had an updated (later than 2014) document regarding their position on the abortion prohibition.
The document chosen to look at from La Corriente is called ‘A 11 años de la penalización del aborto en Nicaragua’ (11 years after the prohibition of abortion in Nicaragua) and is published 2017.

**Method**

The method used in this study is a qualitative text analysis. The philosopher Mats Furberg summarizes the central course of action in a qualitative text analysis as follows:

(My translation): “It is about reading texts actively, asking questions to the text and see if the text, or yourself, can answer these questions” (Furberg, in Essaiasson, 2017, p.212). \(^1\)

However, the description of qualitative text analysis made by Pär Widén in the work *Handbok i kvalitativ analys* has been used as the basis for this study. Widén explains that there are many different ways of analyzing and understanding the meaning of a certain text (Widén, 2015, p.177). According to Widén, there are three different analytical dimensions that can be placed in the foreground of a qualitative text analysis.

Widén explains that the first dimension puts the focus on the actors behind the text. Within this dimension, the aim is to, through the text, create knowledge about these actors’ conceptions and about what meaning they give to different aspects.

The second dimension puts the text itself in focus and is not as interested in the actor behind the text according to Widén. Instead, this dimension aims attention to the language the text is based on and the literary content. Within this dimension, it is common to not only look at what the text mentions but also what it does not mention, with other words, if there are relevant aspects that are excluded from the text.

The third dimension Widén mentions has the central focus on what the text tells us about the surrounding society and culture the text is produced in. Thereby, the objective is to use the text to understand what ideas, values and norms that are dominating a particular context (Widén, 2015, p.178-180).

\(^1\) “Det handlar om att läsa texter aktivt, att ställa frågor till texten och se eftef om texten, eller man själv, kan besvara dessa frågor”
In the case of this essay, the two dimensions that will work as focal points are the first and the second dimension. To locate the main arguments against the prohibition of abortion within women’s rights movements the second dimension, with focus on the text itself, will be used.

When it comes to potential changes and similarities and the relevant standpoints a more actor-focused perspective will be applied. Hence, regarding the second research question of this study, the first dimension described by Widén will work as the basis. Widén also mentions that one crucial part of the making of a viable qualitative text analysis is to formulate critical questions that will be “asked” to the text (Widén, 2015, p.182). These questions vary depending on which of the aforementioned dimensions that will be in focus in the qualitative analysis (Widén, 2015, p.183-184). The questions that have been asked in this study are focusing on the aspects mentioned in the theoretical framework. These include how the relevant movement perceives feminism, what its main argument against the abortion prohibition is, if it argues for a total legalization of abortion, how it perceives the private sphere, what site of power it perceives as the most important, how it perceives female sexuality, and how it perceives sexual rights.

Moreover, Widén states that a qualitative text analysis can be applied to many different forms of texts (Widén, 2015, p.180). In this case, the texts that have been analyzed are different forms of public argumentative documents. They differ regarding form and objective but they share a certain level of subjectivity and all of them should be understood as exceedingly political.

Widén’s chapter also involves a description of the central steps in a qualitative text analysis. This description has worked as the basis for my study. According to him, the first step is to formulate the central question of the study based on personal interest and knowledge. A comprehensive literature search is helpful to get an overall understanding of the subject and delimitate the broader field (Widén, 2015, p.185).

Next step is to find suitable empirical text material that is possible to collect and that is helpful for analyzing the problem and answering the central question. Widén explains that one way to find the material is to search in databases (Widén, 2015, p.186). However, in the case of my work, most of the material has been found with help from earlier research on the subject. Through the study by Heumann, it was possible to distinguish some central movements in the Nicaraguan abortion debate. When these movements were identified, I searched for material from them through Google’s main search service.
According to Widén, the succeeding step involves the creation of analytical themes that help to sort out the most relevant material (Widén, 2015, p.188). In the case of my study, the time aspect was the most important factor when it came to narrow down the material. The goal was to use text documents as modern as possible. Hence, it was chosen to filter the Google results so they only involved results from 2014 and onwards. However, due to the lack of available and relevant material (described further in the ‘Case-section’), this step was not of great necessity for this study.

