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Capital Visions

The Politics of Transnational Production in
Nicaragua



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Sofie Tornhill

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Contents

Abbreviations.....	ix
1. Introduction.....	11
<i>Envisioning Capital: Aims and Research Questions</i>	14
<i>Background and Contextual Settings</i>	15
<i>Outline</i>	20
2. Contriving Transnational Capital: Theory and Method.....	23
Cartographies of Globalization and Progress: A Context.....	25
<i>Neoliberal Delineations</i>	25
<i>States of Legitimacy</i>	29
<i>Development Logics</i>	32
<i>Locations of Labor and Capital</i>	35
<i>Productive Femininity</i>	38
<i>Other Stories?</i>	41
The Language of Politics: Analytic Considerations.....	43
<i>Projections of the Nation</i>	44
<i>Rhetoric, Meaning and Political Rule</i>	46
<i>Positions and Identifications</i>	48
<i>The Empirical Material</i>	51
Summary.....	60
3. Scripts of Globalization: Between Progress and Revolution.....	63
Re-Narrating the Nation: The New Nicaragua.....	66
<i>Transnational Images: The Nation as a Brand</i>	66
<i>Post-revolutionary Goals in the Global Economy</i>	77
<i>Global Anxieties: Advantages and Threats in “Flexible” Production</i>	81
Revisiting the Revolution.....	88
<i>Revolution Interrupted</i>	88
<i>Against the Savagery of Capitalism</i>	92
<i>Reconciliation and the Enemies of the Poor</i>	100
Conclusion: Projects of Globalization.....	105

4. Transformative Subjects: Proper Workers and the Ascent of the Poor	109
Proper Production: Work in the New Era	111
<i>Work in Progress</i>	112
<i>Fabrication of Femininity</i>	120
<i>The Deficient Worker</i>	127
Popular Struggle in the Sandinista Imaginary.....	131
<i>The Power of the People: Populism and Emancipatory Striving</i>	133
<i>Revolutionary Subjects</i>	139
<i>Feminism and the Transnational Menace</i>	143
Conclusion: Subjects of Value in Societal Change	152
5. Classifications of Belonging: (Dis)identification in Global Production.....	157
<i>Encounters within the Global Division of Labor</i>	161
<i>National Belongings</i>	167
<i>Categorizations of Work</i>	176
<i>Disruptive Relations in Value Accumulation</i>	185
<i>Images for Transformation</i>	191
6. Visions of Capital: Conclusion.....	199
<i>Transformative Visions</i>	200
<i>The Global Production of Free Trade Zones</i>	206
<i>Female Emancipation through the Negation of Class</i>	210
References.....	217
<i>Empirical Material</i>	228

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Sofie Tornhill

Abbreviations

ALBA	Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America
ALN	Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance
AMCHAM	United States Chamber of Commerce
ANITEC	Nicaraguan Association of Textile and Apparel
CNZF	National Free Trade Zones Commission
COSEP	Higher Council on Private Enterprise
CPC	Councils of Citizens' Power
CZF	Free Trade Zone Corporation
DR-CAFTA	The Dominican Republic – Central America Free Trade Agreement
GNP	Gross National Product
FTAA	Free Trade Area of the Americas
FSLN	Sandinista National Liberation Front
FTZ	Free Trade Zone
IMF	International Monetary Fund
KWS	Keynesian Welfare State
MAM	Autonomous Women's Movement
MRS	Sandinista Renovation Movement
NAFTA	North American Free Trade Agreement
PLC	Liberal Constitutionalist Party
SAP	Structural Adjustment Program
SWR	Schumpeterian Workfare Regime
TRIPS	Agreement on Trade Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights
WTO	World Trade Organization

1. Introduction

In one of Managua's multiplex movie theatres, located in a recently constructed shopping mall that hosts transnational retailers and fast-food chains, *Pirates of the Caribbean II* was on display in the summer of 2006. Before Johnny Depp appears on the screen as Captain Jack Sparrow, defending himself against bloodthirsty Caribbean cannibals, the audience is shown the expected pre-film commercials. But, in between cell phone advertisements and Hollywood trailers, an advert is shown that is not about the enticements of globalized consumption of commodities and culture but rather about the other end of the chain: global production. A brightly smiling female worker in a subcontracted garment factory extols the Nicaraguan government for its efforts to attract foreign investment, so providing employment opportunities within the expanding export sector.

In this way two strong images of mobility and border transgression pertaining to two different epochs of global economic relations were, in a peculiar way, brought together in the air-conditioned darkness of the movie theatre. The pirates and their ship, a metaphor for the frontier between the Old and the New World, figure as glamorized symbols of the autonomous subject. Precursors of colonialism and the emergent global capitalism that they fed on, the pirates embody the entanglement of legal and illegal aspects of commerce. A cultural obsession throughout the 18th century, the pirate became a discursive vehicle for the mobilization and rationalization of imperialist commodity flows: "the sorry parade of institutionalized predation and exploitation" (Mackie 2005: 29).

The protagonist in the advertisement works in a tax-exempted Free Trade Zone (FTZ): a contemporary symbol of post-Fordist, "flexible", transnational chains of production. Images of happy children, workers moving en masse and a fluttering Nicaraguan flag all point to the interconnection between transnational capital and individual and national progress, a correlation that is further underlined by the concluding exclamation: "Free Trade Zones – hope for the future!" Unlike the pirates, the workers in the commercial are not mobile; the prerequisites and results of labor, capital and products, are. The factory worker is portrayed as gaining access to improved living conditions through her (fixed) relation to transnational capital in line with export-led development expectations, pointing to the significance of gendered, classed and racialized expressions of mobility and confinement in the global division of labor.

The processes of value accumulation that were premised upon the crossing of frightful masses of water and violent explorations of savage lands have in contemporary settings been portrayed as a compression of time and space, enabling multinational companies' relentless search for increasing returns (Harvey 1990). However, growing interconnections between localities do not point toward equal accessibility, not even within the "same" space. Restraining class positions make it highly unlikely that presumptive FTZ workers would round off a day at the shopping mall by catching a movie, the admission fee well exceeding the average daily pay at the factories. To them, the commercial centers may rather function as "shop windows of capitalist success" (Boltanski and Chiapello 2005: 8). To the audience that did watch the commercial, the government's commitment to progress is affirmed. In this regard, the advertisement can be read as a way of mobilizing support for the process of economic integration, as an attempt to equate transnational production with conceptions of universal development.

A couple of months after *Pirates of the Caribbean II* had its Managua premiere, *Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional* (Sandinista National Liberation Front, FSLN) won the Nicaraguan national elections after 16 years in opposition, replacing the neoliberal/conservative government of *Partido Liberal Constitucionalista* (Liberal Constitutionalist Party, PLC). The FSLN was thereby added to the list of recently installed left of center governments in Latin America. Proclaiming an anti-imperialist stance, the FSLN's rhetoric attempting to reconnect to the country's revolutionary past partly displaced representations of transnational capital as the key to national advancement. Thus, rather than being framed in terms of future hopes, the FTZs largely came to figure as expressions of inequalities in the global economic order.

These events, images and settings encircle the concerns of this study in which I analyze practices of sense-making in relation to transnational capital. As suggested by the dual meaning of the title, *Capital Visions*, the study explores visualizations of capital in terms of how market transactions and profit accumulation are being invested with particular meanings, and in terms of how some visions come to acquire a dominating position. Further, the two meanings are here seen as interconnected in the sense that resources are allocated to advancing specific knowledge regimes, which in turn may constitute the scientific and ideological underpinnings of particular economic relations. The types of visions of capital that come to prevail are thus bound up with power and structures of interpretation that, through the exclusion of alternatives, make possible certain forms of conduct. However, exploring components of capital visions may also be a way to deconstruct them; here I wish to highlight how visualizations are implicated in struggles over meaning on various levels and the ways that they are challenged and, potentially, transformed.

The FTZs¹ in Nicaragua constitute the main context for the discussion. This departure, I think, allows for an examination of transnational orders of production and their discursive justifications. For one thing, the FTZs occupy a central, symbolic position in competing discourses on the foundations and effects of globalization. In export-led development prescriptions, as put forward by for instance the Bretton Woods institutions (often echoed in national political agendas, as the pre-film commercial reflects), FTZs are represented as vehicles of economic integration and collective and individual advancement. In contrast, the crowded factories where overtime is required, the threat of dismissal constant, the environment hazardous and the salaries too low to live on have fuelled transnational activism, and the FTZs have been described as the showcases of “race to the bottom” globalization. In the case of Nicaragua, both these framings of the FTZs are reflected in the positions of the two governments in power during the period covered by this study. These two governments are the neoliberal/conservative PLC (2002–2007) and the leftist FSLN (2007–). This provides an opportunity to analyze the outline of divergent political projects in propinquity to orders of production as well as differing constructions of proper citizen-subjects, specifically workers, in the context of uneven development.

Further, as sites where “global” capital is “locally” materialized, the FTZs can be read as a scene where several features, ideas and materialities of globalization merge or clash: the interaction between discipline, fixity and mobility; the sharp division between sites of production and sites of consumption; and transnational networks of capital consolidation while labor is being fragmented through increasing global competition. Indeed, the FTZs are part of the processes that have recast patterns and bases of inclusion and exclusion in the global economy, involving the rapid industrialization in parts of the “periphery” together with the explosive expansion of the informal economy, which coincide with the decline of traditional industrial production in the “center”.

The ways in which different subjects are positioned and dispossessed in the global division of labor are unevenly distributed along the lines of racial, gendered and classed categorizations and power formations. Overwhelmingly, women of color (in the Third World as well as in the First) comprise the “new proletariat” (Mitter 1986) in low-wage occupations within manufacturing and services, suggesting that contemporary exploitation “is as much the consequence of colonial world-making as it is

¹ The benefits for companies operating in the Nicaraguan FTZs include: a) a temporary exemption from the income tax during the first ten years of operation and then a 60% exemption during all subsequent years; b) a permanent exemption from all import duties and taxes on raw materials, machinery, equipment and supplies; c) a permanent exemption from all export and re-export duties on produced goods; d) a permanent exemption from value added and consumption taxes and from all municipal taxes.

the hallmark of a new world order” (Cherniavsky 2006: 40). Focusing on the FTZs is a way to highlight not only how the global divisions of labor are upheld and reproduced on various, entangled scales (transnationally, nationally and locally as well as economically and politically), but also how these divisions may constitute a platform for political alliances. In the wake of austere divergences, the FTZs provide a framework for approaching processes of identification and disidentification in transnational production, the ways that workers relate to and represent their locations within global circuits of production.

Below, I describe the overarching aims and research questions that guide the dissertation. This is followed by a brief delineation of the historical background and contextual setting of the study. Finally, I present an outline of subsequent chapters.

Envisioning Capital: Aims and Research Questions

This study interrogates conflicting meanings attributed to the operation of transnational capital in Nicaragua. Engaging with discourse theory, Marxist and postcolonial feminist theories, it aims to contribute to understandings of the discursive infrastructures that legitimate and help render possible processes of global economic integration. Problematizing neoliberal conceptions of development that in recent decades have constituted the most authoritative imaginary to picture social change, I bring together “macro” and “micro” elements of transnational production to emphasize both abstract global and embodied local aspects of processes of consolidation and transformation. With a focus primarily on representations of the phenomenon of the FTZs, the study examines visualizations of transnational capital in projects of nation-making in propinquity to contending notions of the “common good”; the positions and arguments of (trans)national economic agents; and how FTZ workers attempt to embrace, reject or alter the positions prescribed for them in the process of economic integration. Thus, through the juxtaposition of power and identity formations on multiple levels, I wish to interrogate contextual productions, reinforcements and challenges of global orders of production and divisions of labor.

In particular, I intend to explore the position of (female) FTZ workers both as producers of value and as legitimizing postulates. How, I ask, are they constructed within discourses of globalization and within national political agendas such that they become suitable for labor-intensive production and such that their incorporation as low-wage labor appears to be in line with their own best interests. Through an analysis of Nicaraguan FTZs, I will argue that relations between class, race and gender – between choices and necessities in global markets – challenge the notion of a

generalized link between emancipation and integration into transnational production. And if so, how may the relation between globalized circuits of production and social differentiation be envisioned otherwise, politically and theoretically? Thus, a related dimension of the interrogation of visualizations of capital in this study concerns the premises of knowledge production that takes place in contexts profoundly marked by the inequalities of global divisions of labor. Drawing on postcolonial feminist theorization, I scrutinize the delimitations to access alternative or counter-hegemonic representations of FTZ work, placing the research project within structures of privilege and domination in globalized patterns of production and consumption.

Based on textual or rhetorical enunciations during the neoliberal/conservative government of the PLC led by Enrique Bolaños (2002–2007) and the “revolutionary” government of the FSLN led by Daniel Ortega (2007–) as well as interviews with workers, the study construes struggles over meanings at the intersections of transnational capital’s demands and competing discourses of collective and individual well-being. In order to further frame and direct the discussion, the following questions are posed:

- How are the conditions and effects of transnational capital and globalized orders of production envisioned and made reasonable in the context of the FTZs? Against the backdrop of uneven manifestations of development, how is the nation state’s role and function projected in the quest for political legitimacy?
- In what ways are political subjects constructed, interpellated and differentiated along the lines of class, gender and locality in relation to the demands of global capitalism? What scripts are made available for workers in contending processes of nation-making?
- How do FTZ workers relate to the positions that they are encouraged and disciplined to inhabit in processes of social transformation? How may workers’ narratives be analytically accounted for?

Background and Contextual Settings

The pre-film advertisement representing the FTZs as the road to national and individual progress and the shopping mall where it was displayed – a shrine of (unattainable) consumption in a city fragmented by earthquakes and poverty – vigorously speak to the profound transformations of Nicaragua’s political economy. Echoing a development formula prescribed by for example the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund that advises Third World countries to specialize in “flexible” export production

to make use of their “comparative advantage”, namely, cost-efficient labor, the advertisement was produced by *Comisión Nacional de Zonas Francas* (National Free Trade Zones Commission, CNZF), an institution set up by the government to promote foreign investment. Within the time span of 70 years, Nicaragua has experienced “crony” capitalism under dictatorship (1937–1979); a mixed economy after a leftist revolution (1979–1990); neoliberal structural adjustments (1990–2006); and then the return of the revolutionary party to power in 2007. Yet these changes, though profound, not only represent ruptures but contain elements of continuity as well; the unremitting impact of the United States, the lasting influence of the small elite and striking inequalities.

Nicaragua came to world attention when the FSLN took power by means of revolutionary upheaval in 1979. Formed in 1961 and inspired by the Cuban revolution, Marxist theory and the independence struggle of Augusto C. Sandino against the military presence of the United States in the 1920s, the FSLN managed to overthrow the Somoza regime, Latin America’s longest-lasting dynastic dictatorship.² After having tried out and refined various tactics, the revolution was carried through by means of a rural and urban insurrection that turned into a multi-class alliance (Foran 2005). The isolation that had befallen Cuba was to be avoided by opting for a mixed, democratized economy and maintaining relations with all nations. Later, the role of Marxism was downplayed and the Scandinavian social democratic countries were sometimes held up as a model.³ Democratic elections, extensively monitored by international observers, were held in 1984, giving the FSLN’s candidate Daniel Ortega Saavedra 67 percent of the vote in a race against six other parties (Walker 1997: 10).

However, political initiatives to promote social equality by means of agrarian reform, accessibility of health care and education and expanded labor rights soon came under threat. Initially, the United States was set on maintaining friendly relations with the new Nicaraguan government, but when Ronald Reagan replaced Jimmy Carter as US president 18 months after the revolution, aid to Nicaragua was immediately cut off and measures to overthrow the Sandinista government became systematic: support for the Contra opposition, sabotage, economic sanctions and the blocking of international loans. In 1985 Reagan declared a “national emergency” to bypass Congress in imposing an embargo on Nicaragua, a measure that was

² In 1934, Augusto C. Sandino was assassinated on the orders of the National Guard. Anastasio Somoza García, then head of the National Guard, took power in 1937, this initiating the Somoza family dynasty. He was succeeded by two sons: Luis and Anastasio Somoza Debayle. Nicaragua became what David Harvey (2005: 27) calls the paradigm case of the US system of “imperialism without colonies”. To curb uprisings that threatened US influence in the region, a local counterpart was installed (in this case the Somozas) who through economic and military support were ensured a position of power and wealth, guaranteeing in return the promotion of US interests in the country and the region as a whole.

³ For a discussion on the theory and ideology of the FSLN, see Wright (1995).

widely condemned by other countries (see LeoGrande 1996). The increasing budgetary share of the military expenses of the Contra war, a failing economy and hyperinflation led the FSLN to undertake structural reforms and government downsizing in 1988 and 1989, hitting the poorest sectors hardest (Walker 1997: 12–13). In 1990, the FSLN lost the elections to a US-backed 14-party coalition, *Unión Nacional Opositora* (National Opposition Union, UNO) led by Violeta Chamorro.⁴ Privatization, downsizing of the state, intensified structural adjustments (now without social safety nets) and the redirection of the economy toward export production, not least through the establishment of FTZs, were processes that continued under the subsequent neoliberal/conservative PLC governments of Arnoldo Alemán (1997–2002) and Enrique Bolaños (2002–2007).⁵

Still, this “counter-revolution” did not manage to uproot the Sandinista legacy in its entirety, and the FSLN continued to exert considerable political influence – some would argue that Daniel Ortega kept his promise upon resigning to continue to “govern from below”, arguably blurring the line between opposition and government (Envío 2006). The poor majority, mobilized by the revolution and social and labor movements, persisted in making their presence felt through strikes and protests, implying the

⁴ Violeta Chamorro is the widow of Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, who was chief editor of Nicaragua’s liberal daily newspaper *La Prensa*. He was assassinated in 1978 by the National Guard, which considerably fuelled liberal/bourgeois discontent with the Somoza regime. During the electoral campaign, Violeta Chamorro repeatedly insisted that she had assumed power not primarily as a politician but as a widow and mother with the power to reconcile the nation as she had reconciled her own family, split between members and opponents of the FSLN. She often represented herself as the good, traditional wife: “I am not a feminist nor do I wish to be one. I am a woman dedicated to my home, as Pedro taught me” (Kampwirth 1996: 69). Distancing herself from members of the pro-Contra right (such as Vice-President Virgilio Godoy, who was marginalized soon after the victory), Chamorro and her advisors were considered by some to be “moderate”. At the same time, they worked closely with the United States to revoke the effects of the revolution (see Prevost 1996).

⁵ The governments taking power after the FSLN’s electoral loss are commonly referred to in the literature as the “post-Sandinista” governments. The term aptly catches the continuing legacy of the revolutionary decade and simultaneous attempts to detach the country from the influence of the FSLN. However, with the return of the FSLN to power in 2007, the term “post-Sandinista” is arguably confusing, not least since the “new Sandinistas” could perhaps be conceived of as “post-Sandinistas” as well. Here, I nonetheless sometimes use the term when referring to the 1990–2007 epoch. Sometimes I denote these governments as neoliberal/conservative, pointing to the coexistence of an economic platform that can broadly be described as neoliberal and conservative values, especially regarding gender relations and the role of religion. A problem with this terminology is that ideological contents are among the interrogative ambitions of the dissertation. Misleadingly indicating a given content of these terms, to use them only in relation to the post-Sandinista era may also appear to suggest that neoliberalism and conservatism have no bearing in relation to the FSLN, something that I will dispute below. Sometimes, I use the name of the party, PLC, when referring to Bolaños’s government. However, while both Alemán and Bolaños came from the PLC, Bolaños was marginalized within the party soon after becoming President and went on to form *Alianza por la República* (Alliance for the Republic, APRE). Thus, with these elucidations, the terms “post-Sandinism”, “neoliberal/conservative” and “PLC” will all be cautiously deployed.

necessity of gradual change instead of the instant, complete “makeover” envisioned and promoted by actors such as the US Agency for International Development (USAID) (Walker 1997: 15; Robinson 1997: 31; Babb 2001). Thus, although the transformations have indeed been considerable, they are not absolute, and ideological differences are not complete or coherent. When the FSLN and Daniel Ortega returned to power in 2007, it was in coalition with many of its former foes: Arnoldo Alemán and his loyalists within the PLC, the Catholic Church, the private sector and former Contras.

The doings and undoings of the Nicaraguan revolution have evoked an extensive literature that serves as an inspiration and a point of departure for this dissertation. Of particular interest for the purposes of the study are analyses of political economy and globalization. In an extensive comparative study, William I. Robinson (2003) portrays the incorporation of Central America into the globalizing economy in conjunction with dominant notions of development, emphasizing the significance of historical particularities in a discussion of the possibilities of counter-hegemonic resistance. Several authors explore aspects of the dynamics between neoliberal restructurings and conservatism on the one hand and the legacy of popular mobilization during the revolutionary decade on the other hand. In an ethnographic study, Florence Babb (2001) discusses how the incorporation of Nicaragua into the globalizing economy with its privileging of large-scale corporations in combination with structural adjustment programs and privatization hit small-scale cooperatives and industries hard. At the same time, she argues, the groups most affected by these transformations are also the ones that through popular movements have been prepared to confront ideologies of neoliberalism as well as rising conservatism regarding gender relations, implying that the processes and effects of transformation are countered in low-income barrios.

Segments of the labor force that were displaced by neoliberal restructurings have come to constitute the major source of labor power in the growing FTZ sector. Jennifer Bickham Mendez (2005) details the strategies of a women workers’ organization dedicated to the protection of workers’ rights in export production. With the explicit aim of building activism around both class and gender relations, the organization navigates the hostility from “traditional” (male-centered) unions as well as the measures undertaken by employers to counteract the mobilization of workers in the FTZs. In a highly anti-union context, the organization’s decision not to form a regular union has granted it a certain access to the FTZs as long as it does not sully its reputation as a “moderate” women’s organization rather than “strident” worker’s union, implying both possibilities and limitations. Feminist politics in revolutionary and post-revolutionary contexts in Latin America is a central theme in the work of Karen Kampwirth (1996, 2004, 2006, 2008). Her researches on Nicaragua

reveal struggles over priorities and tactics around class and gender relations in the ambiguous space for transformation opened up by the revolution, mapping as well the coordination of a transnationally supported backlash movement that advocated conservative family values and mobilized against both the FSLN and the women's movement.

Also focusing on transnational mobilization, but in these cases within the labor movement, Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval (2005) and Robert J. S. Ross (2004) explore how FTZ workers' struggle for improved working conditions and the right to organize gained cross-border support, putting pressure on retailers to assume responsibility for their outsourced production. Though these studies make manifest the difficulties of effective protests in a context where anti-union employers set the agenda and companies can always "cut and run", workers' demands nonetheless constitute an echo that is not easily contained.

The processes, relations and transformation analyzed in these works are central to the discussion in this study as well. Deploying a discourse-analytic perspective in the analysis of diverse political texts, however, I attempt to explore *how* social transformations are represented and negotiated. With a focus on conflicting meanings attributed to processes of economic integration, the study is inspired by the work of Ann E. Kingsolver (2001), who explores the expectations, fears and aspirations linked to global capitalism as manifested in representations of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) on both sides of the US–Mexican border. Consulting diverse sources – the press, debates, and interviews with journalists, farmers, politicians, NGO representatives and factory workers – she focuses on the conceptions of mobility and confinement in a process where national projects and identities are merged and violently kept apart: the "free" movements of capital and carefully classified products in combination with intensified border control.

Proceeding from the notion that the increase in capital flows and global interactions hailed in development prescriptions is not simply unfolding, this study shares a similar conviction that practices of signification constitute a key element of political and economic transformations. Here, I attempt to trace both dominant representations of economic processes and also to point to the destabilizing possibilities of alternative visualizations – the latter attempt being regularly alluded to in discourse-analytic studies but not always actually engaged with. Further, placing the interrogation of the political economy within the frame of feminist postcolonial theory extends the discussion to encompass questions of power and knowledge that are implicated in the differentiating structures of globalization and the struggles to legitimize or oppose them, as well as in research projects attempting to interpret them.

Outline

At the outset of this dissertation project in 2003, Nicaragua had been under neoliberal/conservative rule for 13 years. Initially, the idea was to analyze responses to the neoliberal shift, particularly in the context of the FTZs, and to enquire how the FSLN epoch “haunted” the processes of economic integration or provided a source of alternative imaginaries. Then in 2006 the FSLN won the elections. The focus of the study was switched to different responses to neoliberal hegemony, as expressed in the rhetoric of the neoliberal/conservative government of the PLC on the one side and the “revolutionary” government of the FSLN on the other. In addition to the political rhetoric, I also examine processes of identification in the global division of labor, proceeding from how workers in the FTZs respond to the positions that they are urged to inhabit both within projects of nation-making and in relation to transnational capital. The analysis is based on a variety of empirical materials that were principally assembled during three stays in Managua (2005, 2006 and 2008): commercials, promotional videotapes, policy documents, political speeches, web pages, magazine articles, billboards and interviews with politicians, representatives of FTZ authorities, trade and enterprise associations, unionists and workers. Thus, the three empirical chapters aspire to highlight different aspects of transnational production in Nicaragua; constitutions of the nation that seek verification in neoliberal or left ideologies in relation to transnational capital interests and stances; the framework of belonging and conduct that is being envisioned for citizens and workers; and finally, how projections of nation-making in juxtaposition with transnational production are incongruently embodied and resisted by FTZ workers. The dissertation is organized as follows:

Chapter 2 provides an introduction to the theoretical and methodological considerations that inform this project. The theoretical departures are not limited to a particular field. Rather, it is an explicit aim of this project to bring together postcolonial feminist theory, Marxism and discourse theory in a discussion of the constitutive roles of class, gender and locality in contemporary manifestations of the global political economy. The first section of Chapter 2 initiates the discussion on neoliberalism, state formation and knowledge production in the global division of labor that is to be further elaborated in the empirical chapters. In the second part of the chapter, methodological considerations, proceeding from discourse theory, are outlined in combination with a presentation of the empirical material.

Chapters 3 and 4 share the same design and are both thematically and chronologically structured. Within the framework of a general inquiry, each chapter contains two main sections, focusing respectively on what I call the “official rhetoric” in its “post-Sandinista” and “new-Sandinista” versions.

Chapter 3 revolves around the formulations of political projects. At the intersections and points of divergence between national aspirations and economic orders, projects of nation-making are discussed in concurrence with shifting relations between the state and the economy and between the national and the transnational. The chapter begins with an examination of the political rhetoric of the PLC as it is manifested in communications with foreign presumptive investors as well as with the domestic public. In what can be conceived of as a “nation branding” campaign, the country was represented as suitable to host outsourced production while at the same time transnational capital was depicted as the key to progress. The second part of the chapter deals with the delineation of the political project that was beginning to take shape when the Sandinistas returned to power. It analyses navigations between anti-imperialist, revolutionary claims and the pro-investment agenda followed by previous administrations.

Chapter 4 centers on the constructions and interpellations of political subjects, particular constitutions of citizens or “a people” that may impart consistency and legitimacy to political projects and demands. The first part of the chapter explores neoliberal/conservative representations of work and emancipation that also figure as imperatives for particular class and gender relations. It discusses how demands for a pliable workforce and differentiations under neoliberalism draw upon a narrative of globalization in terms of a “common good”. The second part traces the constitution of a “revolutionary” subject in Sandinista rhetoric. When the script of neoliberal capitalism is partly rejected, how is an alternative subject for social transformation envisioned?

Chapter 5 discusses identifications in relation to the previous examinations of the positioning of workers within narratives of transnational production, progress and resistance. Based on interviews with FTZ workers, on one level the chapter is an attempt to examine ways to interpret, inhabit or resist imperative subject positions and political projects that are often formulated on behalf of women and the poor, making their interests appear to be already included. On an interconnected level, it discusses the uneasy distinction between representation and appropriation that also troubles transnational feminist research projects. If the stories of those positioned differently in the global division of labor cannot be fully grasped or easily translated from one context to another, this raises questions about the conditions of possibility that frame encounters, modes of representation and knowledge production.

Chapter 6, finally, wraps up the study by bringing together some of the key issues and arguments. Here I conclude with a discussion about the visualizations of globalized capital that I have discerned in this project: how do they appear to come into being or to be dissolved? In the light of the preceding chapters, I consider the ambiguous position of the FTZ within global and local frames, a space that can be read as a materialization of

ideological strivings. I finally return to the discussion about emancipation and work in globalization that decidedly occupies a central position in national as well as transnational rationalizations of current divisions of labor.

2. Contriving Transnational Capital Theory and Method

Trade liberalization is associated with job losses in formerly protected sectors. It is also associated with the replacement of permanent workers, who have a more privileged status, by temporary and casual workers who enjoy fewer benefits [...] But integration with world markets is also associated with substantial job creation, especially in export-oriented activities such as textile, garments and footwear. A large fraction of the newly created jobs is held by young women from rural areas. These jobs may not be as good as the “privileged” jobs lost in the protected industries and the public sector. But for those young women they often represent an improvement over the alternatives. (World Bank 2003: 15, 32)

Extensive transformations of modes of production, trade and labor relations in the contemporary global economy are portrayed in the above quotation as disruptive and yet beneficial. Despite increasingly informal and insecure conditions of work, for the women who constitute most of the workforce in labor-intensive “global factories” such rearrangements are depicted as “an improvement over the alternatives.” Recurrently, notions of globalization are, as in the passage quoted, outlined on behalf of groups that until fairly recently were largely absent from middle-of-the-road accounts of economic growth. “The women” and “the poor” have made their way into World Bank reports, where they are fitted into the alleged connection between progress and integration into globalized economic relations.⁶

Representations of globalization and labor relations, their expressions and ideological underpinnings, are central themes in the following discussions. This introductory chapter presents the theoretical and methodological framework that informs the dissertation. In this work, I draw upon discourse theory, Marxism and postcolonial feminist theory⁷ that

⁶ See for example the World Bank initiative “Voices of the Poor”: *Can Anyone Hear Us?* (2000), *Crying Out for Change* (2000) and *From Many Lands* (2002), and the World Bank report *Engendering Development – Through Gender Equality in Rights, Resources, and Voice* (2001).

⁷ The usefulness of the term “postcolonial” has been debated. Anne McClintock (1995: 297) points to the limitation of the seemingly singular, monolithic term, organized around a binary axis of time rather than around power, involving the risk of obscuring both the continuities and the discontinuities of colonialism and imperialism. Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak, often referred to as one of the most influential postcolonial critics, has questioned the term and advocated the use of “neo-colonialism” (1991) or “transnational cultural studies” (1999). With these caveats in mind I

I find useful in elucidating the material effects and discursive frameworks of global economic relations. While I think it is equally important neither to erase divergences in theoretical foundations (for instance, the difference between structuralism and poststructuralism) nor to exaggerate the incompatibility between them, already at this point it might be useful to make some provisional clarifications about the deployment of these non-coherent “fields”, which is also a way to delineate the departures of the dissertation.⁸

I have found theories with Marxist orientations central to understanding how the organization of transnational production is involved with class formations and “uneven development”. Interrogating capitalist relations and restructurings of the antagonism between capital and labor in global chains of value production, Marxist theories are instructive in analyzing exploitation on multiple scales, from global nexuses to the factory floor. In line with poststructuralist perspectives, I emphasize the significance of constructions of meaning in processes of globalization. Discourse theory engages with how reality is conceptualized through structures of meaning, or “discourses”, and provides a framework for the study of societal transformations and identity formation as the result of political struggle (for overviews see Torfing 1999; Howarth 2000; Winther Jørgensen and Phillips 2002; Bergström and Boréus 2005: ch. 8).⁹ Discourses can be described as temporary fixations of meaning that, through the exclusion of alternatives, make particular forms of conduct available. To investigate the “conditions of possibility” that a particular discourse provides is, in line with Michel Foucault (1984: 59–61), to ask questions about the sayable, about validity and appropriation: what can be said and done, which positions can be occupied, and by which subjects, what agency can be undertaken, and by whom?

Postcolonial feminist theories raise similar questions about power, knowledge and privilege in relation to differentiations of gender, race and geographic locality in social and economic formations. Thus, they problematize neutralized forms of domination in divisions of labor, implying that they also become useful to picture the dismantling of these relations. It is from such vantage points that I wish to read the phenomenon of the Free Trade Zones (FTZs) in Nicaragua and their embeddedness in capitalist relations, knowledge regimes, and differentiations.

will, following Sara Ahmed (2002: 571n4), use the term “postcolonial” “not...as a name with a referent” but “as a name that works to produce effects in the organization of knowledge”.

⁸ With this brief presentation, I do not wish to give the impression that these orientations are not already theoretically connected, which they are in many respects.

⁹ In line with Marianne Winther Jørgensen and Louise Phillips (2002), I use the term “discourse theory” primarily to denote the theoretical perspective associated with Ernesto Laclau, Chantal Mouffe, David Howarth, and Aletta Norval, among others (the so-called Essex School).

This chapter contains two main sections. In the first, I introduce a broad discussion that is to be contextualized in the empirical chapters. Here I outline a set of inquiries that will serve as the analytic context for the following exploration of divergent ways to make sense of the operation of transnational capital in Nicaragua. In the second section, the discussion is steered in a more methodological direction by being explicitly centered on issues of texts and representations. Last, I present the empirical material, consisting of print text, visuals and interviews.

Cartographies of Globalization and Progress: A Context

In this study, I emphasize the operation of transnational capital and globalized orders of production as formative of social relations and as implicated in compound claims of legitimacy. Here, I introduce a few themes that I deem crucial to the assessment of contrasting visualizations of political change in Nicaragua. The first is the position and contestation of neoliberalism in contemporary economic and political relations. This is followed by a discussion of the foundations of state politics in the wake of shifting relations between the state and the economy as well as between the national and transnational. Further, the FTZs, which constitute the main setting of this study, are part of a particular development strategy; here various dimensions of developmental logic are outlined in relation to a postcolonial critique. A central aspect of globalization is the relation between capital and labor. Thus, constructions of workers and work in global divisions of labor are addressed with a focus on ways to make sense of locality, class, race and gender in circuits of production. Finally, I discuss the production of knowledge in postcolonial contexts and the possibilities of formulating “divergent” accounts of globalization.

Neoliberal Delineations

Exploring different meanings attached to transnational capital, this study addresses the status of neoliberalism that has come to imperatively constitute meanings of globalization, development and the state. If neoliberal capitalism has been formulated as a “gospel of salvation” (Comaroff and Comaroff 2005: 177), the zeal has arguably cooled in the wake of the recession and financial crisis of 2008–10. Among the first to sign the death certificate of the neoliberal version of capitalism were some of its most dedicated erstwhile promoters (see Balakrishnan 2009). Perhaps

the abrupt shifts between endorsement and repudiation give credence to assessments of neoliberalism as an “opportunistic ideology”: loosely delineated by notions of competitive progress, neoliberal principles tend to be pragmatically twisted or abandoned (Peck and Tickell 2006: 26; Harvey 2005: 19).

In an account of the extension of the market associated with neoliberalism, milestones may encompass the application of the Chicago School model in Chile after the coup in 1973; the elections of Margaret Thatcher as Prime Minister in the United Kingdom (1979) and of Ronald Reagan as President in the United States (1981); the crises of Atlantic Fordism beginning at the end of the 1960s; escalating debt crises in many Third World countries; neoliberal policy adjustment programs (or structural adjustment programs, SAP) deployed in the Third World and the First World during the 1980s and 1990s and the collapse of the Soviet bloc (Peck and Tickell 2006: 28; Jessop 2002: 110–111; Harvey 2005).

Although the magnitude and the concurrence of these events and processes of privatization, denationalization and deregulation may appear to amount to a proof of a neoliberal, capital-centric hegemony, Bob Jessop (2002: 111) argues that it is important to observe the diversity of forms and degrees of neoliberalism in different contexts. Expressions of neoliberalism are shaped by its diverse origins (for instance, as a way to counter Keynesianism, the developmental state, social democracy or socialism in particular historical settings), the different crises it purports to resolve (such as the world economic slowdown of the 1970s) as well as by its internal contradictions (Balakrishnan 2009; Jessop 2002). Always in an uncomfortable relation to its precedents, it does not exist in “pure” form. Thus, part of the difficulty in capturing and evaluating the position of neoliberalism and the extent to which it is being challenged derives from the unfeasibility of demarcating it from its “others” (Peck and Tickell 2006: 27–34).

In *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello (2005) contend that the expansion and durability of the capitalist system is contingent upon its ongoing ability to present itself as an acceptable order or even the only imaginable one. Indeed, the pursuit of persistent profit accumulation arguably makes little sense to the masses, upon whose commitment the system is dependent. Against the backdrop of this “absurd” dimension of capitalism, Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 7–16) describe the “spirit of capitalism” in terms of the ideological justifications and motivations on an individual and collective level that convert the order into a common good. The spirit of capitalism, they argue, is not something constant. Since its “internal” logic (profit accumulation) cannot stand on its own, it is dependent upon “external” ideas and morals. Thus, the strength of the capitalist system may be explained by its interaction with anti-capitalism: repeatedly absorbing part of the criticism directed at it, it creates

new moral foundations, simultaneously leaving its critics disarmed or disoriented. In Boltanski and Chiapello's view, it was a remodeling of the left's critique of regulatory, standardizing, state-organized capitalism, culminating in the worldwide protests of 1968, that came to provide an ideological justification for project-based, flexible, neoliberal capitalism.

Examining contextualized moral underpinnings, in the empirical chapters I trace the situated, incomplete and contested "spirits" of capitalist transformations in Nicaragua. Neoliberal globalization, Doreen Massey (2005: 84) writes, is conveyed by a "heroic impotence": a powerful insistence on powerlessness against the backdrop of economic forces that serves to mask that it is in fact a *project*. In line with the understanding of globalization as politically produced, the incorporation of Nicaragua into the transnational circuits of production is thus here simultaneously regarded as a process and as the result of contesting projects where one is, crudely put, "for" and the other "against", but where, as I shall argue, such a distinction is far from stable.

Lately, the "necessitarianism" of neoliberalism (Munck 2003), the frequent insistence that there is no alternative (TINA), has come into question in relation to processes taking place in Latin America, once again associated with leftist resistance: the struggle of the Zapatistas in Mexico that became public on January 1, 1994 (the day when the Free Trade Agreement with the United States and Canada took effect); the World Social Forums in Puerto Alegre and Caracas; and the electoral victories of several centre-left parties across the continent.¹⁰ Indeed, growing social mobilization (e.g. the *piqueteros* in Argentina and *Sem Terra* in Brazil) and the success of left-wing candidates can be read as responses to the effects of the debt crises of 1980s (the "lost decade") and neoliberalism, with increasing levels of poverty and inequality, the shrinking of the public sector and the informalization of the labor market (Lievesley and Ludlam 2009: 9; Lynch 2007). The "left turn" or "pink tide" implies an altered geopolitical emphasis, bringing into question the position of the United States as the natural epicenter of the hemisphere. A "new continentalism" is manifested in the breakdown of the by the US-promoted free trade agreement, FTAA, and the advances of the alternative trade and integration projects, UNASUR and ALBA (Lievesley and Ludlam 2009: 5–8).¹¹

¹⁰ The presidents elected include Hugo Chavez in Venezuela (1998, reelected in 2002 and 2006), Ricardo Lagos and Michelle Bachelet in Chile (2000 and 2006), Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva in Brazil (2002, reelected in 2006), Néstor and Christina Kirchner in Argentina (2003 and 2007), Tabaré Vázquez in Uruguay (2004), Evo Morales in Bolivia (2005), Rafael Correa in Ecuador (2006), Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua (2006), and Mauricio Funes in El Salvador (2009).

¹¹ Free Trade Area of the Americas (FTAA) was proposed as an extension of the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) between Canada, Mexico and the United States that would reduce trade barriers between all American countries except Cuba. FTAA has been opposed by several countries. *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (The Bolivarian Alternative for the Peoples of Americas, ALBA) was initiated as an alternative to FTAA by Hugo

The leftist turn in Latin America has, as one would expect, given rise to divergent interpretations.¹² Is it one wave or two, where one is more radical, with Venezuela's Hugo Chavez as its most prominent figure, and the other more social democratic in character, as in Brazil's Lula da Silva? Are these governments to be interpreted as leftist or rather as populist regimes reproducing *caudillismo*, the strong man syndrome that has already been repeated so many times in Latin America (see Touraine 2006; Castañeda 2006)? Do these new political forces represent a real challenge to the Washington Consensus¹³ (Lievesley and Ludlam 2009; Robinson 2008; Leiras 2007; Lynch 2007)? If so, what are the alternatives? In this regard, the following analysis of the Sandinista National Liberation Front's (FSLN) political project can be perceived as a "case" of the emergent Latin American left, however this process is defined.

The alleged crisis of the left is often diagnosed as a consequence of its inability to even visualize something beyond capitalism, reducing it to a "permanent objection" to the existing regime (Brown 2005: 56). Central to Boltanski and Chiapello's (2005: 28–30) argument about capitalism's spirit is the proposition that the critique directed against it also constitutes its motor. The distinction between condemnation and justification is thus a provisional one. Indisputably, the critique of neoliberalism has to navigate in a terrain largely structured by neoliberalism, and therefore tends to be defensive rather than offensive (Peck and Tickell 2006: 46). Indeed, political imaginaries do not come in the form of user manuals. Departing from the political rhetoric of two governments with different locations on the left–right spectrum, the discussion in this study revolves around the bringing into play of arguments that may or may not strengthen the position of neoliberalism. Thus the intention of subsequent chapters (especially 3 and 4) is not so much to determine convergences on, or deviations from, a predefined neoliberal model but rather to explore the struggles to formulate comprehensive and coherent political projects in a terrain marked by the discrepancies of global divisions of labor and the pervasiveness of neoliberal ideology.

Chavez and an agreement was signed with Cuba in 2004. Nicaragua joined ALBA in 2007 (more on this follow in Chapters 3 and 4). Union of South American Nations (UNASUR) aims at South American political and economic integration. The constitutive treaty was signed in May 2008.