The next step described by Widén is to do a detailed analysis of the material that has been found (with the focus on the dimension/dimensions that have been chosen). This step also involves reading, categorizing and analyzing the collected material (Widén, 2015, p.188-189).

In the light of this, it is of importance to mention that all my material has been written in Spanish and that all translations to English have been done by me. Since Spanish is only my third language this could mean potential misunderstandings or misinterpretations, even if the goal has been to avoid this as much as possible.

Definitions

In this section, two terms that can be perceived as vague and contested are explained further.

The first term that deserves a further explanation is therapeutic abortion. This term has been given different meanings depending on context. However, a recurring feature of the term is that it involves the claim of a restricted right to abortion, in other words, the claim that abortion only should be allowed under particular conditions. Hence, this is the way the term should be understood in this essay. More precisely, therapeutic abortion is defined as the demand of abortion only under certain circumstances, in this study.

The second term that needs to be clarified is feminism. A reasonable theory is that the meaning, the perceptions and the associations of feminism vary considerably depending on context. Due to the complexity of the term, and the impossibility to ask all relevant actors for their specific understandings of it, the term will not be given a special definition in this study. Instead, the focus will be on if the actors use the term feminism in their argumentation and if they identify themselves as feminists, no matter what they actually mean by the term.
ANALYSIS

MOVIMIENTO AUTÓNOMO DE MUJERES DE NICARAGUA

The first document I have analyzed is the declaration published by MAM in conjunction with the International Women’s Day 2014.

Regarding the question of the movement’s standpoint on feminism, the actors within this organization seem to self-identify with the feminist movement. This becomes clear in the following quote for example:

(My translation): “(...) the chauvinists and the violent ones have not succeeded to dominate us, and therefore, we will continue our feminist revolution”2 (Movimiento Autónomo De Mujeres, 2014, p.1).

That the movement makes connections with feminism reoccurs on other places in the declaration. For example, it is written:

(My translation): “With democracy and respect for the human rights, women and feminists are proud to be the only social movement that, despite the old and new obstacles, has remained denouncing authoritarian powers, both in the public and in the private sector”3 (Movimiento Autónomo De Mujeres, 2014, p.1).

Even if it is not as explicitly here as in the first example, it implicates that MAM self-identifies as a feminist movement or at least does not distinguish themselves from the feminist movement.

The second question that has been “asked” to the text involves the main argument. It is possible to argue that the current abortion ban in Nicaragua is represented as a problem for two main reasons in the declaration from MAM. Firstly, one can understand it as a health problem relating to the security of women, since it, for example, is argued that the law complicates the possibilities for women with problems from an abortion to get help. The following extract is an example of this:

2 “(...) los machistas y violentos no han logrado dominarnos, por eso, seguimos haciendo revolución feminista”.

3 “Con la democracia y el respeto de los derechos humanos, las mujeres y las feministas estamos orgullosas de ser el único movimiento social que a pesar de los antiguos y nuevos obstáculos, nos hemos mantenido firmes en la denuncia de todos los poderes autoritarios que tanto en el ‘ámbito público, como el privado’.”
(My translation): “We are living in a country that claims equality, but that is legalizing against the lives of the women. With the prohibition of abortion, the state does not protect the total integrity or the lives of girls and women that are pregnant as a result of a violation. Neither the state assures humanized attention to the women due to complications of abortion. This is one of the most serious violations committed against the women”4 (Movimiento Autónomo De Mujeres, 2014, p.1).

However, MAM also argues against the abortion ban in the light of female freedom and independence and the right to take decisions over your own body. They argue that the prohibition of abortion is problematic because it is an expression of state control over the female body, no matter what consequences it leads to. When this is considered, it is possible to argue that MAM does not only understand the abortion ban as a public health problem but also as a feminist problem. The following extract can be understood as an example of this view:

(My translation): “Our rebellion goes from our bodies to the public. Free and plural bodies. We have claimed the right to pleasure, joy, rebellion, and transgression. We defend with passion and conviction the right to live free of violence, to enjoy our sexual rights and reproductive rights, including the right to decide on eroticism and motherhood with freedom and autonomy”5 (Movimiento Autónomo De Mujeres, 2014, p.2).