¹² See, for example, the special issues of *Economy and Society*, Vol. 38, No 1, and *Nueva Sociedad*, Los colores de la izquierda, No 217, 2008, and anthologies such as Barrett et al. (eds) (2008), *The New Latin American Left*, and Lievesley and Ludlam (2009), *Reclaiming Latin America: Experiments in Radical Social Democracy*.

¹³ The term "Washington Consensus" was coined in 1989 by John Williamson, economist and IMF advisor, and refers to market-liberalization reform packages promoted in developing countries by institutions such as the IMF, the World Bank and the US Treasury Department.

States of Legitimacy

For some time now, the status of the nation state, sovereignty and the viability of political decisions in the presence of the transnational economy has been widely debated (Held 1993; Holden 2000; Hardt and Negri 2002). While many agree on the inadequacy of theories that represent the globalization of capital as an unyielding, unfolding force, it is nonetheless commonplace to picture the options of “weak states” as basically limited to the acceptance of an externally imposed framework (Ong 2000). What would be the point of studying the formulation of political projects in Nicaragua if the agenda has already been set elsewhere? One way is to approach transforming relations between states and markets as effects of political narrations and strategies of *rescaling* (Peck 2002). From an orthodox neoliberal outlook, the global–local interplay dominates, erasing the scale of the national as well as the unevenness of geographic development. Accordingly, different localities are envisioned as players in the uncompromising global market, leaving them few alternatives besides adaptation and convergence. The global is politically and analytically disconnected from the local, suggesting that capital has “jumped scale”, thereby also providing a welcome rationalization for the often sectional interests of neoliberal politics (Peck 2002: 333–336).

Rather than something that is only “out there”, the global is also “in here”. When space is perceived as multiple, processes of globalization appear as the effects of interconnections of scales as well as of the political, the social and the economic. With such an outlook, Massey (2005: 61, 101–102; see also Peck 2002: 336) argues against the tendency to understand localities as produced through globalization, through something unlocated, because, in effect, the opposite is then discarded: the local constitution of the global. Also, in accounts that are critical to neoliberal demarcations of scales, Massey underlines, “local place” is often embraced as a possibility of political resistance. But if space is multiple and relational, and if diverse localities are placed differently within global power geometries, the local is not necessarily a victim of the global. There are local responsibilities for the global, too.

While globalization is frequently cited to justify national adjustments, the importance of the state persists in reproducing the social context of production by means of institutions and legal frameworks. In Jessop’s account (1997: 573–574; 2002: 107) the national state is “hollowed out” when the functions of the state are moved up, down and sideways – above and below the national level in order to promote global competitiveness on various scales. The hollow state should not be conceived of as a powerless state. As argued by Karl Polanyi (1944/2005: 101), even the regime of *laissez-faire* is dependent upon state enforcement. Notwithstanding the

insistence on the minimal state, free-market politics tends to imply an increase in state intervention. Interventionist politics may then be represented as legitimate in terms of its temporality. Once the free market is secured, the behavior of the state will be normalized, that is, minimized (Polanyi 1944/2005; see also Jessop 2002: 107; Peck and Tickell 2006: 33).

Assessing the tendency to portray the Third World as virtually without control in the wake of the globalizing economy, Aihwa Ong (2000; see also Robinson 2004: 124–125; Taylor 2007) points out that states experiment with different forms of sovereignty, contending that even “weaker” ones have the capacity to maneuver global interactions and to regulate social relations within their borders. Rather than speaking of sovereignty as something that has been lost, she proposes the term “graduated sovereignty” to account for state power that is being increasingly variegated both vis-à-vis global markets and vis-à-vis different segments of the population that are controlled and positioned in ways that do not always match national space itself but are adjusted to the functions of global capital.

Accordingly, a distinction between an interventionist and a non-interventionist state is not very helpful if one wishes to comprehend the shift to a neoliberal political logic. In line with Michel Foucault, the supposed dismantling of the state can be understood not as a resignation *from* power but a technology *of* power. In his lectures on neoliberal governmentality, Foucault distinguished neoliberalism from preceding forms of liberalism based on contrasting views on the relation between the state and the market. It is characteristic of neoliberalism that the economy is not perceived as a natural and ontological entity but rather as constructed and normative (Lemke 2001: 195). The neoliberal state does not count on an economic rationale that installs itself; the law, politics and social norms must all be made to match the neoliberal order. From this perspective, “the State” is not necessarily understood as the entity that constitutes the government but rather as a specific shape that government has taken. Political rule is exercised by means of a variety of technologies, the mechanisms through which authority is instrumentalized and normalized, of which some, but not all, are commonly recognized as part of the state: experts, administrations and architecture, for instance, that through overarching political plans, statistics, databases and self-regulation are enabling techniques of government. Thus, pedagogies that do not always originate in the state make it possible to govern in a particular way (Miller and Rose 2008: 26–35).

The idea of “rolling back of state” does not refer to the state in general but rather to a particular kind of state, most pronouncedly the Keynesian Welfare State (KWS) or the developmental state (Peck and Tickell 2006: 29). Within different political and economic contexts, the KWS and the developmental state are both models of state intervention under capitalism.

The aim of the developmental state was in general terms to begin a process of industrialization as such rather than to mediate the interests of labor and capital, as under Atlantic Fordism (Hoogvelt 1997: 206). The shift to a “Schumpeterian Workfare Regime” (SWR) also contains an element of rolling forward new forms of (state) governance, along the lines of a market-centered global economy (Jessop 1997). Describing the simultaneous motions of rolling back and rolling out modes of regulation and governance as “destructively creative”, Peck and Tickell (2006: 33) point to some of the interrelated dimensions of deregulation and re-regulation: retrenchment → workfare; liberalization → standards and codes; mass unemployment → full employability; deunionization → flexibility; cuts → fiscal responsibility; ideological convictions → pragmatic learning (Peck and Tickell 2006: 34; see also Jessop 2002).

To clarify, the transformations between states and markets discussed are here not understood as given by some underlying feature. Rather, in this study emphasis is placed on political struggle and contextualized discursive framings of economic and social transformations. Disputing a functionalist understanding whereby the dismantling of certain dimensions of the state is seen as a direct outcome of globalization, new technologies and modes of production, Jacob Torfing (1999: 239–241) argues that changes must be understood in the context of hegemonic struggles and opposing political logics. The discourse of SWR provides politicians with a justification for macroeconomic discipline and cutbacks in the wake of crisis, the overarching aim being to ensure competition and free enterprise. Indeed, neoliberal rule is bound up with the establishment of a particular morality and vocabulary. As a system, it promotes and privileges markets rather than planning; entrepreneurship rather than regulation; optimized individual economic growth and opportunity rather than solidarity and equality (Miller and Rose 2008: 79–82; Torfing 1999: 240). The state should not only take the market into account but also behave as a market actor in all its functions as the economy becomes the legitimizing principal of political rule (Harvey 2006: 25; Brown 2005: 42).

Further, the “atomization” of society under neoliberalism, with de-centered networks of power along with the establishment of the market as the primary domain where social demands should be met, brings about a particular form of citizenship. Not primarily a recipient of public distributions, the citizen should be encouraged to aspire to personal fulfillment (Miller and Rose 2008: 80–82; Hansen and Hager 2010). In “flexible” neoliberal capitalism, the virtues of individual freedom and responsibility become encapsulated in the entrepreneur, whether in the shape of the creative innovator in Silicon Valley or in the shape of the microcredit-borrowing “heroic self-employed” in the slums of the mega-cities (Davis 2006).

Development Logics

Neoliberal restructurings and the position of the state are central not least for the notions and measures that organize conceptions of development. When development is largely made synonymous with a growing Gross National Product (GNP), the discipline of economics has come to organize a wide spectrum of relations, validating resource distribution and authorizing political interventions (Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela 2004). Against the backdrop of the apparently uneven results of economic growth, opposing explanations and predictions can be traced. A “development orthodoxy” perspective based on the notion of the West as the motor of capitalism and modernity emerged in the 1940s. Through foreign aid, investment and the right sets of measures, poor countries were to be turned into “normal” market economies, the pace of modernization presumably depending upon various obstacles to progress such as historical conditions, tradition or religion. In contrast, in perspectives that stress the “development of underdevelopment”, capitalism is regarded as being bound up with imperialism, colonialism and neocolonialism. Here, exchange on uneven terms is viewed to widen the gap between the rich and the poor. More recently, the paradigm of development has been practically rejected from two distinct positions. “Ultra-modernists” insist on the primacy of the market. If economic growth is a question of getting prices right, developing economies do not represent a special case. From postcolonial perspectives, development is problematized as part of the construction of Western supremacy, bringing into question both the means and the goals of development (Harvey 2006: 71–72; Cooper and Packard 2005: 127; Nederveen Pieterse 2001: 5–7).

Conflicting analyses of the historical conditions of development are translated into different strategies for achieving economic growth. Influenced by the Marxist dependency school, the aim of import substitution strategies was to counter uneven exchange patterns between “center” and “periphery” states. Through governmental support for national industries and protective trade barriers, in the development state domestic production was to replace foreign imports. Particularly influential in Latin America, the model was denounced by its opponents as inefficient; and in the 1960s countries in Southeast Asia became the forerunners of an export-led development model. Although governmental interventions were crucial to the industrialization process of the “tiger economies”, a development idea promoting integration into the globalizing economy and minimizing state “interference” became dominant (Dicken 2003: 175–181). In 1980, the World Bank changed its definition of development from national economic growth to participation in the world market (Robinson 2004: 124). Export orientation measures, privatizations and deregulations

along with cuts in public spending became requirements in programs of loan and debt relief. Setting up export enclaves (free trade zones), with particular regulations such as tax exemption and no restrictions on foreign ownership, is one of the most documented methods to enhance export-oriented growth and foreign investment (Dicken 2003: 175–181).

However, contemporary development theory tends in general to be less “optimistic” about progress and economic growth in the face of stagflation, “lost decades” and “lost continents”, environmental collapse and financial turmoil (Nederveen Pieterse 2001: 24). Prime development institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF have arguably experienced a crisis of legitimacy, the critique being centered on the damaging effects of Structural Adjustment Policies (SAPs) as manifested for example in the virtual disintegration of the Argentinean economy in 2001–2002 and the indifference to social issues in market-centric analyses. In recent decades an apparent shift in the politics of the World Bank has occurred that can be summarized as an attempt to “bring the social on board”, which has also implied a renewed focus on the function of the state. The publicly displayed tension between the IMF and the World Bank may point to cracks in the Washington Consensus (Munck 2003: 495; Nederveen Pieterse 2001: 152). In World Bank reports, the call for “good economics” has increasingly been accompanied with an exhortation for “good governance” (Cooper and Packard 2005: 134).¹⁴ While the World Bank has been extensively criticized for its “gender blindness”, for example with regard to the effects of SAPs (Elson 1994; Benería 2003: 48–53), the position of women and poverty alleviation currently often occupy a central position in development discourse. Some observers have interpreted the World Bank’s new focus as a welcome shift away from a narrow emphasis on GNP growth; the extensive report *Engendering Development* (2001), for instance, has been portrayed as a “sign of progress”, an indication of the influence of feminist theory (Ferber and Nelson 2003: 13). At the same time, the shift has enabled the Bank to intervene in areas beyond its initial focus on an abstracted field of the “economic”. With a redefinition of the distinction between the economic and the political, the social policies of nation states came to fall within the scope of development intervention (Buchanan and Pahuja 2008: 269–270).

Opposing the notion that an ideological alteration is taking place in dominant conceptions of development, Paul Cammack (2004) argues that the emphasis on poverty should rather be understood as a deepening of neoliberalism: a systematic reshaping of social relations and institutions that enhance proletarianization and accumulation on a global scale while the pro-

¹⁴ The 2002 issue of the World Bank’s annual World Development Report, *Building Institutions for Markets*, is a clear example of the increasing emphasis on “good governance” and the renewed importance attributed to states and policy.

poor rhetoric induces the promotion of increased productivity and competitiveness with legitimacy. In this regard, the World Bank's novel focus can be considered in the light of the argument made by Boltanski and Chiapello (2005: 29) about capitalism's ability to co-opt parts of the critique directed against it. As the authors put it: "The price paid by critique for being listened to, at least in part, is to see some of the values it had mobilized to oppose the form taken by the accumulation process being placed at the service of accumulation, in accordance with the process of cultural assimilation".

Postcolonial theorists have argued that conceptions of modernity and development must be situated in the geopolitics and epistemologies of colonialism. However, like other theoretical strands associated with the "linguistic turn", postcolonial theory has been criticized for a lack of engagement with economic questions, reducing its scope to a cultural dimension (see for example Dirlik 1997). Although the critique may be unduly categorical, like Stuart Hall (1996) I want to emphasize the importance of making explicit the significance of the economy for the formation of (post)colonial relations: even if the sometimes transcendental status given to the economy is rejected, to ignore the structuring force of capitalism would result in a reversed reductionism. In their edited collection *Postcolonialism meets Economics*, Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela (2004) argue for the urgency of deconstructing from postcolonial perspectives the neutralized position of economic calculations and expertise in the organization of riches and poverty. While the unflagging optimism might be difficult to sustain, the imaginary of development remains dominant. There are, as Arturo Escobar (2005: 341) argues, few alternatives for picturing social change.

Integral to the epistemology of advancement is the notion of time or deferral. Indeed, development might be one of the concepts that Hayden White (1978: 151) describes as being upheld by "the technique of ostensive self-definition by negation": being difficult to define, it can be grasped only in relation to what it is not *yet*. When Western modernity constitutes the point of reference for the "underdeveloped" to be measured against, a narrative is thereby installed in which the broad courses of history, including the future, are known (Massey 2005: 11). Accordingly, in development scripts modernity is represented as an "incomplete project" that offers the possibility of "becoming" (Mignolo 2005: *xv*). Within the teleological notions of progress, entangled with racialized categorizations, modernization became the potential of deviating others to leave anachronistic times behind (Said 1979; Escobar 1995; McClintock 1995; Goldberg 2002).

Exploring the connection between cultural representation and profit accumulation, Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak contends that it is necessary to

“put the economic text ‘under erasure’, to see that is, the unavoidable and pervasive *importance* of its operation and yet to question it as a concept of the *last resort*” (Spivak 1996: 125). Her attempt to deconstruct capitalist value denominators represents an effort to expose global capitalism’s dependence upon the ghostly or “forgotten” material labor and the discursive silencing of subaltern women in the global economy.¹⁵ By looking at how, where and by whom value is created, one might conclude that the Third World produces the wealth and the possibility of cultural self-expression in the First World.¹⁶ That is to say, Third World workers provide the resources necessary for the production of knowledge, which gives ideological support to the very continuation of that particular economic relationship. If the subaltern subject as a producer of value is effaced, Spivak (1990: 97) argues, one easily falls back on the notion that the First World is helping Third World countries to develop, without acknowledging the transfers going the other way. In addition, a focus on the production of value points to the necessity to rethink the conventional European male-centered working class subject in order to approach the fact that it is a predominately female workforce that currently accounts for the industrialization of the Third World (Spivak 1990). To bring together political economy and postcolonial feminism in the focus on the “economic question” can thus provide an understanding of the juxtaposition of value production and subject constitutions, exploitation and representation, in relation to the ideological justification of the process of development.

Locations of Labor and Capital

As I argue in the following chapters, the centrality of labor is manifest in the projects of nation-building in Nicaragua; workers are marketed as a comparative advantage, labor is represented as the key to the individual and common good, and workers are pictured as a source of national resistance. The masses of workers, an effect of and a prerequisite for industrialization and national advancement, have, since their formation, evoked divergent

¹⁵ Spivak uses the term “subaltern” (with reference to Antonio Gramsci and the Subaltern Studies group associated with, among others, Ranajit Guha, Partha Chakrabarty and Partha Chatterjee) to approach various subjectivities that have been displaced by colonial and postcolonial relations. It refers to a *situation* rather than an identity. Thus, the subaltern should not be regarded as a unified subject identity but as an “identity-in-differential” which manifests itself only in relation to other constructions (Spivak 1996).

¹⁶ The terminology to denote economic, epistemological and geopolitical spheres is, as Chandra Talpade Mohanty notes, “very imprecise and inadequate”. Terms like Western/First World/North and non-Western/Third World/South (and Fourth World or One-Third/Two-Thirds Worlds) purport to suggest that geographical distinctions are bound up with economic, political and cultural domination, but must also be sensitive to divergences within and across regions. The terms First and Third World indicate the colonial history that they are embedded in. For an elaboration on this terminology, see Mohanty (2002: 505–506).

sentiments. On the one hand the degenerate, working and “dangerous classes” (Chevalier 1973) tended to be denied the status of humanity in the apparatus of classification and control by the upper classes, who ascribed to workers moral weakness, dependency and a propensity for distortion. Workers representatives, on the other hand, maintained that capitalism explained the deprivation of workers. Far from being degenerate, the workers represented the humanity of the future (White 1978: 193; Scott 1999: 118–119).

In relation to the emergence of new forms of production in the wake of industrialization in the 19th century, Foucault (1994: 32) discusses a shift in management mechanisms and the organization of laboring bodies. In large-scale manufacturing units with sophisticated equipment, stocks of materials and merchandise, the risk of demolition was constant. The fear of an attack was directed not toward the outside but toward the inside – toward the workers who were at once a constant threat to the production of value and necessary for its materialization. As a consequence, Foucault argues, a whole series of measures were adopted to regulate the relation between the workers’ bodies and the apparatus of production. Workers had to adjust to the rhythm of production, to its spatial and temporal conditions, and autonomous, contingent and inappropriate bodily movements had to be reduced. It was the enactment of a necessary regularity that constituted the workers as a *labor force*.

Indeed, constituting a specific commodity, a conscious “pseudo-commodity” that differs from other factors of production such as machinery and materials, labor represents a problem to capital. Strong class identifications may jeopardize high returns on capital investment. As Christopher Arthur (2001: 30) suggests, “capital can produce value only through winning the class struggle at the point of production”. Labor as a problem to capital can be clarified by the Marxian distinction between the laborer, a person with needs and desires, and labor power, abstracted labor, turned into a commodity. Therefore, laborers are by necessity alienated in the sense that their creative abilities are reduced and steered by the demands of capital. In capitalist production, labor power is shaped in contradictory ways. For instance, while capital requires educated workers who can make flexible decisions, education and skill are also obstacles to production (Harvey 2000: 101–102).

Achieving perhaps its most emblematic expression in the combination of Fordist mass production and the scientific management of Taylorism, the standardization and fragmentation of the production process ensured the replaceability of workers. The process of economic globalization has significantly altered the relation between labor and capital. To a certain extent, the dismantling of Atlantic Fordism that began in the 1960s has entailed an outsourcing of Fordism and Taylorism to “periphery” or newly industrialized states. Alluding to Alain Liepitz’s expression “bloody

Taylorism”, which encompasses the repression of workers and an extensive division of labor, Carl-Ulrik Schierup, Peo Hansen and Stephen Castles (2006: 232–243) deploy the term “bloody subcontracting” to describe how the hierarchical structures (rather than “flows”) in subcontracted production are steered by commanding corporate actors relying upon gendered, racialized and immigrant segments of the labor market (see also Ong 1991). Parallel to the “hollowing out” of the nation state, the “hollow corporation” denotes how control over brand names, product development and marketing is being centralized and run by means of “core” workers, while labor-intensive production is being outsourced and carried out by “disposable” workers, from whom the companies keep their distance (Mitter 1994: 18–20).

In the global economy, the mechanisms of control associated with Taylorism have acquired new dimensions. Against the backdrop of globalized circuits of production, information and control, Massimo De Angelis (2001) writes about capital accumulation on a global scale in terms of a *fractal-panopticon*. As in Jeremy Bentham’s panopticon, which was designed to monitor subjects who were likely to deviate from a given norm, such as prisoners or workers who could escape or loiter, the possibility of being seen has a disciplining effect on agents in the global economy. When information and capital flow instantly and data collection enables constant comparisons, “virtual watchtowers” potentially measure, evaluate, chastise and reward conduct in accordance with the market model, turning “subjects and activities into data, shadowy projections of real subjects” (De Angelis 2001: 5). And just as in Bentham’s architectural invention, it is the perceived omnipresence that maintains order and regulates behavior; the idea of the total mobility of capital produces a global infrastructure that escalates global competition. A diffuse globality comes to permeate all localities. Wages are held down while high rates of production are ensured as all nodes compete by means of the quantity and quality of labor.

Thus, the idea of capital mobility (not always translated into actual motion) has arguably allowed capital to “jump scale” while labor, as relatively place-bound, is pushed down as a result of labor market flexibility and increased competition between different localities. Saskia Sassen (1998: 86–92) depicts the global economy as an uneven interplay between increasingly differentiated segments of the economy. Simultaneous processes of valorization and devalorization increase the polarization between “high-skill” and “low-skill” work as well as between high-profit and low-profit activities, yet they are highly interdependent (see also Nagar et al. 2002). While a part of the economy, most notably the financial sector, is confined to a lesser extent by place and time, large sectors are firmly tied to their localities. Displaced by sectors where the possibilities of gains are huge, sectors with meager prospects of profit are increasingly being

informalized. To stay competitive, an array of economic activities are outsourced or carried out under sweatshop conditions.