Regarding the question about unconditional support, MAM’s document does not describe their standpoint explicitly. However, even if the latest quote above does not contain a concrete policy proposal it is the closest MAM’s document gets to suggesting a reform. It can be perceived as if MAM implicitly tells the reader that abortion should be a decision for the independent woman, not

4 “Vivimos en un país donde se proclama la igualdad, pero se legisla en contra de la vida de las mujeres. Junto con la penalización del aborto, el Estado no protege ni tutela la integridad y la vida de niñas y de mujeres embarazadas a consecuencia de una violación; tampoco asegura atención humanizada a las mujeres por complicaciones de aborto. Ésta es una de las más graves violencias cometidas en contra de las mujeres”.

5 “Nuestras rebeldías van desde nuestros cuerpos a lo público. Cuerpos libres y plurales. Hemos reivindicado el derecho al placer, a la alegria, a la rebeldía y a la transgresión. Defendemos con pasión y convicción el derecho a vivir libres de violencia, disfrutar nuestros derechos sexuales y derechos reproductivos, incluido el derecho a decidir sobre el erotismo y la maternidad con libertad y autonomía”.


something that the state is involved in. Moreover, there are no implications on the opposite (no suggestions of that abortion only should be legal under certain circumstances). Thus, it is possible to argue that MAM supports an unlimited access to abortion without state restrictions.

Regarding female sexuality and sexual rights some interesting findings have been made. The fact that MAM’s declaration involves an acknowledgment of women’s right to enjoy their sexual rights and the right to pleasure is another worth further analysis. It implicates that MAM understands the female sexuality as an object of political debate and not just a personal issue. Another factor that contributes to this understanding is that MAM mentions the private sector as a political area. This is done in one of the extracts quoted earlier, translated as follows by me:

“With democracy and respect for the human rights, women and feminists are proud to be the only social movement that, despite the old and new obstacles, has remained denouncing authoritarian powers, both in the public and in the private sector”.

Moreover, a possible interpretation of that MAM claims their sexual rights is that the movement possesses a ‘sex-positive approach’. This means that they not only connect sex to threats and risks for women but also female pleasure.

The fact that MAM argues that the private sphere is a political area have other implications worth mentioning. It can be understood as if MAM means that state reforms from a ‘top down perspective’ not are enough and that they also demand work on the personal level to achieve real change in Nicaragua.

**Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir**

The second document that has been looked at is an informative text from the Catholic organization Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (CDD). Regarding the question of feminism, nothing is mentioned in the document, neither in a positive or a negative way. Hence, there are no explicit signs that CDD self-identifies with the feminist movement.

It is possible to argue that CDD’s main argument against the abortion prohibition is based on the consequences of the law. These consequences are mainly related to the health and security impacts that the law has. For example, CDD argues that instead of reducing the numbers of abortions, the prohibition leads to women resorting to unsafe methods and abortions exerted by unprofessional persons, which can be a huge risk. It is also mentioned that the maternal mortality in Nicaragua has increased since the law was implemented and that a legalization of therapeutic abortion could decrease this number.
However, the abortion issue is also described as a health problem in another light. According to CDD, the prohibition leads to a complicated and difficult situation for health professionals. These workers risk serious punishment (even imprisonment) if they help women conduct an abortion. On the other hand, CDD explains that it also can be dangerous for them to not conduct the abortion. This depends on the fact that if they detect some implications regarding a pregnancy that leads to health issues for the woman and not acts to solve these implications, they can be accused of omission (the failure to act). This can also lead to imprisonment. CDD continues with stating that this situation for health professionals lead to a decreased quality of the public health services. What follows from this description from CDD is that the total prohibition of abortion not only causes problems for women but also for health professionals that are caught up between two laws that are contradicting each other.

Regarding support for unconditional abortion rights, it is very clear that CDD do not support a total legalization of abortion and that they are against unconditional abortion rights. Instead, they argue for an implementation of a law that accepts abortion under certain circumstances, (therapeutic abortion). More specifically they argue that abortion only should be legal under the following three circumstances:

- To defend the health and the life of the pregnant woman
- When the pregnancy is a consequence of a sexual violation
- When the fetus possesses congenital malformations incompatible with life

CDD clarifies that it is under these specific consequences that they accept abortion, which becomes evident in the following extract:

My translation: “(...) there are three reasons or causes in which abortion is fully justified” (Católicas por el derecho a decidir, 2016, p.3)⁶.

However, the document leaves a lot of issues relating to abortion unproblematized. Nothing is mentioned about the abortion ban as a form of state control over the female sexuality. The question of female sexuality is not mentioned at all, which can be understood as an implication of that CDD

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⁶ “(...) existen tres razones o causales en las que aborto está plenamente justificado.”
understands sexuality as a private issue and not an object for political debate. Contrasting from the name of the organization, (Catholics For the Right to Decide), nothing is mentioned regarding the right to a free choice. Moreover, the private sphere in general is not in focus in this document and sexual rights are not mentioned at all.

MOVIMIENTO FEMINISTA NICARAGUA
The third document that has been analyzed is the one from the feminist network Movimiento Feminista Nicaragua (MF). This movement is explicit, in the name itself, a feminist movement. Hence, regarding the question of feminism, it is possible to draw the conclusion that MF self-identifies with feminism.

MF presents a lot of statistics regarding maternity, abortion and, health in Nicaragua. For example, the movement states that the maternal mortality is 125/100 000 and that 28 % of all pregnancies in the country are among girls and teenagers under 18 years old. Moreover, the movement presents numbers from 2012 and 2013, showing that 47 % of the maternal deaths could have been avoided if the pregnancies would have been terminated. MF also presents examples of pregnant women suffering from serious cancer forms that have been denied treatment since the treatment could affect the development of the fetus.

These statistics are mentioned here to exemplify that MF mainly argues for a more liberal abortion law in the light of the health effects of the current prohibition. Hence, the abortion ban is mainly presented as a health problem among this group of actors. A health problem that is affecting girls and women because the Nicaraguan state denies them help and treatment. Later in the text, it becomes even more clear that MF mainly understands the abortion ban as a health issue. For example, in the following extract:

(My translation): “The feminist organizations from Nicaragua return to question the Nicaraguan state about the factors that made the legislators and the president decide that pregnant women not are entitled the right to live and are forced to die in the attempt to create a new life, at the expense of their own?”(Movimiento Feminista Nicaragua, 2016, p.1).

7 “Las organizaciones feministas de Nicaragua volvemos a interrogar al Estado de Nicaragua sobre ¿Cuáles son los asideros que llevaron a los legisladores y al presidente de la república, a decidir que las mujeres con embarazos de riesgo no son titulares del derecho a la vida y deben morir en el intento de generar una nueva vida a costa de la propia?”.  

22
Furthermore, the following example also clarifies how MF is arguing against the prohibition of abortion:

(My translation): "Nicaragua is a clear example of how a state can resort to ‘the protection of life’ in a fetish way, and through unjust laws, provoke the death of thousands of women who have been forced to live in conditions of poverty, discrimination and, violence" (Movimiento Feminista Nicaragua, 2016, p.1).

What these examples show is that the movement puts focus on the health consequences of the abortion ban and that the movement not shows any particular interest in the symbolic meaning of the law reform. Moreover, the extracts show that the movement mainly holds the state accountable for these issues.

Regarding the question of unconditional support, MF’s position is not explicit in the text. To start with, the movement suggests the following reforms:

- A review of the current abortion ban with the aim of removing punitive provisions
- A non-criminalization of medical professionals that exercise their ‘professional responsibilities’
- The provision of services with high quality for women with complications arising from abortions performed in dangerous conditions
- State support to help women avoid unwanted pregnancies.

The suggested reforms have two implications. Firstly, the reforms imply that MF supports unconditional access to abortion even if this is not expressed explicitly. This interpretation is mainly based on the fact that MF claims a review with the aim of removing penalties. Moreover, these reforms also make it clear that MF understands the state as the most important site of power when it comes to reform and change. This conclusion is based on the fact that all the reforms suggested by MF are on governmental level.

Furthermore, the text from El Movimiento Feminista ends with the following words:

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8 “Nicaragua constituye un claro ejemplo de cómo el Estado puede invocar la protección de la vida como fetiche, y provocar con leyes injustas, la muerte de miles de mujeres que han sido obligadas a vivir en condiciones de pobreza, discriminación y violencia”.
(My translation): “We will not get tired of demanding justice. We have the right to live free from violence, we have the right to decide”⁹ (Movimiento Feminista Nicaragua, 2016, p.1).