An interlinked effect of altering capital–labor relations is that responsibilities are being individualized, and risks are tending to be downscaled to the “local” and to the unemployed or the “working poor” (Peck 2002: 337–338; see also Bauman 1998). Thus, if the “creative destruction” of capitalism encompasses labor (and nature) as a disposable commodity in profit accumulation, it is contingent upon a social context to mediate the disruptive effects (see Dragsbaek Schmidt and Hersh 2006: 71). Above all, the responsibility for adaptation seems to be assigned to women (and) workers. They are the ones who are assumed to be flexible, to ensure their own empowerment by adjusting to the shifting demands of the labor market, and to compensate for cuts in social spending (Benería 2003: 50–51; Jessop 2002: 121; Nagar et al. 2002).

Thus, in the wake of the impact of transnational capital and fragmented chains of production where the reproduction of workers and consumers in particular localities seems of little importance, relations between labor and capital have decidedly been transformed. In this context Eva Cherinavsky (2006: 30–40) detects a shift from alienated to disposable labor that recasts the worker’s proper/proprietary relation to the self and the market. To the underpinning of capitalist relations, the notion of rational, free labor with a proprietary selfhood that enters into a self-interested transaction with capital, exchanging work for wages, has been central. Drawing upon Manuel Castells’s argument about the “structural irrelevance” of certain localities and segments of the population to the workings of the global economy, she argues that labor no longer has “a proper relation to capital”. In neocolonial formations, labor becomes suitable for flexible capital, Cherinavsky (2006: xx) suggests, “by an openness to capital(ization) without the conventional protections (legal, social, political)”, implying that the idea of a proprietary personhood is negated. However, in the flexible specialization in labor-intensive production of neoliberal globalization, the irrelevance of unprotected labor to capital is still entwined with categorizations, as I will discuss next.

Productive Femininity

How do specific places and specific people become discursively designated for specific types of labor activities at the intersections of transnational capital and formulations of national political projects? The massive incorporation of women into outsourced, labor-intensive production in “Third World” countries seems to bear out Marx and Engels’s prediction regarding what they perceived as the degenerating force of capitalism: “the more modern industry becomes developed, the more is the labor of men

superseded by that of women” (1848/2002: 228). Structural adjustment programs that have implied the abandonment of agriculture as the predominant sector; “the new international division of labor” entailing the rapid industrialization of Third World countries (Fröbel et al. 1976); urbanization; and the establishment of nodes for intense, financial transactions (Sassen 2001; Castells 2000) may all be read as part of the profound restructurings of gender and class relations that have resulted in the emergence of what Swasti Mitter (1986) has called “the new proletariat”: a predominantly female labor force in the “periphery”.

Since the first wave of industrialization, women’s integration into the labor force has, as Joan Scott (1999) explicates, been accompanied by different interpretations. The debate has revolved around whether paid labor should be regarded as a vehicle for the improvement of women’s status or, on the contrary, whether wage-labor reflects and reinforces women’s subordinated position. Described as the “double exploitation” of women, their lower wages have also been conceived of as posing a threat to the price of the labor of working-class men, constituting a source of tensions and hostility between male-centered union activism and the women’s movement (Scott 1999: 129; Eley 2002). Within feminist theory, different interpretations of the effects of the incorporation of women workers partly arise from the often ambiguous position on labor: capitalism and patriarchy as hand in glove or paid employment as the path toward women’s independence?

In subsequent chapters, I will come back to the debates over the effects of the incorporation of women into global production, often framed precisely in terms of emancipation or exploitation (for overviews, see for example Benería 2003; Hoogvelt 1997). The quotation from the World Bank at the beginning of this chapter is illustrative of the conviction that work, though under insecure conditions, opens the way for a strengthening of women’s positions. From the opposite standpoint, global factories for textiles and apparels have been described as “a showcase of horrors” (Ross 1997: 10) and likened to the 19th-century “dark, satanic mills” that William Blake wrote about (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005: 1). Sweatshops have become a symbol of adverse effects of globalization, at the heart of movements opposing the contemporary expressions of globalization. In responses to this, others have criticized the tendency to portray Third World women as passive victims (see Hoogvelt 1997; Kabeer 2000). Returning to this discussion, I will examine how racialized, classed and gendered allocations of alternatives and obligations in the global economy destabilize the discourse of free choice as well as the idea of emancipation through integration into transnational production as a ubiquitous solution.

In the context of the booming subcontracting industry, scholars have proposed divergent accounts of the reasons for the apparent preference for women in labor-intensive production. Some theorists have argued that, in

the search for profitable forms of production, capital has proved to be “gender blind,” which is why the cheaper labor of women has become preferable to that of men (Afshar and Barrientos 1999: 3). Diagnosing the employment numbers of women as an outcome of calculation rather than indifference, Annette Fuentes and Barbara Ehrenreich (1983) argue in an early analysis of gender and work in the *maquila* industry for an understanding of global production as contingent upon gender inequalities. Profitable outsourcing is in their view made possible by the existence of a large pool of exploitable workers which is kept cheap and docile through the patriarchal subordination of women.

In an ethnographic study of how femininities are produced on the factory floor, Leslie Salzinger (2003: 12) problematizes understandings of women’s positions that are largely located in family relations, that is, *outside* modes of production. Just like employers who seem to nourish the image of an already existing productive female labor force that can simply be tapped into, the theorizing of gender relations as a primary explanation pays no attention to how women are adjusting to the labor that they perform, in other words how they are *produced* through the organization of work. As Chandra Talpade Mohanty (2003: 141) puts it: “global assembly lines are as much about the production of people as they are about ‘providing jobs’ or making profit.” Of course, workers are not inherently “cheap.” Specific categorizations of the labor force appear to warrant minimized production costs. As pointed out by several theorists, “feminine traits” such as docility and dexterity must be situated within a context of minimized living costs and lack of protective labor laws, often alongside a carefully planned political agenda in which women’s cheap labor constitutes a comparative advantage (Mohanty 2003: ch. 6; Kang 1997; Medley and Carroll 2004).

Thus, from this perspective and against the common analysis of second-wave feminism that regarded patriarchy as integral to capitalism, capitalist modes of production are not determined by the subordination of women; relations between gender and class are not fruitfully conceived of as fixed. As Wendy Brown (2005: 106) argues, capitalism does not “love differences”; rather, it tends to exploit them in the short run and wear them down in the long run. That would mean that capitalism *as such* cannot *explain* racism and sexism (or vice versa), not that it is disconnected from such formations. Contending that it has become a sort of an axiom that the gender or race of the worker is of no importance in capitalism, Beverley Skeggs (2004: 71) asserts that workers enter the labor market with different set of values, implying that they are likely to play different parts in production. Because, as Spivak (2000a: 37) points out, when capitalism maneuvers in a context where women *can* be dominated, their subordination is generally intensified, capitalism being an exceedingly effective mode of social production.

Likewise, Cherniavsky (2006: 40) underlines that the prospect of being disposed of and discarded by capital is not evenly distributed along the lines of race and gender. Rather, this prospect is contingent upon the lasting effects of “uneven development” and the colonial world order, implying that women of color comprise the segments that are most exposed to forms of exploitation. At the same time, the notion of a progressive assimilation of the “periphery” and “backward” sectors into the nexus of the global economy provides a moral justification, turning women in the South into “the favored agent-as-instrument” of the globalization of capital (Spivak 1999: 200). These interconnections, I think, between value accumulation, disposition and ideological enforcement that coincide in the figure of the Third World female worker, make manifest the significance of postcolonial feminism to the theorizing of transnational production, something that I will further consider in the empirical chapters.

Other Stories?

Prevailing accounts of economic globalization, Sassen (1999 82) argues, take the shape of a “narrative of eviction”: their coherence is ensured through the erasure of whole sets of workers, sectors and experiences. On a similar note, Nagar et al. (2002: 269) urge feminists to “focus on the lives of people who are marginalized by globalization.” In addition to this, however, I think it is important to analyze *how* (female) workers are made visible, fitted into narratives of globalization and represented as crucial to the operation of transnational capital. Neither acts of inclusion nor acts of exclusion are absolute.

Proceeding from interviews that I have conducted with FTZ workers, I discuss the ways that workers relate to and negotiate the often contradictory interpellations that they are subjected to in processes of economic integration. Engaging with their accounts of factory work and conceptions of (dis)belonging in national projects of transformations is, further, an attempt to approach alternative visions of globalization and also a way to consider the challenges facing research projects in postcolonial contexts. From the perspective of postcolonial theory, questions of representation are crucial and problematic. The attempt to give subordinated groups a voice is a strategy that has often been used, not least within feminist theory: departing from the experiences of those subordinated by structures of domination, the aim has been to formulate emancipatory knowledge. Recently, even an institution such as the World Bank has proclaimed the significance of listening to what marginalized groups have to say. In its initiative “Voices of the Poor”, the explicit aim was to consult poverty-stricken people around the world in order “to understand poverty from the

perspective of the poor themselves.”¹⁷ In its pages, the reader is invited to learn about how the poor define poverty, about their experiences of exclusion, powerlessness and unequal gender relations, about their perceptions of the state as well as about their fears and hopes. As the Bank expresses it: “There are 2.8 billion poverty experts, the poor themselves” (World Bank 2000b: 2).

The World Bank’s quest for the voices of the poor can perhaps be understood as a way to give content to an already existing discourse, an appropriation of the interests of “the poor”. The attempt to give subordinated groups a voice may be considered in the light of how subaltern speech has been incorporated into imperial knowledge regimes. Indeed, the colonial record is not only appended to silenced voices but is also entangled with what Homi Bhabha outlines as the *demand for a narrative* (Bhabha 1994: 140). In the scientific mapping of the other, the “native informant” was urged by the researcher to provide information to be analyzed and turned into knowledge, which could then be used to confirm the righteousness of the colonial mission. Spivak points to the paradoxical positioning of the subjective in the history of post-Enlightenment Western knowledge production. At the same time as subjective experience was largely ruled out as a plausible foundation of general knowledge, the “native informant” was regarded as a source of objective data that whole disciplines, such as anthropology and ethnography, were founded upon (Spivak 1993). Thus, the native informant, speaking on behalf of her ethnic group, figured as a sort of raw material from which the evidence of cultural difference could be extracted. Through the voice of the other, the Western investigator was given access to the information that the subaltern *had* but did not *know*, information that had to be evaluated by means of objective techniques in order to be turned into knowledge (Bhabha 1994: 141; Beverley 2004: 86).

Beyond hegemonic exclusion and representation, which tend to coincide with appropriation, what are the possibilities to formulate anti-hegemonic accounts of women’s work in the globalizing economy? As Spivak (1993) points out, the voice of the other is not simply “there” for the researcher to transmit; both the subject and its desires are constructed at the moment of representation. The limitations of speech and the violence that is always part of every representation are, of course, matters that need to be attended to in research projects that are critical of the current order but nonetheless part of it. Arguably, to conduct research in a postcolonial context is to benefit from the subaltern’s impossibility of representing herself (Dhawan 2004). Again, the “Third World” constitutes an arena for fieldwork, providing the

¹⁷ The Bank “collected the voices of more than 60,000 poor women and men” and published them in three volumes: *Can Anyone Hear Us?* (2000), *Crying out for Change* (2000) and *From Many Lands* (2002). The studies were carried out in 47 countries. “Voices of the Poor” was to function as a background for the *World Development Report* of 2000/2001, *Attacking Poverty*. See <http://www1.worldbank.org/prem/poverty/voices/>

“resources” for knowledge production and the foundation for academic careers. Or, in Judith Butler’s formulation:

...feminists as well must ask whether the “representation” of the poor, the indigenous and the radically disfranchised within the academy, is a patronizing and colonizing effort, or whether it seeks to avow the conditions of translation that make it possible, avow the power and privilege of the intellectual, avow the links in history and culture that make an encounter between poverty, for instance, and academic writing possible. (Butler 2004: 229)

In equating speech and emancipation, the trajectory of using speech to produce regulatory knowledge about a particular group seems to be omitted. Indeed, as Foucault insisted, that which is known can also be regulated, making silence not only a shelter *for* power but also a shelter *from* power to a certain extent (1990: 101). Coming to a similar conclusion, Franz Fanon (2004: 36–37) argued that refusing to talk and claiming a radically antagonistic position was the only credible response to colonial power. As Butler (2000: 36) notes, the main challenge is not a question of extending a violent regime to allow for the inclusion of the subaltern. Largely, she is *already* included within that regime, and it is the very conditions of her inclusion that result in the violence of her effacement. But the problematization of speech should not be understood as a post-representational research agenda (see Dhawan 2004). As I will further discuss in Chapter 5, if speech and meaning are always partly inaccessible, this may be located to the center of the analysis instead of being perceived as an aggravating circumstance.

The Language of Politics: Analytic Considerations

A guiding idea of this dissertation is that neoliberal schemes are difficult both to harbor and to reject. Claims of authority and legitimacy are formulated in relation to the unevenness of development across and within territories and global divisions of labor. The ways in which two versions of nation-building in Nicaragua are given meaning and are entangled with transnational capital are analyzed in the following chapters by means of discourse analytic concepts that I find useful to depict political struggles over meanings and constructions of identity categories, such as floating signifiers and logics of equivalence and difference. In Chapters 3 and 4, I analyze the political language through which the neoliberal/conservative and Sandinista projects frame their agendas communicate political visions: what I denote as the “official rhetoric”. The delineation of political projects and economic transformations is also bound up with particular

constructions of citizens, or subject positions, that call for specific forms of conduct. Such imperative constructions thus frame the positions that FTZ workers are encouraged to embrace in the uneven terrain of global divisions of labor. Last, I introduce the empirical material; the textual/visual enunciations that the analysis of the official rhetoric is based on and interviews with politicians, representatives of FTZs and private enterprise associations, workers and unionists.

Projections of the Nation

In the sections above I discussed seemingly contradictory processes that have rearranged conceptions of stateness: the globalization of production, capital and trade that coincides with an increasing emphasis on “good governance” to ensure functioning economies. Indeed, rather than evaporating under the impact of the global economy, the idea of the state “remains pivotal in our very imagination of what a society is” (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 2). For postcolonial states, Peter Hitchcock (2003: 10) points out, there are strong economic, ideological and political incentives to reproduce the idea of the Nation, and also to deputize for mechanisms that are rather transnational in character, such as the politics of the IMF and the World Bank, which are given reason in a national context.

In the essay “DissemiNation”, Homi K. Bhabha suggests that “the nation” can be conceived of as a “narrative strategy”, the effect of commanding articulations that make a scattered collective appear cohesive. Compensating for the lack of origin, the national metaphor disguises the violence involved in the constitution of “the many as one” (1994: 204). The narrative of the nation, Bhabha contends, contains a “double time”, leaving it torn between two dimensions: the *pedagogical* and the *performative*. The pedagogical dimension refers to the linear, self-generated and homogeneous narrative that fosters a sense of identification with the nation through constructing a link between an alleged origin and the present; the naturalized organization of territory. But the nation is not archaically frozen in history. It must also signify progress and modernity and therefore consistently be reproduced and performed. This split is both a prerequisite of and a threat to the national coherence as the plural performance of the nation potentially disturbs or destabilizes the pedagogical claims of origin and homogeneity. In this impossible founding of the nation, the wholeness that would allow the people to appear as one presents itself as a lack: heterogeneity and antagonism are already “in” the nation (Bhabha 1994: 201–217).

In line with a discourse-theoretic understanding, the “nation” and “the people” can be perceived as *floating signifiers*, crucial signs that different discourses endeavor to define. In the struggle for legitimacy, political rule

tends to refer to a social unity. However, representations of unity always reveal contradictions and antagonisms. This calls for the establishment of a hegemony in correspondence with the interests and desires of “the nation” and “the people” that are also thereby given a particular content through an array of constitutive articulations (Torfing 1999: 193; Laclau and Mouffe 1985). In the conception of the nation and the people there is always something missing (as in any meaning, category or identity). The community of the nation must be constantly imagined, precisely because it is never fully achievable: “the true essence of nation escapes predication” (Torfing 1999: 193, 202). The “nation-as-this” and the “people-as-one” can be achieved only through the constitution of its “enemies” or “others”, located in both the inside and the outside of the nation. The enemies can be depicted as antagonistic to the nation, as in Huntington’s “clash of civilization” whereby China, North Korea and Islamic countries are delineated as a threat to Western democracies. The others may also take the shape of legitimate adversaries, as in the depiction of other countries as competitive forces within the global economy (ibid. 194).

Indicating the incompleteness and partiality of meaning and identity, antagonisms are implicated in processes of construction and deconstruction, which in discourse theory is described as two opposing logics. On the one hand, a “logic of equivalence” polarizes society into two antagonistic pools through the establishment of a political frontier, for example between the “oppressed” or the “common people” and the “oppressors” or the “elite”. Various groups and institutions are made equivalent in that they are all constituted as enemies of the oppressed. As such, they are perceived as blocking the realization of the “people” and the “nation”. A “logic of difference”, on the other hand, denotes the constitutions of non-antagonistic relationships that relegate social conflicts to the margins of the social, as for instance in a society where all demands are to be individually met by the market economy. Through strategies of assimilation or “dividing and ruling”, existing chains of equivalence are disintegrated and social demands are kept apart so that they can be accommodated within an expanding, overarching order (Howarth 1995: 122–123; Howarth and Stavrakakis 2000: 11).

In this regard the nation is constituted through a *discursive closure*: a violent reduction of possibilities as difference is articulated as sameness. A hegemonic national project, the attempt to impose one logic over another, provides the possibility of content and identifications in a context of undecidability where meanings of important floating signifiers are not settled (Howarth 1995: 124; Torfing 1999: 194). Arguably, the economic and political transformations bound up with the operation of transnational capital in Nicaragua take shape around a *dislocation*, an occurrence that cannot be integrated into an existing discourse which will therefore be destabilized as a result of the event. A dislocation entails a rupture in

political identifications as those identities that have been constituted in part through incorporating a particular order are necessarily thrown into crisis when that order is brought into question (Laclau and Mouffe 1985: 126; Howarth 2000: 111). Thus, while a dislocation is an expression of the inherent contingency of meaning, the reduction of possibilities and of fixation of meaning, a discursive closure is the effect of hegemonic interventions.

Quite unexpectedly, the Sandinistas lost the elections in 1990, which coincided with the fall of the Soviet Union. In the wake of the loss of a socialist imaginary and a virtually unfettered exposure to the global economy, the political order had to be reshaped. The defeat clearly disestablished not only the political imaginary of the Sandinistas (e.g. the party as an extension of the revolutionary will of the people) but also the identities of their opponents as the contours of their primary target changed. The new situation thereby gave rise to the opening of a discursive terrain for political contestation, new hegemonic projects struggling to stabilize dislocated meanings of floating signifiers and identities. At the time when my study starts, the discursive effects of neoliberalism's dominant position are pronounced, but meanings are by no means stable or unequivocal, whether among the proponents or among the opponents of the current order. In Chapters 3 and 4, I analyze the empirical material as part of hegemonic practices: attempts to construct a social order through the expulsion of ambiguity and through bringing together various identities and forces within the frame of a coherent political project.

Rhetoric, Meaning and Political Rule

An entry point into this study is the notion of the centrality of language to political rule. It is through a particular vocabulary that the aims and means of government become intelligible (Miller and Rose 2008: 30). Foucault's concept of governmentality suggests through the linkage of governing ("*gouverner*") and forms of thought ("*mentalité*") that technologies of power can be analyzed only in relation to the *political rationality* that uphold them. Modes of representations, the delineation of concepts, borders, arguments and justifications, allow governments to define a discursive field within which power is legitimized. Through structures of interventions, such as institutions and legal frameworks, expertise calculation and documentation, subjects and objects are governed in terms of notions of the good, the appropriate and the profitable (Lemke 2001: 191; Miller and Rose 2008: 54–55). As Blom Hansen and Stepputat (2001: 5–6) point out, while state formation in Western Europe continues to constitute a principle imaginary of what the state should be, instead of seeing postcolonial states as "flawed imitation[s]", the task is to examine, historically and contextually, "how the

state attempts to make itself real” through the use of “‘proper’ languages of stateness”.

In Chapters 3 and 4, I explore the rhetoric of the conservative/neoliberal and Sandinista governments. The understanding of power as embedded in an array of social practices and relations opens the way for a decentered analysis of the constitution of legitimacy in the political projects of the state (cf. MacLeavy 2007). What Blom Hansen and Stepputat call the “the language of stateness”, which I refer to as “the official rhetoric”, is manifested in, for instance, policy documents, political speeches and billboards. Following Miller and Rose, I consider the diverse empirical material, some parts of which are produced and distributed by governmental institutions while other parts have looser links to the state, as pertaining to complex political structures that render particular forms of government possible. In this study, political rhetoric is not primarily of interest in order to determine the purposes of any particular program that can then be evaluated against actual implementations and effects. Rather, I regard rhetoric as the (dispersed) language of government through which the state, its visions and authority claims become (potentially) available to subject-citizens. The official rhetoric is here understood as the version of the state that citizens encounter: it is through rhetoric that visions and principles are transmitted and through language that the type of knowledge upon which politics is founded may be approached. Rather than contradicting “actual” politics, rhetoric can be conceived of as the vehicle that expands social rationality, shapes a particular logic and constitutes political subjects and identities. As Laclau (2005: 12–13) puts it: “Far from being a parasite of ideology, rhetoric would actually be the anatomy of the ideological world.”