The last words from this quotation, that MF argues that they have the right to decide, can be understood as one more sign of a support for an unconditional abortion law. However, the text does not develop these claims more concretely and it is therefore hard to determine anything.

Lastly, it is worth to mention that there are aspects that could be relevant for the abortion question that MF not comments or brings to the discussion. These aspects include female sexuality and sexual rights, that are not mentioned at all in the text. The private sector is also totally excluded from the text.

LA CORRIENTE
The last text that has been analyzed comes from the organization La Corriente. Compared to MAM and MF, this movement does not describe themselves as feminists as explicitly. However, the text still contains some signs of that La Corriente at least not makes a strong distinction between themselves and feminism. For example, the following extract can be perceived as one of these signs: My translation: “The feminist activists blame the state for the vulnerability that women are exposed to and they urge to continue resisting, denouncing and debating every day”¹⁰ (La Corriente, 2016, p.1).

Even if this extract is written in a ‘they-perspective’ and not a ‘we-perspective’, La Corriente still acknowledges the feminist activists and their work which can be understood as a sign of belonging.

Regarding the main argument against the abortion prohibition, the following extract is a clear example of La Corriente’s position:

My translation: “The total prohibition of abortion is the ultimate expression of the institutionalized and symbolic violence that reflects the state’s control over the female body. Moreover, it proves the

⁹ “No nos cansaremos de exigir justicia. Tenemos derecho a la vida, tenemos derechos a vivir libres de violencia, tenemos derecho a decidir”.

¹⁰ “Las activistas feministas responsabilizan al Estado de la vulnerabilidad a la que están expuestas las mujeres e instan a continuar resistiendo, denunciando y debatiendo todos los días”.
prevailing misogyny among public officials and the total absence of secular values in a country that constitutionally does not have an official religion”\textsuperscript{11} (La Corriente, 2016, p.1).

a form of state control over the female body. The fact that the state of Nicaragua is involving religious features in their politics is also a part of La Corriente’s main critique.

Another interesting aspect of the document from La Corriente is when the movement explains what kind of reform it claims. The movement is not just interested in a legalization of therapeutic abortion, but want abortion to be legal, safe and free for all women in Nicaragua. This becomes clear in the following quotation from the text:

With my translation: “We are echoing the demand for legal, secure and free abortion for all women”\textsuperscript{12} (La Corriente, 2016, p.1).

Thereby, La Corriente is arguing for unlimited access to abortion for everyone without requiring some special conditions.

In the text from La Corriente, nothing is mentioned regarding female sexuality, sexual rights or the private sphere. Hence, it is hard to get an impression of how the movement links these aspects to the issue of abortion.

The theoretical framework used to summarize Heumann’s categorizations has been applied on the relevant movements analyzed in this essay too. The aim with this application has been to illustrate the findings that have been made in the analysis in a clear way that makes it easy for the reader to get an overview of the central aspects of the analysis.

\textsuperscript{11} “La penalización absoluta del aborto en Nicaragua constituye una máxima expresión de violencia institucional y simbólica que refleja el control sobre los cuerpos de las mujeres. Evidencia la misoginia imperante en funcionarios públicos y la ausencia total de valores laicos, en un país que constitucionalmente “no tiene religión oficial””

\textsuperscript{12} “Haciendo eco a la demanda de un aborto legal, seguro y gratuito para todas las mujeres (..)”
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>MAM</th>
<th>CDD</th>
<th>MF</th>
<th>La Corriente</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>The view on feminism:</strong>*</td>
<td>Self-identifying with feminism</td>
<td>No signs of self-identifying with feminism</td>
<td>Self-identifying with feminism</td>
<td>Some signs of self-identifying with feminism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The main argument against the abortion ban:</strong></td>
<td>Both a public health problem and a feminist problem</td>
<td>A public health problem - Endangers the safety and health of women and puts health professionals in difficult situations</td>
<td>A public health problem - Endangers the safety and health of women</td>
<td>A feminist problem - an expression of the oppression against women and a political problem - the Nicaraguan laws should be secular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Support for unconditional access to abortion:</strong></td>
<td>Yes</td>
<td>No, only therapeutic abortion</td>
<td>Not mentioned explicitly in the text</td>
<td>Yes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The perception of the private sphere:</strong></td>
<td>An exceedingly political sphere</td>
<td>Not mentioned explicitly in the text</td>
<td>Not mentioned explicitly in the text</td>
<td>Not mentioned explicitly in the text</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>The privileged site of power and reform:</strong></td>
<td>The state (top-down perspective) + work on the personal level (bottom-up perspective).</td>
<td>The state (top-down perspective)</td>
<td>The state (top-down perspective)</td>
<td>The state (top-down perspective)</td>
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**CONCLUSIONS**

In the coming section, a summary of the findings from the analysis has been made. Regarding the first research question, about the movement’s main arguments against the abortion prohibition, some interesting discoveries have been found. On a general level, it is worth to emphasize the variety of arguments that seem to characterize the debate against the prohibition of abortion in Nicaragua. The findings that have been made vary a lot depending on which movement they come from, and it is hard to talk about a single ‘main argument’ against the abortion ban. Rather, the different movements that have been analyzed have different grounds for their criticism.

**MOVIMIENTO AUTÓNOMO DE MUJERES DEL NICARAGUA**

Regarding Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres (MAM), two arguments against the abortion ban seem to be dominating. To start with, MAM argues against the prohibition for health-related reasons. They argue that through the implementation of the abortion prohibition, the state does not longer guarantee the safety or integrity of girls and women. Moreover, MAM denounces the fact that Nicaraguan women that get pregnant as a consequence of sexual violation are forced to keep the child today. Additionally, MAM also motivates their criticism to the prohibition of abortion in another light. The movement states that they, with conviction and passion, defend women’s right to decide regarding motherhood with freedom and autonomy. Hence, it is possible to argue that MAM has two main arguments against the prohibition of abortion:

- The law puts women in dangerous situations where their safety not is guaranteed.
- The law prevents women from taking autonomous decisions regarding motherhood.
However, throughout the text analysis a third argument from MAM has been identified that is not as dominating but still deserves to be mentioned:

- The law is strongly influenced by the Church, and MAM is critical against the integration of the state and religious concerns.

**Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir**

In the text from Católicas por el Derecho a Decidir (CDD) the health-related problems that the prohibition of abortion leads to are in focus. For example, the movement argues that the prohibition makes women undergo unsafe and illegal abortion methods, which is a huge health risk for them. According to CDD, it is not only women that are negatively affected of the abortion ban. The law also puts health professionals in difficult situations where they are stuck between different laws that are contradicting. This decreases the quality of public health services according to CDD. Consequently, two main arguments against the abortion prohibition have been found from this movement:

- The law puts women in serious danger, both physically and mentally.
- The law creates troublesome situations for health professionals and weakens the quality of the public health care.

**Movimiento Feminista de Nicaragua**

The health-related aspects of the prohibition of abortion are in focus in the text from MF too. This can be understood as the main reason for MF’s criticism. The law makes it impossible to terminate a pregnancy in a legal way, even if the pregnancy causes serious problems for the woman. MF states that 48% of the maternal deaths could have been avoided if women got access to terminate their pregnancies. It is in this light that the movement argues against the law, and the main argument could be described as:

- The law is a serious threat to women’s safety and health, especially for women living in poverty.

**Programa Feminista Centroamericano La Corriente**

Lastly, La Corriente’s main arguments should be presented. This movement does not focus as much on the health-related effects of the law. Instead, the movement denounces the law, arguing that it reflects a patriarchal system where the female body is controlled and exploited. Furthermore, the
movement puts criticism on the religious features of the law. Hence, the two main arguments can be described as follows:

- The law is an expression of how the female body is controlled and of how violence is institutionalized in Nicaragua.
- The law contains religious features, which contradicts with the Nicaraguan constitution that says that the country does not have an official religion.

With regard to the second research question, where the aim has been to find similarities and/or differences between the modern arguments and standpoints and the arguments and standpoints that were central 10 years ago, some interesting findings have been made.