Thus, in analysis of the meanings given to transnational capital in the formulation of political projects, rhetoric is not primarily to be comprehended in one of its more conventional senses denoting primarily *persuasion*, which would call for an evaluation of effectiveness, the extent to which the addressee has indeed been convinced. Instead, I am interested in how authority claims are constructed and framed as viable in a context of conflicting and provisional meanings. Jonathan Potter points to the *offensive* and *defensive* elements of rhetoric whereby offensive rhetoric is understood as undermining competing or alternative arguments while defensive rhetoric refers to the construction of descriptions that resist challenges (Potter 1996: 106–108). This allows for an analysis not mainly of how rhetoric corresponds to reality, but instead of the relationships between opposing arguments: how a description destabilizes other versions and in turn resists being undermined.

The official rhetoric under study here will thus be understood as consisting of endeavors to formulate political projects within a terrain of discursive struggle through the establishment of particular relations between different subjects and significations. The ways that some signs are

specifically important in the formulation of political projects can be understood with recourse to discourse theoretical terminology as the effect of *articulatory practices*. Articulations are defined by Laclau and Mouffe (1985: 105–113) as practices that bring together different signs in ways that give them new meaning or as the construction of *nodal points* that temporarily fix meaning. The nodal points of a discourse are those signs that in particular structure the meanings of other signs. In the empirical material that I analyze here, some nodal points appear to be important primarily within one of the political projects, for example “reconciliation” in Sandinista discourse, which is bound up, for instance, with national unity and anti-imperialism. Other nodal points can also be conceived of as floating signifiers because of their significance within hegemonic struggle. Examples of such signs are “development” and “globalization” and “revolution”, which are given competing meanings in the rhetoric of the two governments as they are linked to different sets of signs (growth versus exploitation in the case of globalization, for example). Also, identity categories may have the function of floating signifiers: “the people” (*el pueblo*/“Nicaraguans”), “the workers” or “the poor”. The ways that these signifiers are invested with meaning are imperative in struggles to make sense of transnational capital and to promote particular identities in response to globalization.

Not only signs with overtly “political” content seem important in the establishment of political projects and subjects; “the nation” and “the people” are often depicted in terms of emotions and sentiments. Following Sara Ahmed (2004), I think it is fruitful to analyze the politics of emotion. Ahmed suggests that emotions are crucial to the shaping of social relations; they differentiate or bring together imagined subjects. For example, through the operation of emotional appeals in moral and political justifications, the nation may be turned into a “shared object of feeling” that renders only certain subjects recognizable as the part of the national ideal. I will thus examine the “emotionality of texts”, how political articulations work through emotions: hope, fear, dignity, hate and love are evoked in ways that may both bind together and disperse.

Positions and Identifications

An important aspect of political power is to “make” subjects that match the political project, subjects who may bear and desire a particular version of “the nation” and who, in line with Bhabha’s reasoning, may *perform* the nation. Herein lies always a threat to the unity of the nation since the performance is necessarily heterogeneous. Certainly, the idea of the people as one, itself a violent inscription, is not another name for equal structures of belonging. The notion of a community or a people also entails the

elaboration or transformation of the state on behalf of particular economic or social groups – the differentiation of citizens in accordance with notions of which subjects belong to the past or to the future of the nation (Blom Hansen and Stepputat 2001: 22). Thus, the state can be conceived of as an instrument of incorporation and exclusion, or in line with Butler’s inquiry: “What does it mean to be at once contained and dispossessed by the state?” (Butler and Spivak 2007: 5). Indeed, to be deprived by national ties of belonging takes the shape not only of outright expulsion. Particular ways of inclusion may also constitute the roots of deprivation: narratives of (dis)belonging have material and violent effects (see Ahmed 2000: 97–99). In the following chapters (especially Chapters 3 and 4) I will discuss how the state provides particular scripts for its citizens. Subjects are addressed, or *interpellated*, in ways that position them within a discourse and produce them as social actors (Howarth 2000: 108–109; Torfing 1999: 150–151).¹⁸ To any subject, many different points of identification potentially apply. However, not all positions are open to everyone – not all individuals, groups or classes have access to the same discourses or are positioned in the same way within them (Foucault 1984: 60).

Here, following Anna Marie Smith (1998: 55–74), I think it is productive to make a distinction between *structural positions* and *subject positions*. Making explicit an argument that she detects in the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985), she defines structural positions as those conditions that shape and delimit an individual’s options and life chances, situating her “within hierarchical social, cultural, political and economic systems by forces and institutions that are prior to her will” (Smith 1998: 56). To be “woman”, “black”, “white”, “mixed”, “man” and so on in a racist and sexist society entails being positioned within power relations and patterns of domination and resource allocation that are largely already in place, regardless of individual preferences. In a capitalist society, those who do not own the means of production have to sell their labor to ensure their survival on terms that they cannot choose; they are structurally positioned as workers in relation to capital. Whereas within Marxist theorization this position has been largely considered to generate objective class interests, the concept of subject position serves to make it clear that we do not experience our structural positions in a transparent or straightforward way; rather, we live them through political discourse, through subject positions. Smith (1998: 58) defines a subject position as an “ensemble of beliefs through which an individual interprets and responds to her structural positions within a social formation.”

¹⁸ Discourse theory engages with Louis Althusser’s argument about subject constitution as the effect of ideological practices through which the subject is interpellated or “hailed”, but emphasizes the political dimension rather than underlying economic structures (see Howarth 1995: 123).

Thus, subject positions are connected to structural positions in complex ways, and not simply determined by them. For instance, it is when a worker starts to identify with a position in an antagonistic relation to capital that she may engage in acts of collective resistance, something that is not derived from the her structural position as such. Hegemonic discourses, that is to say, “dominant forms of conduct and meaning in a given context” (Howarth 1995: 124), construct “horizons of intelligibility” (Norval 1996) that organize the content, availability and legitimacy of subject positions situated within a nexus of differences and power relations. As Smith (1998: 71) points out, subject positions are constituted in processes of political struggle, “the struggle to provide compelling frameworks through which structural positions are lived”, but they are positions that political authority can never fully determine.

Accordingly, in the context of this study, I suggest that citizens–subjects are structurally positioned in relation to transnational capital and competing versions of nation-making, which are the effects of historical and contemporary formations of privilege, oppression and exploitation linked to categorizations such as class, race and gender. I also suggest that individuals, through political interventions, are interpellated to identify with and act in accordance with particular subject positions that are (discriminately) made available to them within competing hegemonic articulations: particular constructions of the “worker” in juxtaposition to other categories such as “woman”, “the people” and “the poor”. Such positions are not easy or painless to inhabit but are difficult to ignore.

Indeed, in line with the notion of subject positions as discursively constructed, implying that the link to structural positions is not given, subjects come into being through interpellation and identification, and, further, acts of identification will always be partial and unfinished (Howarth 1995: 123; Smith 1998: 72; Norval 2004: 144). Herein lies an ever-present possibility of disidentification, contingency and unpredictable alterations, and also the possibility that hegemonic discourses might be thrown into crisis if they fail to interpellate subjects “into stable, ‘normalized’ forms of identification” (Norval 1996: 27). For example, in an argument that becomes important in relation to this study, Cherniavsky (2006: 26) contends that, against the backdrop of the rising significance of transnational capital and an expanding informal economy, states increasingly fail to interpellate their citizens as national subjects. Disposable workers, she argues, are turned into disposable “pseudocitizens”, which points to a crisis in hegemonic state power, the failure of the state to subject citizens “to its power and to authorize them as ‘freely’ consenting subjects”. It is particularly in times of social and economic turmoil that the contingency of identities becomes obvious, something that another discourse-theoretic concept seeks to encompass: *political subjectivity*. Whereas the concept of subject position refers to various positions made available within a

discourse, the notion of political subjectivity is concerned with how “social actors *act*” and take “decisions” within an undecidable terrain. When discourses are dislocated, identities may attain novel forms through articulations of new social meaning and identification with alternative discourses (Howarth 2000: 108–109).

Issues of identification, how workers invest in particular subject positions (or not), will thus be central to the discussion in Chapter 5. While the interviews are analyzed in juxtaposition to the conservative/neoliberal and Sandinista variants of the official rhetoric, these accounts are not to be read as a “correction” of other articulations, nor even always in direct correlation to the official rhetoric. Sometimes they do not seem to inhabit the “same” space. Rather, the chapter seeks to analyze the ways that workers make sense of their structural positions in relation to transnational capital, and of the subject positions that appear to be available to them within processes of nation-building. Proceeding from interviews with FTZ workers, the aim is to explore how imperative subject positions are negotiated or rejected, as responses to the ways that workers are being positioned as suitable for transnational capital and as agents of change within different political imaginaries. How does the “myth of the state” circulate among citizens? How do workers talk about, imagine and act upon the demands of transnational capital?

Finally, in this study I identify individuals with different categorization – FTZ workers, unionists and so on – that perhaps do not correspond to their own identifications. Though this is inevitable to a certain extent in an analysis of differentiating structures, it still represents a fixity and reduction that does not correspond to the reality of the people I interviewed. These are theoretical categories based on common structural positions that do not capture concrete agents or practices (Smith 1998: 59). Indeed, an important task is to try to avoid the “imprisoning process of representational essentializing whereby parts of the lives of ‘others’ come to epitomize the whole” (Skeggs 1997: 32, 165).

The Empirical Material

The empirical material consists of commercials, promotion videotapes, policy documents, political speeches, websites, billboards and interviews. All of these manifestations will be treated as *text* in a broad sense: as signifying practices that establish meaning and systems of relations and differences between positions, objects and practices. A discourse analytic approach destabilizes the hierarchy between different types of material that has often guided the social sciences. For example, a policy document does not necessarily provide a better reflection of social reality than a tabloid magazine. Both types of material convey meaning and make particular

authority claims in representing reality. Thus, despite different social locations, the empirical material is commonly not graded in terms of its reliability within discourse analysis, and diverse material categories can generally be analyzed with the same kind of tools (Börjesson and Palmblad 2007: 16–19). However, this is not to say that all representations have the same status or authority within different discourses, or that all types of material are equally relevant to the study of a particular problem. The conditions of (im)possibility of different articulations, their credibility and impact, are constitutive of discursive formations (Foucault 1984: 60).

In the following I outline a few considerations in relation to the specificity of the materials; printed texts, visuals and interviews.

Rhetoric and texts

The empirical material used to analyze the political rhetoric relates to two governments: the neoliberal/conservative government of the PLC led by Enrique Bolaños (2002–2007) and the “revolutionary” government of the FSLN under Daniel Ortega (2007–). The examination of political language calls for some explanation of the choice of material. One option could have been to analyze, for instance, parliamentary debates in order to capture opposing takes on the processes of restructuring and ideas about how to direct and regulate the flows of transnational capital. These materials, however, are not easily accessible, either for researchers or for the general public, implying that they lack the “official” imprimatur. In line with the discussion above about the official rhetoric, the assumption is that it is through rhetoric that citizens, at least potentially, encounter political claims and visions. Thus, material has been selected for being relatively available (albeit with various degrees of outreach), most of it being clearly designed with a particular audience in mind – for example, voters, investors, workers, political allies or opponents.

The focus is mainly on the representations of the ruling party; enunciations by the opposition are not directly included. While this is partly dictated by the state of the materials (i.e. availability and the extent of the study), centering on rhetoric linked to formal power is also an attempt to scrutinize the struggles to formulate coherent political projects that have to take the operation of transnational capital into account. In order to concretize the discussion, the material has been selected in light of its relation to the FTZ. I visited institutions, organizations and government departments that form part of the infrastructure of transnational capital in Nicaragua. The material obtained here can therefore also be regarded to reflecting and promoting the visions of capital, with varying relations to the governments in power. On most of these visits I was provided with leaflets, promotion materials and other types of documentation such as declarations, evaluations, statistics and reports. Many of these institutions have websites, some of which have been included in the material.

I also conducted one or several interviews with officials at each of the places I visited (about 15 in total). Through their positions, these interviewees are closely associated with the institutions that produce and circulate the “official rhetoric”. Still, these conversations lack the accessibility of the other enunciations. Apart from contributing to my understanding of different aspects of the political context in Nicaragua, quotations from these interviews are analyzed in each of the three empirical chapters in order to enhance the discussion, even though the passages quoted are not regarded as being as “official” as, for instance, policy documents and commercials.

Transcribed presidential speeches are made available for downloading on government websites. All speeches given during the five years of Enrique Bolaños’s administration have been archived and are presented in chronological order. I selected and analyzed those that specifically addressed the FTZs, foreign investment, globalization, the workers’ situation or declarations of the main political agenda in total 66 speeches. Some of these speeches were given at large public gatherings, such as Labor Day speeches, which were also broadcast on radio and television. Other speeches were given at less public events, addressing, for example, delegations of foreign investors or participants in conventions for FTZ workers. The main policy document produced during Bolaños’s term, *The National Development Plan*, has also been analyzed.

The divergence in the political parties’ framing of the FTZs is partly reflected as discrepancy in the empirical material. Whereas the PLC produces material that is directly related to the FTZs and contains abundant references to foreign direct investment, the material produced under the FSLN is decidedly more indirect and vague on that topic. Unlike the PLC, which makes the FTZs a key constituent of its political project and identity, the FSLN evinces an ambivalent relation to transnational capital: a palpable manifestation of the political direction of the previous government and a sign of uneven development, the FTZs nonetheless remain important in a context of few alternatives. Not surprisingly, this is part of the terrain of negotiations and struggle over meaning. The aim of this study is precisely to elucidate strategies to embrace or to refute the presence of transnational capital. It does, however, mean that the discussions in the sections that deal with the FSLN’s rhetoric range more widely in order to catch indirect references or rather the larger picture of which the FTZs are part, though this is not always straightforwardly stated in the material.

The analysis of the FSLN’s rhetoric embraces policy documents, of which four are considered products of the party and one was elaborated in collaboration with *Consejo Superior de la Empresa Privada* (Higher Council on Private Enterprise, COSEP), Nicaragua’s most influential association for private enterprise and one of the most vocal opponents of the revolution during the 1980s. The presidential website, which was pedagogically

structured during Bolaños's term of office, seems to have become more "eclectic" after the FSLN's victory. It contains poems written by the "first lady", Rosario Murillo, under vague headings such as "Nicaragua, with love", while information is not systematically archived. I have analyzed all transcriptions of speeches I found relevant that appeared on the website between January 2007 (the time of President Ortega's inauguration) and May 2008, 20 in all. Whereas Bolaños's speeches ranged between one and five transcribed pages, the FSLN speeches often exceeded 20, sometimes reaching 50 pages. I have also analyzed a weekly journal, *El 19*, an organ of the FSLN's citizen participation project, which makes for an apt source in which to analyze the construction and interpellation of political subjects. Sixteen issues of the journal came out between August 2008 and January 2009, after which it became digital. Here, the 16 hard-copy issues are included in the research materials.

Visual representations

The empirical material also contains different kinds of (audio)visual representations: commercials, promotional videotapes, websites and billboards. As mentioned above, all material is treated as "text" in the sense that it conveys meaning. This study will not be extensively "technical" in analyzing visual material. In fact, I will basically use the same set of concepts for analyzing the construction of meaning in visual images, audio and print text. That said, I will make a few comments specifically on visual analysis. Translating the meanings of pictures poses a challenge; based on different kinds of codes, images will have to be translated into words (Lister and Wells 2001: 76). Nicholas Mirzoeff, discussing the propensity to "read" visual images by means of linguistic tools, writes that it tends to lose the specificity of the visual. Compared with the written sign, he argues, the visual sign has a decided immediacy, "an impact at first sight" evoking feelings and associations, a "surplus of experiences" (Mirzoeff 1999: 15–16).

The visual images examined here, both still and motion pictures, all represent strong rhetorical expressions. Clearly interpellating designated subjects such as voters, workers or investors, they contain affluent sets of techniques to move the viewer. What kinds of identity do visual representations offer? What deeds and what types of interaction do they stage and prescribe? How does the use of symbols (such as flags and maps) and metaphors (scaffolds and highways as signs for progress and mobility, for instance) operate in the visuals? In visual images, subject positions are constructed in the picture through the viewing position but also through the staging of a relation between the image and the viewer: distance, intimacy, camera angle and "eye contact" (Jewitt and Oyama 2001). Does the visual, signaled for instance through the posture and direction of the gaze of the person portrayed, appear to be staged as a documentary, momentarily capturing a faction of reality? Is the viewer cast as an interlocutor or as a

voyeur? Visual constructions of power and identity have been discussed not least in relation to the voyeuristic, controlling gaze: the fetishized female as an object of masculine heterosexual desire or of what John Urry has called the “tourist gaze”, the visual production of the an exotic other (see Lister and Wells 2001: 83–86). Indeed, advertising, which often produces images intended to be instantly recognizable, tends to rely upon and reproduce stereotypes, specific recognizable representations of particular categories (Niblock 2001: 297), something that becomes relevant not least in the marketing of the FTZs and its labor power.

Interviews

Discourse analysis tends to obliterate the distinction between already existing material and material that is produced in the course of research, such as interviews. Conventionally, already existing material has been regarded as more accurate, as supplying an authentic insight that is not distorted by the researcher’s intervention. An alternative position would be to regard the interview as an *interactive situation* that also places the researcher within the frame of the analysis of the content and context of the interview (Börjesson and Palmblad 2007: 16–19). Even if the authenticity-based hierarchy between existing and produced material is abolished, there remain, of course, often considerable ethical, emotional and analytic differences between analyzing an anonymously authored policy document and conducting an interview: not only the often awkward first contact to the difficulties of formulating relevant questions, time-consuming transcriptions, and the frustration of not doing the interviewees justice, but also the enjoyment of inspiring encounters and the challenge of composing distinctive material.

During my three visits to Nicaragua (2005, 2006 and 2008), I conducted around 60 recorded interviews. The length of the interviews ranged from 30 to 120 minutes, but most of them lasted about an hour. About half of these have been transcribed and properly analyzed.¹⁹ The interviewees had starkly diverse relations to transnational capital: they were unemployed, top politicians, trade unionists, FTZ workers and bureaucrats. Interviews took place in offices, markets, fancy restaurants, cars, peoples’ homes and a half-abandoned goldmine (decidedly the most extreme surrounding – oxygen was provided through a crank and a rusty pipe). The purpose of conducting interviews changed during the course of the research period and, was, admittedly, not always very clear, for a number of reasons: the general direction of the project changed when the FSLN returned to power in 2007,

¹⁹ All interviews were conducted in Spanish. Those interviews I analyze and cite have been transcribed; the remainder (which there was no time to transcribe or properly analyze) I have only listened to. I transcribed most of the interviews myself; others, conducted with interviewees who were not easy to identify, were transcribed by my neighbor in Managua. All translations of interview citations and quotations from the rest of the empirical material are my own.

my theoretical and research interests were transformed and, as I discuss in more detail in Chapter 5, the depth of the division of labor in the global economy and the stark differences in structural positions made it hard to formulate both questions and answers about work experiences: what kind of knowledge can be produced and to what ends (cf. Mulinari 2005)? During my first stay in Managua, interviews were highly “explorative” in the sense that I was trying to get a sense of what I was looking for, whom to talk to and so on. I visited various organizations and institutions and attended meetings, some of them rather loosely connected to what later became the main topic of the dissertation. These side issues, however, were far from “dead ends” but rather underpin the project in one way or the other.

Roughly categorized, I conducted interviews with two main groups, which are represented in the following chapters: FTZ workers and officials representing the government and institutions with links to the FTZs or trade and private enterprise. I have processed the interviews by what can be described as a thematic analysis (see Braun and Clarke 2006): in relation to my research questions and the theoretical inquiries raised, I have read the interviews and organized accounts in line with the different themes that I found reflected in the material and that I want to highlight. Below, I discuss the interviews with the two main groups separately.

The conditions of the encounters with interviewees differed widely depending upon whom I was meeting, how I positioned them, how they positioned me and how I tried to position myself and my project. That is to say, structural positions and subject positions, as discussed above, were always in play in the interview situation and throughout the project, from the formulation of questions and encounters to my decisions on what to include and my interpretations and representations (cf. Skeggs 1997: 28–29).

The interviews that I conducted with the group of “representatives” were most often arranged through e-mails or phone calls to the organizations, ministries or institutions that I wanted to talk to, such as the administrations of the FTZs, the Ministry of Labor, the American Chamber of Commerce, pro-investment associations and umbrella organizations for investment and private enterprise. In presenting the project to the interviewees, I underlined the role of FTZs in the national political projects. The issues that mainly interested me in these interviews were perceptions of, and action taken in relation to, transnational capital, and notions of national and societal transformations. I asked questions about the concrete work of the particular institution and the interests it promoted and defended, about the networks in which it operated, its contacts with foreign investors and unions as well as about its assessment of the general political climate at the time. The interviews conducted in 2008 often came to center on the change of government and its possible effects. Because of the diversity of the institutions that I visited, the analysis of the interviews with this group is less thematic than that of the interviews with workers. They are also cited

less frequently in the following chapters. In interviews with officials, I tended to be positioned as a “student” and as “Swedish”. I sometimes had the impression that a Swedish nationality was to my advantage – many of the interviewees had experience of different cooperation projects and were interested in Swedish politics (not least the altered position of social democracy).²⁰ Indeed, when I interviewed representatives of different institutions as well as workers, the encounters were arguably marked by the (unequal) relations and expectations which decades of foreign aid and transnational solidarity work have generated.²¹

Though interviews were at times difficult to arrange, I found most entities that I visited quite accessible. I was provided with information materials and was often shown around and introduced to the staff. I was sometimes invited to participate in meetings and occasionally taken on tours in the factories. Only rarely did I feel that interviewees questioned the purpose of the interview. However, officials were not unaware of the negative associations of the FTZs. In several interviews it was the first issue to be raised, sometimes framed in terms of the limited understanding of foreigners (“I don’t think that *you* are that naïve, but many gringos come here and just condemn everything”). By mistake, an e-mail conversation was forwarded to me when I tried to arrange a visit at one of the FTZ factories through one of the institutions that promote foreign investment. A representative who had promised to help me wrote to one of his co-workers: “Now she wants to do interviews with some of the companies that are established here. So it would be great if it could be in one of the sectors that hopefully live up to the norms of Corporate Social Responsibility!” Many interviewees helped to arrange further interviews. An official at the Ministry of Industry told me that she had always wanted to write a dissertation herself and therefore would like to help me as she much as she could. Within a couple of minutes she had scheduled several meetings for me at institutions that I had been trying unsuccessfully to contact for weeks.

This was also the way that many of the interviews with workers came about – workers, unionists or community organizers introducing me to other workers. For example, a unionist whom I met in Managua arranged a visit to her city for me. She found a family for me to stay with, and she organized a meeting with the mayor of the city, visits to different

²⁰ I assume that the often positive connotations of Sweden have changed since then, at least within the higher layers of the FSLN, which adopted a highly critical position toward the Swedish ambassador during the spring/summer of 2008 for remarks that were considered to interfere with Nicaragua’s domestic political affairs, such as the disqualification of two opposition parties for not complying with the electoral regulations before the municipal elections in November 2008. In FSLN rhetoric, Sweden was presented as one of the enemy states, trying to impose its own agenda. The Swedish embassy was closed in the fall of 2008 as Nicaragua is no longer one of the countries that the Swedish International Development Cooperation Agency prioritizes.

²¹ For an analysis of classed, racialized and gendered transnational relations in Swedish solidarity work in Nicaragua, see Berg (2007).

workplaces (such as the goldmine), and a group interview where 20 people showed up. Interviews with workers were conducted both individually and with groups of various sizes. Many of the most rewarding talks were not interviews but everyday conversations. During one stay I had my base at the office of an NGO in Managua that organized FTZ workers. Several of the staff were former FTZ workers and some still worked part-time in the factories. I participated in their everyday activities such as canvassing, arranging workshops, and attending meetings with trade unions and different institutions.

I interviewed most workers in their homes on Sundays, when they had their day off (which often made we feel guilty for taking up some of the little spare time they had and for making them think about the factories on the only day when they could focus on other things). When I visited the workers' neighborhoods, I also got to talk to the workers' relations and to former workers. Most of the interviewees, however, worked in the FTZs at the time of our conversation. The majority was between 18 and 30 years old; some of them had worked at several FTZ companies over many years, while others had just started. I conducted interviews with workers primarily in Managua and in three smaller nearby cities where many FTZ companies were established. Some of the workers were born and raised in the area while others had moved there in order to look for a job in the FTZs. While, as discussed above, the FTZ worker is extensively and transnationally coded feminine, many men work in FTZs, too, and I interviewed several male workers as well. A few of them worked as sewing machine operators, while others worked in the package and storage area, often represented as the heaviest and most masculine part of the production chain. Some, but far from all of the workers were affiliated to unions.

Although the right to form unions is enshrined in the national labor regulations, unions are repressed in numerous ways, ranging from outright busting to harassing affiliated workers or simply ignoring union attempts to initiate negotiations. The union members that I talked to mostly belonged to small unions with affiliates at only one factory, though they were often backed by larger unions. I have chosen not focus in this study explicitly on the work of the well-established unions such as *Central Sandinista de Trabajadores* (Sandinista Workers' Central, CST) or large workers organizations.²² I justify this choice by reference to my interest in "everyday" representations of, and negotiations with, the conditions that subject workers to transnational capital, and the organizational strategies of unions and so forth, though far from unrelated, did not fall within my primary focus.

²² For an analysis of union strategies in relation to the FTZs, see Armbuster-Sandoval (2005); for a detailed ethnography of Maria Elena Cuadra, a women's organization focusing on the FTZs, see Bickham Mendez (2005).

The fact that it was often unionists or community leaders who introduced me to workers partly located me within a recognizable context; but, as I discuss in Chapter 5, our different positions were at times a source of confusion, and sometimes erected a barrier between us. However, I regard this not only as an obstacle to the research project, but as something that can actually generate important insights as well. For this reason, I have chosen to place some of the discussion about the challenges of a research project that takes place in a context engendered by global inequalities in the analytic chapter. I have tried to let the “encounter” that is tied up with decidedly different structural positions become an integrated element of the text, as opposed to regarding it primarily as an issue of methodology.

I always initiated interviews by introducing myself and the research project briefly, usually emphasizing the attempt to understand different experiences in relation to the FTZs. I also stressed that workers would be anonymous – they did not have to tell me their names (though often I knew their names already) or the name of the factory where they worked. Indeed, in a context of highly precarious conditions of work, I of course did not want to cause them any problems. Some workers declined altogether to be interviewed, explaining precisely that they were afraid to lose their job; others wanted to participate but not to have the interview recorded, while others made a point of not letting the company dictate who they could talk to.

In the interviews, I asked workers to describe a normal day at work, for instance, what they did and how they interacted with others. I asked about why they had decided to seek a job in the FTZs, about their perceptions of the factories before starting work and whether these had changed. I also encouraged them to talk about special incidents at the factories that had made an impact on them. We talked about their ideas about the FTZs as a general regime and its effects on society at large as well as in their communities and daily lives. I asked about relations at work, with supervisors, co-workers and, if applicable, within unions and also about how FTZ work affected relations outside the factories. Other issues covered in the interviews included workers’ perceptions of the “global”, encounters with foreign managers at the factories and notions about consumers at the destinations of the goods they produced.

Thus, with the FTZs constituting the node of the discussion, I have, based on interviews with workers and with connections to the “official rhetoric”, selected a couple of themes that guide the analysis of workers’ accounts. Attempting to examine how FTZ workers relate to available subject positions that situate them in relation to the interlinked processes of nation-building and globalization, in Chapter 5 I address perceptions and conditions of belonging, exclusion and inclusion in the national project; representations of work and (dis)identifications with the category of the worker; the workplace as constitutive of social relations; and conceptions of

the prospects for transformations of labor relations and the possibilities of collective identifications and alliances.

Summary

Before locating these more general discussions in the setting of FTZs in Nicaragua and the projects, subjects and identifications with which they were intertwined, I briefly summarize the discussion so far. The purpose of this chapter was to elaborate a platform for the subsequent discussion through raising a set of theoretical and methodological inquiries. The emergence of the FTZs and their material and symbolic effects is in this study framed within the context of uneven development and the globalization of capital, production and consumption. Since the 1990s, neoliberalism (in a non-precise sense) has come to constitute a dominant force in organizing conceptions of the economy and the state, which has implied a process of re-regulation (rather than just deregulation) of societal functions, recasting notions of citizenship as well. In the “developing world” such restructurings have often been the result of Structural Adjustment Programs that emphasize market liberalization and export-led growth. These changes have often been promoted by national governments, a fact that in part can be read as an indication of emergent transnational economic and political elites that are connected through the flows of “flexible” capital. The growing magnitude of mobile capital, fragmented chains of production and the sharp distinction between sites of production and consumption in the global division of labor have made working conditions in many sectors more precarious and informalized, processes that are taking shape along the lines of gender, race, locality and class.

Further, I have argued for the significance of examining how these processes are given meaning and made possible in particular contexts through political interventions and discursive framings. In the following empirical chapters I analyze ways to make sense of transnational production in Nicaragua. To this end, I have presented an analytic framework guided by discourse theory to picture political struggle. Concepts such as floating signifiers, logics of difference and equivalence, structural positions and subject positions were put forth as instructive in highlighting the inscription of particular issues as political objects, while others are relegated to the outside of political interventions. I argued that a study of rhetoric allows for an analysis of the politically viable, the legitimate and the normalized. Attention to subject positions gives an indication of differentiations between proper and improper conduct, between preferred and problematic subjectivities in processes of societal transformations, as well as of the

setting in which workers attempt to navigate the ways that they are structurally positioned in relation to transnational production.

3. Scripts of Globalization Between Progress and Revolution

“Free Trade Zones – zones of hope in the Nicaragua of the New Era!” Above a picture of a fluttering Nicaraguan flag and an image of the country entirely covered by a garment factory, these inspiring words appear on a poster from the National Free Trade Zones Commission (CNZF), a government institution that promotes and facilitates foreign direct investment. Nicaragua’s flag and borders – primary symbols of national sovereignty and identity – are here seamlessly blended with an image that has become iconic for notions of globalization: workers, mostly female, in a Third World country striving to meet the demands of flexible capital in outsourced export production. Declaring the advent of a “New Era” and designating the Free Trade Zones (FTZ) as “zones of hope”, the large print appears to encapsulate a utopian dimension. But what might be the prospect of a political project contingent upon transnational capital? Is the entire country to be transformed into a gigantic production zone, as the poster appears to suggest? What narrative strategies may be deployed to ensure a connection between hope and FTZs that in other settings have been the topic of “race-to-the-bottom” debates in the wake of changing divisions of labor?

Certainly, the poster is indicative of a particular development paradigm in which the neoliberal mode of capitalist regulation has come to arrange discourses of economic growth. Finding a vehicle of implementation in the Bretton Woods institutions as well as in national policy plans around the world, the principle that prescribes integration into the global economy by means of eliminating trade barriers, enhanced export production and foreign direct investment has indeed reshaped entire socio-economic cartographies. A place in the global division of labor is to be attained through specializing on low-wage, labor-intensive export production. In this regard, the poster enforces the declared connection between a common good and integration into global markets. The utopian message proclaims that investment opportunities translate into hope of progress. Read as a typology of epistemological power, the map that is engulfed by a factory seems to propose that in the whole country there is solely room for what Doreen Massey (2005: 5) refers to as the “cosmology of only one narrative”: no place exists for differences or alternative trajectories.

I saw the poster mounted on the wall at CNZF's reception office in Las Mercedes, Nicaragua's largest state-owned FTZ. A fenced-off area on the outskirts of Managua where armed guards superintend all visits, the Zone is an example of what Saskia Sassen (2001) calls "strategic spaces" in the globalizing economy: nodes for economic transactions and value accumulations or enclaves where the "global" is "locally" materialized. The Zone has been in operation since 1992 on what was once a prison site; it now hosts about 90 companies for tax-exempted export production, employing 30 000 workers. The majority of the companies operate in the clothing sector and are owned by US, Taiwanese or South Korean investors. Just about the entire production volume is destined for the US, where it appears on the shelves of retailers such as JC Penny, Walmart and K-mart.

In the office of CNZF, lawyers work to adapt the national legislation to make investment smoother, some are responsible for the infrastructure of the Zone, while yet others work on marketing and relations with foreign investors. I had come to the office to interview one of the CNZF officers, who had also promised me a guided tour in one of the factories, otherwise impossible for visitors to access. As I was waiting for the interview, I had time to glance at the other posters on the walls of the reception area; framed graphs showed the increase in foreign investment and employment opportunities and a histogram indicated the debt reduction that IMF had granted Nicaragua for having implemented the required Structural Adjustment Programs (SAPs). When I returned to the office about a year and a half later, all the posters had been replaced by pictures of Augusto C. Sandino, who for his anti-imperialist fight against the US navy in the 1930s gave his name to the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) – then back in power after 16 years in opposition.



Figure 1. Poster from CNZF. Photo by author.

One poster shows anonymous workers in transnational circuits of production; another portrays a man who symbolizes the struggle against imperialist forces. The wall adornments apparently point to two opposed imaginaries: the global versus the national, the “new era” versus heritage, the FTZs as a manifestation of hope or as an unfortunate necessity. Though such rudimentary divisions might have a certain relevance, here I will examine how political visions are taking shape in the presence of transnational capital at a time when scripts of embracement or resistance are not necessarily immediately available or applicable.

Thus, the chapter juxtaposes two (fairly) distinct but by no means coherent political projects that are underpinned by competing discourses of national progress, so as to discuss strategies for interpreting and handling transnational capital. In order to nuance the tendency to understand localities (nations, regions, and so on) as the products of globalization, rendering the global without location and the local without agency, it is necessary to pay attention to “the *local* production of the neoliberal capitalist *global*” (Massey 2005: 101; see also Peck 2002). Indeed, contrary to the claims of many of its adherents and agents, the *content* of globalization is not given: it is, rather, a project. The aim of this chapter is to detail how the formulations, justifications and contestations of such projects are played out in the context of economic restructuring in Nicaragua.

The chapter is divided into two sections. The first looks at the rhetoric of post-Sandinista nation-building under Enrique Bolaños government (2002–2007). It centers on the marketing of FTZs and, in turn, on the role that transnational capital was depicted to play in the national political agenda. In the second section, the rhetoric of the political project of the Sandinistas that returned to power at the beginning of 2007 is analyzed. Against the proclaimed unambiguous linkage between globalized capital and progress, the FTZs are being associated with imperialism rather than hope as the FSLN attempts to forge a political direction through reconnecting to a revolutionary past and through adjoining Latin America’s “left turn”. This part of the discussion examines how declared socialist aspirations are mediated in relation to the framework of previous governments and the workings of transnational capital.

Re-Narrating the Nation: The New Nicaragua

The history of “Latin” America after independence is the variegated history of the local elite, willingly or not, embracing “modernity” while Indigenous, Afro, and poor Mestizo/a peoples get poorer and more marginalized. The “idea” of Latin America is that sad one of elites celebrating their dreams of becoming modern while they slide deeper and deeper into the logic of coloniality. (Mignolo 2005: 57–58)

In *The Idea of Latin America* Walter Mignolo (2005) describes how the notion of “Latin” America – the term itself making manifest the epistemological dominance of colonial elites – has been entangled with land, labor and finance since its “invention”. The global idea of Latin America is one of a territory that awaits its turn to fully develop: a vast land containing valuable resources, cheap labor and exotic tourist opportunities. The transformations that I will discuss here revolve around discourses of what Nicaragua is and ought to be. In tracing narratives on politics, progress and transnational capital, I first discuss the portrayal of the FTZs: how was the country represented in order for it to appear an appropriate destination for foreign direct investment? In addition, the marketing rhetoric is regarded to be essential for political articulations and authority claims that place Nicaragua’s position within the global economy at the center of the neoliberal/conservative agenda of renewal.

Transnational Images: The Nation as a Brand

We are realizing a Revolution without gunshots. A revolution without deaths or refugees. We are constructing a new country. (Bolaños, August 19, 2002)

Over the last decades, Nicaragua has evoked and been imagined through the lenses of conflicting transnationally produced sentiments: romanticisms, solidarities and apprehensions. To the left, the country became an emblem of Third World revolutions and resistance when the FSLN in 1979 managed to put an end to the dictatorship of the Somoza dynasty that had ruled the country, for more than four decades supported by the United States because of its anti-communist commitment. At the focal point of media attention, the Sandinistas attracted support from governments and movements all over the world and *internacionalistas*, foreign volunteers, poured into the country, especially as the revolution soon came under threat. In a “David and Goliath” struggle, the United States sought to crush the FSLN by means of a “low-intensity” war. It thus became part of the identity formation of left-wing movements (Western, not the least) to support the

revolution in Nicaragua, which appeared less dogmatic than Castro's Cuba but still radical enough to fuel desires for revolutionary alternatives. Images of Nicaragua and the revolution were also shaped and transmitted through popular culture; the young FSLN leaders knew how to make music and art part of their political project, leading some to give them the epithet "rock 'n' roll revolutionaries" (Cooper 2001).

For the Somoza elite and the government of the United States, which in accordance with the "backyard" logic aimed to uphold its long-standing control over Nicaragua and the rest of Central America, the revolution was bad news. Though staged as an internal conflict between the FSLN and its opponents, the United States did not manage to mask its involvement in the Contras war (see LeoGrande 1996). After a decade marked by war, embargo and economic difficulties, the FSLN lost the election of 1990 to Violeta Chamorro and the National Opposition Union (UNO), which had received massive economic support and assistance from the United States. With the aim of revoking the Sandinista era, the fundamentals of what has been described as a "slow motion counter revolution" were outlined. By means of SAPs and export-led growth, Nicaragua was to be integrated into the global economy, and the US Agency for International Development (USAID) foresaw transformations on all levels so profound that the country would no longer be recognizable (see for example Walker 1997; Babb 2001; Robinson 2003; Armbruster-Sandoval 2005). Essential to this endeavor were the industrial parks for tax-exempted, foreign-owned export production that were established with funds from the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank shortly after the FSLN lost power (Avin 2006: 74). Between 1990 and 1995 Nicaragua signed more than 200 international agreements, most of them relating to the operation of transnational corporations. However, the planned integration of Nicaragua into the global economy initially proved hard to fulfill as transnational capital was reluctant to settle in a country associated with war and instability (Robinson 1997: 41; 2003: 75).

While the left's imaginaries faded, the production of images of Nicaragua continued, albeit with few pop cultural expressions. The benign revolution that President Enrique Bolaños envisages in the speech quoted at the beginning of this section, a revolution without violence and conflicts, a revolution against the previous revolution, is suggestive for the post-Sandinista attempt to make a clean break with the past. Launching his government (2002–2007) as the "New Era", Bolaños, representing the Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC),²³ took office as the third president

²³The PLC was formed in 1968 as a branch of Somoza's *Partido Liberal Nacionalista* (Liberal Nationalist Party, PLN). At first, its strategy was to negotiate from within the PLN but later it moved into open opposition with the Somoza regime. After the revolution, the party leaders stayed in Nicaragua to participate in the struggle. Therefore, it was somewhat unexpected that the PLC should be among the most uncompromising parties within the UNO coalition: Arnoldo

since the FSLN's electoral defeat. During the previous government (1997–2002) he served as Vice-president under Arnoldo Alemán, whom during the electoral campaign he had promised to prosecute for wide-ranging corruption which undermined the confidence of donors and lenders, worsening the distressed state of the country.²⁴

When Bolaños took office, Nicaragua had the highest foreign debt per capita in Latin America and one of the widest income gaps in the world. Whereas Alemán proclaimed the objective of turning Nicaragua into the granary of Central America that it had been in the time of the Somozas (an ambition not extensively translated into deeds), Bolaños signaled from the start an ever-increasing emphasis on foreign investment, in accordance with IMF requirements (see Grigsby 2002). Intensified efforts to attract transnational capital to the tourism and the *maquila* industries became integral to the mitigation of unemployment and, overall, to the formulation of a national economic and political agenda.

Thus, the FTZs of Nicaragua were to be put firmly on the investors' map. The National Development Plan, which was approved in 2005 as part of the Poverty Reduction Strategy formulated within the framework of the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative that granted Nicaragua relief for some of its foreign debt²⁵, stresses the central importance of establishing an investment-friendly climate:

It is necessary to acknowledge that the national economy under current conditions has not been able to create the opportunities for employment and income with the magnitude and quality demanded by society, and so the NDP proposes to improve the policy for export promotion and attraction of investment. Nevertheless, to take advantage of these opportunities, it is necessary to overcome a series of constraints in its business climate that reduce competitiveness and innovative capacity. (National Development Plan, paragraph 152)

Moving on from this description of the current inadequacies of the country, the Plan states that in order to attract investment it is necessary to “improve

Alemán, mayor of Managua and leader of the PLC after 1990, steered the party in a decidedly anti-FSLN direction, and was vocally opposed to the “co-government” strand that ensured the FSLN's continued influence during the term of the Chamorro government (Coleman and Stuart 1997). Later on, Alemán and those loyal to him entered into a pact with the FSLN, severely undermining Bolaños during his presidency.

²⁴ Alemán was convicted for corruption and given a 20-year sentence, later converted to house arrest. His liberties were continually expanded until he was released at the beginning of 2008. For an overview of the “pact” between Alemán and Daniel Ortega that facilitated his release and ensured the continued political influence of both Alemán and Ortega, see Close (2009).

²⁵ The Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) initiative was launched in 1996 jointly by the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF). In order to qualify for debt relief, a country must among other things have implemented Structural Adjustment Programs and have developed a Poverty Reduction Strategy. Nicaragua was considered to have met these criteria in 2004.