To start with, a clear similarity between the ‘modern’ way of arguing against the prohibition of abortion and the dominating way 10 years ago is that both contain a lot of competing discourses and understandings. It is hard to talk about one, unified argument against the issue within the women’s rights movements that have been in focus for this essay. This was also the case for Heumann when she conducted her study.

When it comes to the question of feminism, some differences between the modern standpoints and the standpoints that were central 10 years ago have been discovered. Heumann’s so-called poverty frame, where the actors did not identify themselves as feminists, was dominating during the time Heumann did her study. This does not seem to be the case in the modern way of positioning, (even if the movements that have been analyzed still contain elements similar to the ones in the ‘poverty frame’). Not a single one of the movements that have been analyzed in this study are distancing themselves from the feminism as explicitly as the actors Heumann placed within the ‘poverty frame’ did. Instead, the movements that are central for this study are either self-identifying with feminism or do not mention anything specific about it. Hence, regarding feminism, three out of the four movements that have been looked at in this study have more in common with Heumann’s ‘autonomy frame’ and/or the ‘personal is political frame’. These frames were not as prevalent as the ‘poverty frame’ when Heumann conducted her study. The fourth movement, CDD, has a different approach to feminism. The movement is not mentioning the subject at all, which makes its position on feminism hard to determine. Hence, none of the movements, share the explicit distance-taking from feminism that were characterizing the actors within the main approach between 2003 and 2008.

Regarding the main argument against the prohibition if abortion, some interesting findings have been made. During the time Heumann did her study, the so-called poverty frame was dominating. This
means that the majority of the actors that Heumann analyzed between 2003 and 2008, mainly understood abortion as a necessity for some women, due to complications with the pregnancy or some other circumstance that complicated a potential child birth. The main argument against the abortion ban at that time was not based on a feminist analysis of the symbolic meaning of the prohibition but rather on the concrete consequences of the ban: it put women in life-threatening situations. Anyhow, the dominating discourse (‘the poverty frame) also faced some competition during 2003-2008. Both the ‘autonomy frame’ and the ‘personal is political frame’ argued for access to abortion from an approach where the law’s symbolic meaning was in focus. They argued that the law was an expression for the oppression women in Nicaragua faced, and that it was a way for the state to control the female body. Consequently, the focus was on women’s right to decide and on female liberty rather than on the health effects from the prohibition among these groups.

Both these understandings are still possible to find within the movements that have been studied in this essay. All the movements are mentioning the public health consequences of the prohibition of abortion (even if the extent to which this is in focus is shifting between the movements). Three out of four (not La Corriente) of them have the public health problems leading from the abortion ban as one of their main arguments against the law. However, the law is also criticized for its symbolic meaning among some of the movements relevant for this study. Both MAM and La Corriente mention that the law is an expression of the oppression of women and of the state’s control over the female body, arguments that are compatible with the ones within the ‘autonomy frame’ and the ‘personal is political frame’. Hence, the arguments that were the ones dominating between 2003 and 2008 are still used among women’s rights movements in Nicaragua. It is hard to speak about which argument that is dominating, but that was never the aim of this study anyhow. What can be said is that both the approaches still are possible to find within the four movements that have been in focus for this study, which can be understood as another parallel between the two time periods.

Two arguments that have been found in this study were not mentioned at all in the study by Heumann. Firstly, CDD’s statements about the difficult situation the abortion prohibition puts health professionals in and the fact that the law weakens the quality of the health care were not mentioned in Heumann’s study. Secondly, MAM’s and La Corriente’s critique against the religious features of the law were not mentioned as central by the earlier scholars. This can be seen as a difference between the modern arguments and the ones between 2003 and 2008. However, these arguments should not be understood as the ones dominating the modern debate but rather an additional critique from some of the movements.
Regarding the movements’ support for unconditional access to abortion a similarity between the two different time periods have been distinguished. The movements that explicitly identify themselves as feminist movements (MAM and MF completely, and La Corriente to some extent) also seem to support unconditional access to abortion. The only movement that does not self-identify with feminism, CDD, is also the only movement that explicitly does not support unconditional access. This is also the case in Heumann’s study, where the actors within the ‘poverty frame’ not identify themselves with feminism and not support unconditional access to abortion. While the actors within the ‘autonomy frame’ and the ‘personal is political frame’, identify themselves as feminist actors and support unconditional access to abortion.