Nicaragua's image as a good place to do business" (National Development Plan, paragraph 183). That is to say, the materialization of the "New Era" was framed as contingent upon a successful re-narration of the country, a challenge described by Bolaños in another of his speeches: "The image that they had of Nicaragua was that of confrontation, terrorism, danger and insecurity. So we dedicated ourselves to change that image and now Nicaragua is appreciated as an attractive and peaceful country, the most secure in Central America – the pleasant country it really is" (Bolaños, September 22, 2006). Here, history is represented as series of events that investors should be encouraged to forget. Speaking at the inauguration of a new industrial park, Bolaños exclaimed: "I have to say it with pride: We are making history! We are building a New Nicaragua!" (Bolaños, March 11, 2004).

Thus, "making history" seems to imply a break with the past in order to make possible a desirable future. An example of how history does not always seem to fit aspirations for a new start was found on CNZF's website (czf.com.ni), where the benefits of investing in Nicaragua are marketed. In a section that prepares visiting investors by informing them about, for instance, the food, the climate and handicraft markets, time makes a peculiar leap in the short historical exposition Between 1927, when Augusto Sandino opposed the US-supported regime, and 1990, when Violeta Chamorro was elected president, there are no entries at all. The assassination of Sandino, the Somoza dictatorship, the Sandinista revolution and the Contras war must apparently be omitted in order not to disturb the picture that the website is attempting to paint.²⁶ A safe and stable country for secure investment: "This is the time and this is the place: Nicaragua, a picturesque country full of opportunities for you and your business!"

As these representations suggest, the increase of capital flows and global interactions hailed in development prescriptions is not only a question of laws and benefits but is also dependent upon less tangible, more unmanageable conceptions and attitudes. The efforts to transform a poor image and to distance the country from its perceived past is akin to a "nation branding" campaign, a term that increasingly circulates in management and marketing literature. It captures strategies and practices to cultivate and promote images connected with a place and its culture or attempts to refashion a country's reputation.²⁷ In a global "attention

²⁶ After the FSLN's victory, the historical account that previously covered half a page was extended to a ten-page detailed description of the Somoza dictatorship, the revolution and the first FSLN government as well as the changes during the 1990s. Later, the section on the website with facts for the visitor was omitted altogether.

²⁷ Simon Anholt, often described as the "guru" of nation branding, publishes the Nation Branding Index (www.nationbrandindex.com; Nicaragua is not included), which measures the power of countries' brand names by comparing exports (images of products and services from each country), governance (perceptions of national governments' competence), culture and heritage, people (the populations' reputation for education, friendliness, and so on), tourism,

economy” where information is lavish but interest difficult to attract, countries, like products, are promoted as brand names through marketing tactics, an endeavor that is also encouraged by institutions such as the World Bank and the World Trade Organization (Jansen 2008: 121; Aronczyk 2008: 42–43).

The following discussion traces the content of the branding of the “New Nicaragua”, turning first to a promotional videotape that illustrates the effort to pursue export-led development prescriptions through the crafting of lively, investment-friendly images.²⁸ Produced in the summer of 2006 on the initiative of CNZF, the videotape was to be used as an accessible presentation of Nicaragua’s FTZs at international fairs and during tours targeting potential investors. To the tones of electro-music, the camera zooms in on busy workplaces and urban centers where construction sites suggest a process of modernization, enhancing profitable business opportunities. The voice-over informs us:

Only two hours from the most important market, the United States, you find Nicaragua, a country with an abundant labor force, young and highly productive. A country with rich natural resources where the Nicaraguans will make you feel at home. A safe nation with a high level of productivity thanks to its human capital. This is the time and this is the place – Nicaragua, a picturesque country for you and your business!

As the benefits that await investors are described, city panoramas and nature sequences flash by along with images of diligent workers in different offshore sectors: garment workers, tobacco producers and call center employees. Sometimes when the electro-beat intensifies, the picture is divided into various segments so that an image of a worker in front of a sewing machine or a shot of one of Managua’s few tall buildings multiplies across the screen, resembling a vintage MTV video. It is a country where investors do not have to choose between business and pleasure; it offers beautiful beaches and mist-shrouded volcanoes but, most importantly, the voice-over repeats, it has a large supply of young workers:

Our country counts with an abundant labor force, young and highly productive, with the capacity to learn fast; and it has low levels of turnover and absence. The Nicaraguan labor force is one of the most competitive in Latin America.

investment and immigration (opinions about the country’s economic and social situation and potential to attract people for work or study). A forum for nation branding is the journal *Place Branding and Public Diplomacy*.

²⁸ The stills from this promotional videotape and the stills from two other videotapes that I discuss in Chapter 4 are used by permission from the CNZF. I was allowed to include them on the condition that I underline that these images correspond to the government of Bolaños and are not in line with the views of the administration that took over after the FSLN’s electoral victory in 2006.

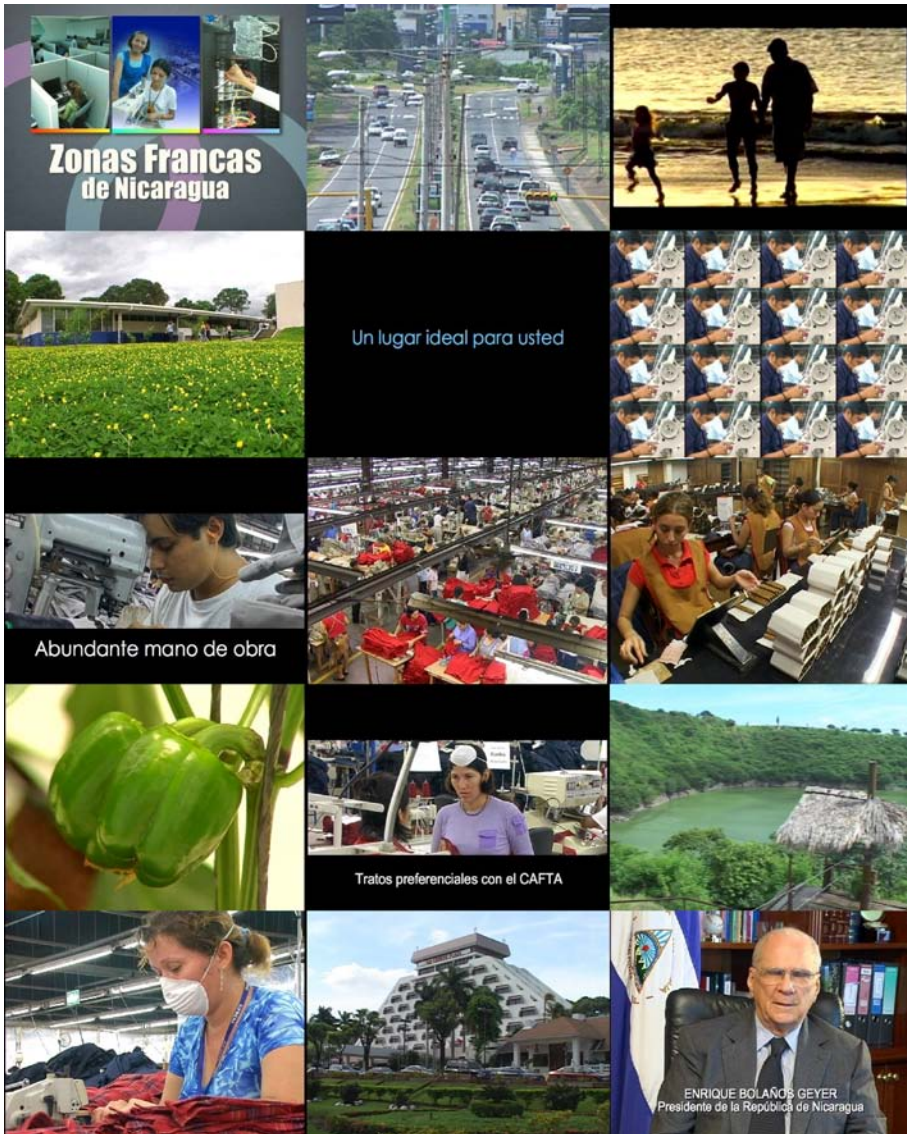


Figure 2. Stills from CNZF promotional videotape. Used by permission from CNZF.

Throughout the tape, we see focused workers who, staged to be unaware of the camera, never look up from their tasks, giving the tape a documentary appearance. The camera shifts between panoramas of factory landscapes with their rows of workers and close-ups of workers' hands and faces, indicating both the abundance of the labor force and its specific qualities. Toward the end of the videotape, President Bolaños addresses potential investors directly, gesticulating and looking firmly into the camera as he sums up the message:

As you have been able to see, to invest in Nicaragua is a very wise business decision. Nicaragua is a country full of opportunities where many sectors are still untouched [*virgen en muchos sectores*]. With the free trade agreement²⁹, the intention is to expand the opportunities to invest and do business in Nicaragua...I invite you to invest in Nicaragua and share the success that many other companies are already experiencing thanks to their decision to take advantage of the unique opportunities that we offer you!

Investors are introduced to a friendly, progressive country where cities expand, trade agreements are signed, jobs are created and a committed government and an hospitable population ensure smooth and profitable production. What the videotape puts on display are not only the FTZs as such. Rather, it is the nation as a whole that is being defined and marketed. Its population, nature and political climate are all represented as being in tune with the demands of transnational production.

However, the putatively all-embracing narrative of nation branding is always vulnerable to contradictions. In this particular instance of branding the ambivalence between weakness and strength in the global division of labor arguably leaves a palpable trace. Throughout the videotape, Nicaragua is contrasted to potential rivals, giving a glimpse of the harsh competition between countries specializing in “flexible” production. Nicaragua is said to be safer than other Central American countries. With its proximity to the United States, it is depicted as more convenient than other options: “Nicaragua...is the most competitive country in Latin America for investment in manufacturing. A fast and competitive alternative to China.” But the promise of “unique opportunities” and the transnationalization of production possibilities are double-edged; the factors that attract investors may also drive them elsewhere as different localities are continually judged against perceived alternatives.

A trope of pioneering is entailed in several of the inviting gestures, which makes *timing* a centerpiece of the branding strategy. Bolaños lures investor with sectors that are “still untouched”; and on the CNZF website it is frequently repeated that “this is the time!” Further examples are found on the website of ProNicaragua, another agency dedicated to the promotion of foreign investment that works closely with the government and has offices in Managua and Arkansan. Under the caption “Investors tell their stories”, established businessmen present their companies in video clips and share their experiences of doing business in Nicaragua. Here are two of them, encouraging others to follow their example:

So if I have something to tell a foreign investor it is: “Trust in Nicaragua, have confidence!” There are other people that have been very successful and

²⁹ DR-CAFTA is the free trade agreement between the United States, Central America and the Dominican Republic. More on the agreement will follow in Chapter 4.

I think that there is still time to be one of the pioneers: come to Nicaragua to invest!

The time is now! This country will move forward. People will come here and the people who come here first will be able to use this great environment, this great pool of human capital that exists in Nicaragua.

Communicating a certain urgency, these pieces of advice suggest that business will become less profitable as the country develops. The most recurrent and significant component of the branding effort revolves around the worker, “the great pool of human capital” that “still” awaits the “pioneers”. Another advertisement from CNZF is indicative of the conceptions of place and time that inform such representations. The message is illustrated by a young woman who stands smiling in front of hundreds of workers in a garment plant:

Discover the richness of our people, invest in Nicaragua. In the Free Trade Zones of Nicaragua we offer you the efficiency and quality of our people. This is the true richness that will make your products the most appreciated on the international market.

Alluring references to pioneering and discovery arguably parallel imperialist fantasies of exploration and conquest. Groundbreaking investors are invited to discover the people and riches of foreign lands, and, as in colonial times, the labor of the “discovered” carries a promise of extractable profit. The fact that Nicaragua is not yet modern is presented as a competitive edge. In the context of the globalized economy, where time and space have been represented as increasingly compressed (Harvey 1990), the advertisements suggest that it is possible to take a few steps back on the general path of progress. Here, the logic appears to echo racialized, colonial discourses on geographical and temporal distances that coincide as geography is turned into history and space is turned into time (Massey 2005: 5; McClintock 1995). In the *terra nullius*, the natives dwelled in an anachronistic space that did not belong to them. If the land is empty, it is up for grabs. The same appears to apply to “untouched” sectors of the economy in a country that is still not heavily populated by foreign investors – the ones who come “first” are in the best position to “use this great environment”.

But “discovery is always late”, Anne McClintock (1995: 28) writes in the context of imperial conquest; the land was evidently already populated. The discovery of the virtues of the Nicaraguan labor force is contingent upon meanings and constructions already in place. In this respect, the woman in the forefront of the photograph embodies a “transnational fantasy” of a proper worker (see Salzinger 2003): her “efficiency and quality” becomes the primary site for discovery. It is the woman and her virtues and riches that are evoked as an enticement. Standing in the foreground of the picture,

she is placed by the camera at the level of the viewer. Her gaze and smile signal interaction (see Niblock 2001: 303) as she looks into the camera with her head slightly, perhaps shyly, tilted.

The subject position offered to the viewer is that of the investor, an onlooker and evaluator who in terms of class, gender and ethnicity is probably not “like” the woman in the picture. She appears simultaneously close and distant, though already appropriate she is yet to be fully recognized through the act of discovery. Though she is marketed as a good worker, she is not working in the image. In this respect, the advertisements of the FTZs fit into a propensity to map the globalizing economy with metaphors of colonial, masculine dominance (Freeman 2001) where the trope of “virgin lands” is being replaced by images of “untouched economies” and untapped sources of cheap, female labor. Rejecting coincidence as an explanation, colonialism and contemporary globalization can be regarded as sharing a similar epistemological ground, laying out and legitimizing the science of value extraction and accumulation (see Zein-Elabdin and Charusheela 2004: 2).

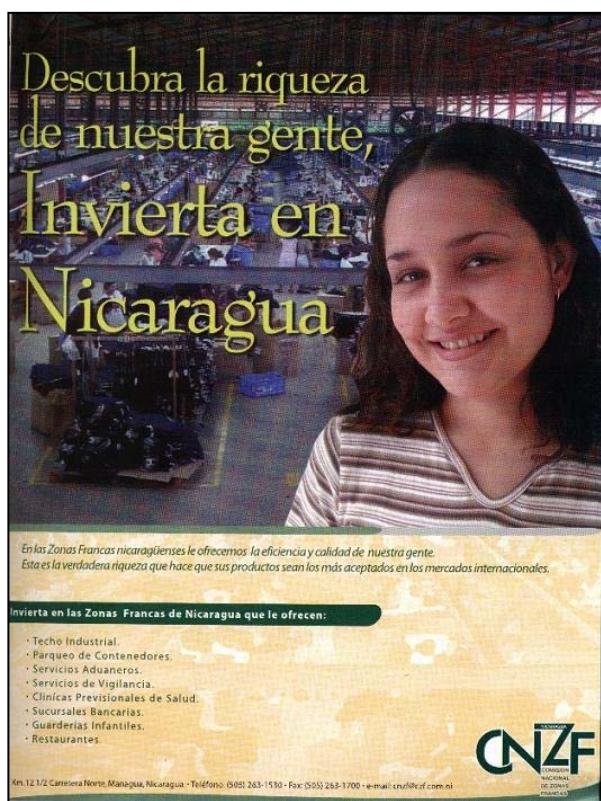


Figure 3. Advertisement in promotional brochure from CNZF.

The frequent display of smiling workers underlines the appropriateness of investment. Investors should be in no doubt that they are keenly awaited by the government and workers alike. Eagerness and friendliness are put forward as a Nicaraguan trademark, manifested both in the government's cordial invitation of investors and in the proclaimed welcoming attitude of the population at large. In the videotape, the executive secretary of CNZF further emphasizes the point as he exclaims: "Nicaragua awaits you in 2006 with open hearts and arms!" He continues:

The greatest advantage that Nicaragua offers investors is the reception of the people, the quality of the people who welcome investors with open arms, and then the enthusiasm with which they work. We invite you to visit so that you can see for yourself, so that you will come here and invest.

Almost like children, the workers unreservedly welcome the investors in a relationship between capital and labor that is envisaged as personal and familiar. This, supposedly, is the "true richness" of the workers; their dedication, efficiency and enthusiasm. Though Nicaragua offers the lowest wages in Central America, workers are not marketed as "cheap" but are referred to in terms of "riches". In one of his speeches Bolaños asserted: "More and more investment keeps coming to the country. And it is coming not because we have cheap labor but because the Nicaraguan is a good worker" (Bolaños, August 23, 2006). However, as these articulations indicate, workers are branded in accordance with features characteristic for "unskilled", labor-intensive manufacturing. Repeatedly they are represented as "highly productive", "young", "fast learners" and "abundant" – workers as a juvenile, moldable, reliable mass rather than being distinguishable in terms of individual skills and capacities. The CNZF website underscores workers' commitment and honorable attitudes to work: "Even in times of crisis, the free trade zone employee has demonstrated a strong disposition to work, including walking long distances". Also, during the recurrent bus strikes, for example, employers are assured that their employees will turn up at the remotely located factory zones.

The brandings on the videotape as well as in information brochures and on websites deploy a communication strategy, apparent in both image and language, which is commonly used in product and service advertisements: close-up portraits, beautiful nature settings along with repeated slogans. Indeed, nation brandings commonly borrow the genre characteristics from commodity branding that draws upon the recognizable and anticipated (Locke 2004: 18). As is often the case in product advertisements, both the consignor and the addressee of the message are present in the articulation, establishing a direct relation between them (Fairclough 2001: 244): "as you have been able to see", "you and your business", "I invite you". Such

articulations create a sense of simultaneity, reciprocity and confidence. Clearly, the relation between the dispatcher, corresponding implicitly or explicitly to the government (as in Bolaños's invitation), and the "you" that is compelled to invest is formed in relation to a third party that is excluded from the direct communication. The place and the people, which make the nation desirable and something that can be offered and accepted, figure as indirect objects: "our people".

While the idiom of nation brandings is borrowed from a commodity marketing genre, nations differ from products. That which is being branded is not a ready-made product but rather the conditions for its elaboration. These are largely constrained by the economic order. Indeed, the images that any given country can opt for are limited. In Nicaragua more pretentious claims are precluded by its position in the global division of labor. Efforts are largely reduced to the attraction of less lucrative ranks of outsourced production, mostly garment manufacturing. Investment here is not fueled by factors that are often used to explain comparative advantages in the attraction of industries: a skilled labor force, a national market or a production site that will induce positive consumer associations (O'Shaughnessy and Jackson O'Shaughnessy 2000: 59). Rather, the opposite is true in the context of FTZs, where the product is disconnected from the location of its fabrication, as outsourcing and the fragmentation of the production process enable companies to disengage from labor-intensive stages of production. The products manufactured for export are not to be associated with Nicaragua, a "Made in Nicaragua" label being likely to invoke unwelcome images of sweated Third World labor among consumers. Thus, the space that is branded is at the same time deprived of its historical and contemporary content in several regards. Investors are not to be reminded of Nicaragua's violent past and ongoing political struggles, which may threaten profit accumulation; and consumers are ideally to disregard the place and the agents of production altogether.

Arjun Appadurai (1993: 333) suggests that the decomposed production chains of FTZs have come to operate as a fetish that obscures the organization of work in an increasingly global dynamic. When FTZs appear with varying degrees of distinctiveness, the figure of the (female) worker also emerges as an effect of selective visibility; she is marketed as suitable to producers, yet she is detached from the product of her efficiency and concealed from consumers on the other side of global divisions of labor. Not coincidentally, a key strategy of labor unions, consumer activists and transnational solidarity movements has been to reconnect labels to their out-sourced conditions of elaboration, to unmask the strategy of selling a brand rather than a product (see Klein 2001). Marketing the labor force as fast-learning, reliable and cost-effective, the videotape draws near the issues that have been most intensely criticized by the anti-sweatshop movement:

low salaries, forced overtime and suppression of labor unions, all symbols of “race-to-the-bottom” globalization (Krupat 1997; Ross 2004).

The branding of Nicaragua as a profitable investment destination is marked by undecidability between weakness and strength of the global division of labor: it is suitable for to production because it is not yet entirely suitable. In the examples given above, Nicaragua and its people are represented as *belated* in the evolvment of capitalism. Because the country has not quite taken off, there is still time for adventurous investors to discover a labor force that, because it is not fully incorporated, is especially suited for global production. What the country has to offer is inseparable from its position in the global economy, where the “efficiency and quality” of “the people” – that is, a predominately female workforce typically living below the poverty line – constitute the primary asset (see Armbruster-Sandoval 2005: 115).

In a context where all prerequisites for production, except labor, are brought from abroad to the site of assembly, it can be argued that the export-led development model is less about the export of manufactured goods than about the export of cheap labor power “embodied in the final assembled and exported products” (Delgado Wise and Cypher 2007: 127). Indeed, the images staged as comparative advantages may from another vantage point be read as reflections of distress. As it appears, this particular branding jostles with images that unionists and activists attempt to floodlight and that the Nicaraguan state, multinational companies and retailers attempt to negate.

Post-revolutionary Goals in the Global Economy

Nicaraguans! On this special day for the workers, I invite you to share some reflections so that we look upon the future of Nicaragua with optimism, with the hope of consolidating these social conquests of the New Era: the permanent development that assures us that we will continue on the path toward our future, creating more and more productive employment, more production, more progress, more well-being. We should not stumble over the same rock as in the past...The rock of illusions and demagoguery: the rock of looting and embezzlement that brought increasing backwardness, sadness, disillusionment and the exodus of families fleeing military service and persecutions of all kinds. (Bolaños, May 1, 2006)

The announcement of the dawn of a “New Era” can be regarded as an aspirational enunciation, rather than a description of actual conditions. “*Nicaragua avanza!*”, the government’s slogan that appeared on all state bulletins and concluded radio and TV announcements, worked as a compelling imperative. Certainly, the re-narration of the nation discussed in the previous section did not have only presumptive investors as its intended

audience. Reflected in the depiction of FTZs as “zones of hope”, the official rhetoric was set on convincing different segments of the domestic public about the reasonableness and effectiveness of its political project. If the campaign that struggled to turn Nicaragua into an investment heaven focused on refashioning the country’s reputation, the challenge was also to craft a sense of content and direction, to foster new national identities and to advance consensus enough to secure the vote. In the context of chronic economic hardship, the FTZs constituted one of the few strategies to reduce massive unemployment, and they became the perhaps most visible proof of the commitment to the prime message during the electoral campaign of 2001: “More employment – with Bolaños, yes we can!”

In a way, nation branding campaigns can be conceived of as distilled examples of what Bhabha (1994) depicts as a “narrative strategy” of the nation (see Chapter 2). When foreign direct investment and export production are depicted as the nation’s future, what is the content of a nation for which a factory floor appears as a suitable metonym, as in the poster first discussed? Imagined links between a mythical past and a common destiny in the attempts of the modern, post-imperial Western state to mediate the pedagogical and performative dimensions of the nation that Bhabha writes about are arguably played out differently in a narrative that is trying to attain modernity, still out of reach. Indeed, a detachment from, rather than a celebration of, the past was suggested as a focal point of identification in post-Sandinista rhetoric.

But the epoch of the Sandinistas is not unambiguously erased (as it was in CNZF’s historical account earlier discussed). In the quotation from Bolaños’s Labor Day speech at the beginning of this section, workers were called upon to remember a specific history in order to envision the improvements that are still awaiting at some distance. Designating the “permanent development” of the New Era as in every way the opposite of the situation in the 1980s, Bolaños also enunciated a word of warning a few months before the presidential elections. While the epoch of the FSLN is outlined in terms of war and devastation, the present government has initiated a project of development, resulting in economic growth and modernization. However, this progress is represented as fragile, and a possible return of the Sandinistas in the approaching election threatens to turn the past into the future. In another Labor Day speech, Bolaños similarly contrasted the celebration of his party to a meeting organized by FSLN a couple of blocks away:

In the other square are the parties of the communist dictatorship that once turned Nicaragua into a disaster and also failed in the Soviet Union. It is a system that doesn’t work any more; it is a system that makes countries fail but that has enriched the leaders...without them having to work. In the other square are the leaders and the agitators who promote violence. They

like violence, war, food rationing, confiscation of harvests and compulsory military service. And that system has already failed, and Nicaraguans won't let themselves be fooled again. [...] This is how my government of the New Era celebrates International Labor Day: with concrete actions and achievements, with progress and not demagoguery, with truth and not lies or violence. (Bolaños, May 1, 2005)

Time has proved the alternative wrong. The system that fooled the Nicaraguans once will not fool them again. The "New Era" is presented both in relation to that which it is not and in relation to what it will become. It is a political project that, in contrast to communism, is appropriate to the future. Even though Nicaragua is often narrated as different and distant from the past – "something very important has happened: Nicaragua is already something else [*ya es otra*]" (Bolaños, October 11, 2006) – in the context of persisting and pressing problems, Nicaragua could hardly be represented as *entirely* new. When newness figures more as a future hope than a reality, the past is turned into an explanation of why the proclaimed changes are yet to be fully realized:

If we had started 24 years ago when the revolution started off on the wrong direction, we would have been there already. If we don't start today, tomorrow it will already be too late. Maybe we will not see the progress. Who cares? We are doing it for our children and the children of our children! (Bolaños, August 29, 2003)

Missed opportunities function as a justification for a belated political agenda. With results that are not immediate, the ones for whom the improvements may or may not materialize are instructed to have faith and patience. Though political mismanagement and the corruption of post-Sandinista governments is part of the explanation, the origin and primary cause of the hardships is located in the revolution, still partly blocking the future. The challenge consists in constructing legitimacy upon a perception of progress, although the signs of change are still scarce:

You and I have seen that at the beginning of my period, I inherited a ransacked government without resources, but now we have straightened out the finances and for a year now we have seen the advances toward development. There is still a lot to be done but now progress has begun and we are moving toward a better place. You and I have seen how new FTZ factories appear all over the place that give employment to tens of thousands of compatriots. They already have jobs and more and more are coming. (Bolaños, December 9, 2004)

Again, the FTZs operate as the proof and promise of improvement. But how does the political rhetoric attempting to constitute a domestic agreement around this agenda navigate between national and transnational

interests and demands? The representations of transnational capital discussed so far clearly counter the perception, which sometimes arises in discussions of globalization, of national powers attempting to cling on to sovereignty principles that crumble under the magnitude of globalized capital. Indeed, the rhetoric around the FTZs can be read as an example of how the Nicaraguan government, far from being paralyzed by the impact of global capital, is attempting to turn prevailing globalization narratives into its own. SAPs are represented as integrated elements of the political agenda (“now we have straightened out the finances”), not as something externally imposed – allowing for the notion of a purposeful state. In his speeches, Bolaños often talked about how on trips around the world he never missed an opportunity to promote his country, always on the lookout for potential investors. At the opening of a new Taiwanese factory he portrayed his commitment thus:

There are those who ask what I do as President when I go abroad. There are even some who think that I go sightseeing or visit museums...I wish! [...] The trip to Taipei is long – 19 hours with a stopover in Los Angeles. Those stopovers are not technical for me, rather they are opportunities to seek investors at any time of the day. So there in Los Angeles I met with Mr. Song Ho King, chairman of Popular Textil, who this afternoon opens his factory here in Nicaragua. [...] Dear friends, this is what I do when I speak to investors like Mr King: convince them that Nicaragua is the best option for their companies. All over the world, the President of the Republic is considered to be the best promoter and vendor of his country. (Bolaños, December 12, 2003)

Pointing to his relentless dedication to promotion, Bolaños represents himself as a salesman for his country. This is also what nation-branding consultants suggest: political leaders should become the managers of their country’s brand name (O’Shaughnessy and Jackson O’Shaughnessy 2000: 56). Promoting and selling the country is ultimately about the president’s commitment to citizens. Leslie Sklair’s (2001) expression “global nationalism” suggests the idea that national interests are best served through finding a beneficial position within the global economy. Correspondingly, Bolaños represents opposition to measures of integration, such as the signing of the Free Trade Agreement with the United States, as unviable, necessarily in opposition to national interests: “Those who oppose DR-CAFTA, like Daniel Ortega, do so because they see it as an instrument of prosperity, security and the rule of law. Let’s not give them that pleasure [*No les demos gusto*]” (Bolaños, July 14, 2005).

In the National Development Plan, a possible conflict between national and transnational interests is frequently rejected:

It is important to note that a policy aimed at improving export capacity does not enter into contradiction with the development of the domestic market

and the demands from the most vulnerable groups, but instead offers opportunities for both markets in an open economy. (National Development Plan, paragraph 153)

Thus, the PLC's delineation of its political project is based upon a negation of conflicting interests within and across regions and markets. This, I would argue, must also be taken into account in discussions about the "weak" state that is losing control in the face of the magnitude of global capitalism (see Chapter 2) in order not to downplay local class differences and elite interests that are often transnational in character. In the context of economic restructuring, Nicaragua's class composition was profoundly altered, largely to the advantage of groups with connections to finance and flexible capital, as the country was to be integrated into the global economy. In this regard, the commitment to the process of globalization of President Bolaños, who is also the former president of Nicaragua's influential elite association Higher Council on Private Enterprise (COSEP), mirrors what William Robinson (2004, see also Sklair 2008) describes as an emergent "transnational ruling class": the entanglement of national and transnational capital as well as the merging of economic and political power.

Global Anxieties: Advantages and Threats in "Flexible" Production

The political project, of which transnational capital forms a part, draws its logic from a principle that justifies free trade and export production in terms of a common good. Yet the rhetoric of the "New Era" persistently invokes defensive arguments in an attempt to distinguish its agenda from shortcomings in the present. How might the economic "failure" at the heart of politics be dealt with? Elaborating upon undeniable difficulties despite the development measures undertaken, Bolaños often employed metaphors in his speeches to describe the state of the country. Nicaragua is compared to a patient recovering in hospital, or is referred to as a company that has been badly run by its management, leaving it on the verge of bankruptcy, notwithstanding plentiful resources:

If we compare Nicaragua to a hospital patient, we can say that the country is no longer in danger. It has already left the intensive care unit and is now improving. We are doing well but the country is still weak and there are a lot of things to do. We have to create more employment for those who still don't have any...but they can count on getting it! I am here as the president of all Nicaraguans. Committed to the workers, both those who have jobs and those who still don't. Nicaragua has been ill for a long time because of the machinations of the *caudillos*, which are already out of fashion. (Bolaños, May 1, 2004)

And how did Nicaragua end up in such a lamentable condition of poverty? The truth is that Nicaragua is a rich company, blessed with amazing natural resources, and we, the owners of the rich company called Nicaragua, we have run it badly since it was handed over to us at the beginning of our independence. In general we Nicaraguans can't be satisfied with the results of what we have done to rich Nicaragua. (Bolaños, September 12, 2003)

A good way of judging the nation is thus to liken it to a company. As the administrators of the company, the government and the population at large have fallen short in managing the resources that they have been entrusted with. The neoliberal/conservative narrative of failures and of history as a problem to be overcome may be considered in relation to Foucault's discussion of the new political logic that took shape in West Germany after the Second World War. Installing a break with the recent past, economic growth was to fill the void when the state could no longer be defined in terms of an historic mission; economic growth, rather than historical continuity, could give the state legitimacy, foster a new social consensus and open the way for a particular forgetting (Lemke 2001: 196). To the extent that a parallel can be drawn, in the case of Nicaragua the break with the past and the adoption of economic growth as the basis of legitimacy is troubled by the fact that economic progress has been at best moderate and in addition unevenly distributed. In the passages quoted above, the nation, political leaders and citizens alike are modeled on the most cherished figure of the neoliberal trope – the entrepreneur. Individualized explanations in which the current position of Nicaragua is described as the outcome of a self-inflicted illness or local, administrative failings suggest no links to diverse positions within global economic interactions and uneven developments. It is a mismanaged nation that, because of a lack of entrepreneurship in the past, has to pay the price for deferred promises of progress.

In his speeches Bolaños often opted for a direct and inclusive rhetoric, representing everyone as in the same position and with similar interests in relation to transnational capital: “you and I have seen how new FTZ factories appear”, “maybe we will not see the progress” or “we are doing it for our children”. These rhetorical framings can be read to counter the tension that David Harvey (2005: 19) argues is inherent in processes of neoliberalization. In his view, neoliberalism can either be regarded as a utopian project attempting to realize a theoretical script for the arrangement of global capitalism, or it can be understood as a political project to ensure the power of economic elites and their conditions for capital accumulation. If the second version has become dominant, as Harvey suggests, the outlining of a political project directed to the potential electoral base will have to mediate the incongruity between the declared aim (inclusive well-being) and more visible effects (the intensification of class segmentation).

Thus, the reassuring messages of the PLC center on collective problems and hopes. But what is the content of “hope” in these apparently unifying representations? What seems to constitute the goal of the political measures? Signifiers such as “well-being”, “progress” and “permanent development” abound in the rhetoric but are seldom further specified. When aspirations for the future are sometimes glimpsed, they do not seem very far-reaching. Conceivably in order to counter the association between poverty and the FTZs, Bolaños claimed when speaking to a women workers’ organization that it was a mistake to think that FTZs are something that only poor countries have and desire:

You all know that we receive cooperation from Canada, from Sweden, from Switzerland, countries that are very advanced in every way in comparison with us, and they come here to help us and cooperate with us, well they also have FTZs, aiming to export to the United States. They compete with us or we compete with them, so you should not think of the *maquila* as an industry of poor countries...it is not, it is an aim of all, almost all countries want them. (Bolaños, March 6, 2005)

The acceptance of the current mode of capitalist regulation, “flexible specialization” and export production entails a delimitation of alternative futures: the assignment is to embrace rather than to dispute the position in the global division of labor. Invoking some of the countries most associated with wealth and with long histories of aid programs in Nicaragua, Bolaños describes an order that is more or less the same for all countries. They all compete on the same terms and with the same means and aims. Workers should not think that they hold jobs reserved for the poor; “almost all countries” strive to establish *maquila* production. In the richest of countries too, there are workers who, much like themselves work in export processing zones.

Further, becoming the “hot spot” for garment production in the Americas is represented as a national goal. Bolaños proudly declared that Nicaragua was attracting increasing attention among investors: “no other country in the region experiences the same dynamics that we see in Nicaragua. Many have noted the industry, especially the textile sector in Nicaragua, which is already considered to be the China of Central America” (Bolaños, August 23, 2006). Although there was no reason to aspire to much beyond the FTZs, a hierarchy between different industries was often established in the envisioning of future achievements:

It is not as if there will only be FTZs to fasten buttons and sew shirts and pants; no, there will be FTZs to make refrigerators, washing machines, car components and computers [...] more technology, and in the future even production of motorcycles; and I am convinced that our children will produce cars that the United States and Europe are now seeking to produce in China. (Bolaños, March 24, 2006)

Even though the garment factories are represented as corresponding to a common good in the present, they should preferably be replaced in the future. Still within the frame of offshore industry and subcontracting, coming generations – and here the reference to “our children” again undoes class differences – will no longer be restricted to working in the least prestigious and most feminized sectors; the assemblage of car parts, rather than the fastening of buttons, will constitute the basis of progress.

In the above quotation China serves as a model and a precursor, but it is also pictured as a rival and represented as imposing limitations on political measures in Nicaragua:

Increasing human well-being is the obsession of my government of the New Era, so that every day more Nicaraguans climb more rungs on the ladder of progress. I would like to make a small comparison with continental China, that giant whose prosperity is growing at high speed and against which we have to seriously compete in international markets. For example, in the FTZs of China they work 13 hours daily, seven days a week, and for this they earn the equivalent of 2000 córdobas a month. There are no rest days and the factories do not have the same decent conditions of work and hygiene as those that are being introduced in the New Era of the New Nicaragua. Neither do they enjoy the labor and trade union rights that exist in Nicaragua. They still suffer from the ills of communism that tyrannized them for many decades. They have still not achieved democracy. (Bolaños, May 1, 2006)

The link between “permanent development” and FTZs is not unchallenged. Criticism from workers and trade unions has been fierce, and in mainstream media articles are frequently published describing slave-like working conditions and environmental problems. Such negative accounts arguably left traces in the passage quoted above. Conjuring up an image of China as a country that spared no pains to increase its competitiveness, Bolaños seems to point to a global infrastructure that Nicaragua has to submit itself to in order to participate in the global economy. Integration into the global order is represented as a ladder to progress. Nevertheless, its organization may be evoked as an explanation of why there are many rungs yet to be climbed. But whereas China imperils the well-being of its workers, Bolaños is “obsessed” with “increasing human well-being”. The FTZs in China are cited as a point of reference to argue that it is, after all, worse elsewhere, possibly as a way of countering negative accounts. The description of FTZs in China, however, coincides with the very arguments that the insistence on obsession with well-being was supposed to negate. Reports abound even in Nicaragua about compulsory overtime, salaries well below subsistence level and union busting.

Thus, defensive and offensive rhetorical strategies were deployed to counter opponents as well as internal tensions or contradictions in the nation-building narratives, some of them deriving from Nicaragua’s position

in the global division of labor and from conflicts between representations directed toward different audiences. For countries specializing in “flexibility”, hopes of development and modernization are attached to something beyond the national, to the obscure figure of the presumptive investor, at the same time a savior and a fastidious character who may always find a better offer elsewhere. This entails an ever-present uncertainty. The encounter between capital, labor and place in postcolonial contexts can be read in the light of Gayatri Spivak’s (2002) elaboration on hospitality. In the branding campaign that centered on the government’s commitment to create “unique opportunities” and the enthusiasm of workers who make investors “feel at home”, friendliness was turned into an argument in favor of investment. Bolaños declared Nicaragua to be “one the most hospitable and generous countries in the world. This is what presidents, kings, princes, common people and people from all walks of life tell me when I talk to them on my travels to look for resources to improve my country” (Bolaños, September 10, 2004).

Thus, in a context where corporations have largely abandoned their national ties, and hence have no “true home” (Hage 2003: 18), the branding attempted to convince investors about the nation’s qualities as host. Proceeding from the etymological ambiguity within the word *hostis*, which signifies both enemy (“hostile”) and guest, Spivak discusses how both meanings are highly applicable in the case of the colonizer. The encounter between the guest and the host’s law is always marked by vulnerability; the guest has to be invited unconditionally for the invitation to be recognized as a hospitable gesture. Yet there are unexpressed restrictions attached; the guest cannot take over and still be considered a guest. Spivak (2002: 54) refers to this when she writes that in the imperial experience the enemy is turned into guest and finally into host. Such a tension between the opposite meanings of the word is conceivably present when labor and territory are made available to capital investment. Freely moving capital is, as it were, materialized as a guest in certain localities where laws are being altered to please the guest, until the point when the relationship is potentially reversed.

Indeed, a challenge facing the government was to rebut allegations that priority was given to the interests of transnational capital at the expense of workers’ rights and well-being. One way to ensure the alignment between workers’ interests and foreign investment is to introduce a distinction between good and bad investors. The hierarchy in production whereby car production is valued more highly than garment production is matched by a hierarchy among investors. To a large extent, Taiwanese and South Korean investors have come to symbolize foreign exploitative capital and harsh labor conditions. At a meeting that I attended between the CNZF and trade union leaders, a CNZF official tried to counter prevailing views of the FTZs: “people always think FTZ – *chino* – exploitation. These terms might be related but they are not synonymous!” Pointing to the diverse

nationalities among investors, he stated that there was no point in trying to deny that there had been problems in the FTZs but these could mostly be ascribed to *los chinos* (the common denomination of everyone of Asian descent). Or, as a representative of ProNicaragua expressed it in an interview: “In fact, Nicaragua started out with Asian companies, with problems with the Koreans, who are known worldwide for their bad treatment of workers. Now we have a directive to attract investment from the United States. One of those companies, for example, runs a project against domestic violence” (Interview, June, 2006). Companies practicing corporate social responsibility and caring for the well-being of women are contrasted to devious investors.

The problems of the FTZs are thus not located to the structures of production and investment as such but rather to ethnified conceptions of responsibility, where the US is linked to good practices while the character of Asian investors makes them less preferable. It follows that rather than enforcing labor regulations, the solution is located to the attraction of the right kind of considerate businessmen that act responsibly out of free will. But at the same time as investors from Asia are represented as problematic, “the Asian miracle” is often put forward as a model for Nicaragua. Also, there are many reports about companies of other origins that disregard national labor legislation, and, being among the principal investors, Taiwanese and South Korean companies can hardly be regarded as exceptions. Still, with a distinction between good investors associated with progress and bad investors causing trouble, the political agenda as a whole may steer clear of disparaging accounts attempting to place exploitative labor conditions to the fore.

Contradictorily, the FTZs figure both as a manifestation of modernization *and* as a reminder of the country’s subordinated position in the global division of labor. When signs of modernity and poverty converge, the picture painted in the official rhetoric is at times difficult to sustain. Nation brandings are monologic articulations that cannot accommodate nuance, contradiction or disagreement (Jansen 2008: 134–135). But monolithic images are difficult to control. A passage from an interview with a CNZF official illustrates the point:

We only have 120 companies within the FTZ model, in Honduras there are more than 500. The media don’t help. They pay a lot of attention to politics and give the impression that everything is chaos. And then there are the reports from the *barrios*, the silly problems of the people. Neighbors fighting one another. If I am interested in doing business in Denmark, I go to a web site and find out what is going on there. In the case of Nicaragua, if someone wants to know what is going on here...in the news they learn only that we are fighting, that we are savages. They don’t sell the picture of the opportunities that an investor has to develop here. And the presumptive investor talks to other investors. If he comes here, we say “come to

Nicaragua, it's a good place for investment" but he doesn't just trust the government. He talks to other investors and they tell him it's a lie, that he shouldn't bother: "just stay out of there, you're better off in Honduras". (Interview, June, 2006)

If the narrative of the nation is not univocally articulated, branding attempts will inevitably fail as cracks are not convincingly concealed: the government's pledge will be drowned by the din of chaos. News channels broadcasting daily from Managua's poorer *barrios*, which in effect constitute the base of the "abundant labor force", expose poverty and social unrest that do not match stories of progress or assurances about the "richness" of the workers. As suggested by Bhabha's split between the pedagogical and the performative dimensions of the nation, the coherence of the narrative