Heumann mentions that the dominating discourse at the time when they conducted their studies were one that only supported access to therapeutic abortion. This does not appear to be the case in the modern way of arguing, at least not based on the cases that have been analyzed in this study. This can be understood as a shift in the debate, from a more limited claim (access to therapeutic abortion) to a total support for abortion without any special requirements. On the other hand, the exclusive support for therapeutic abortion is remaining in the modern debate. CDD makes it clear in their document, that they only support abortion under certain circumstances, which goes in line with the approach that was dominating when Heumann conducted her study.

The main perception of the private sphere between 2003 and 2008 was as an apolitical area that not needed to be discussed in political debate according to Heumann. The majority of the movements analyzed in this study do not mention the private sphere at all in their texts. One way of interpreting this is as if they agree with the dominating approach during the time Heumann did her study. In other words, as if these movements also understand the private sphere as an apolitical area and therefore exclude the subject from their political texts. However, this is hard to determine with security. The only movement that mentions the private sphere is MAM, which also acknowledges this sphere as political. MAM is also the movement that has most in common with Heumann’s ‘the personal is political frame’. Both MAM and the actors within ‘the personal is political frame’ self-identify with feminism, perceive the abortion ban as a feminist problem, support unconditional abortion access and recognize the private room as a political sphere. Hence, this can be understood as another similarity. The feminist movement that explicitly support unconditional access to abortion also supports the idea of the private sphere as political.
The relevant movements seem to understand the state as the central site of power and hence also the central site for potential reforms regarding the abortion issue. This conclusion is based on the fact that the majority of all the reforms that the movements suggest in their texts are on a state-level. According to the work by Heumann, this was also the case when she conducted her study. Consequently, another similarity between the two periods of time is that the main focus within women’s rights movements seem to be on state reforms and work from a ‘top down’ perspective. Since the central problem is a law reform implemented by the state this finding may not seem to be that surprising. However, both MAM and the actors within ‘the personal is political frame’ are understanding the topic differently. These actors argue that reforms on the state-level should be combined with work on the personal level, since the norms and ideas about abortion among individuals not necessarily change through a law reform. Anyhow, as already mentioned, MAM and the actors within ‘the personal is political frame’ do not represent the dominating approach regarding the personal sphere but should rather be understood as exceptions.

The last aspects that have been looked at are related to women’s sexuality and sexual rights. Here, some other similarities have been found. The actors within main approach in Heumann’s study have a so-called ‘sex negative perspective’ where they mainly understand sex in relation to the problems and threats it can expose women to. A potential consequence from the sex-negative perspective is that these movements not prioritize sexual rights in their work but rather see these rights as narrow and of less importance. However, the category that is claimed to be the least prevalent one in Heumann’s study (‘the personal is political frame’) acknowledges women’s right to pleasure and understands sexual rights as of importance. Hence, based on Heumann’s study, it is possible to argue that even if the main approach at that time did not acknowledge sexual rights as of great importance there were also other, competing, understandings of the issue. In the analysis of this study, the same conclusion has been made. It became clear that the majority of the movements that have been looked at do not mention female sexuality or sexual rights. The exclusion of these issues from their texts can be interpreted in different ways. One possible way of understanding it is as if the movements not understand these questions as politically relevant (or at least not relevant for politics regarding abortion). However, this is not something that can be determined with any certainty since it is not explicitly said in the texts. What, on the other hand, can be said with certainty is that just like in Heumann’s study there is one group of actors in this study that differs from the rest by acknowledging sexual rights as relevant for the abortion issue and that is emphasizing women’s right to pleasure as an aspect worth to consider when discussing the prohibition of abortion. Just as when the other aspects were discussed, it is MAM’s approach to sexual rights that is similar to the
approach within the ‘personal is political frame’. Hence, another similarity between the two periods of time can be distinguished: the majority of the movements do not speak about the prohibition of abortion in terms of sexual rights, but there are some exceptions that still acknowledge these rights and perceive them as of importance.
BIBLIOGRAPHY


THE MATERIAL:


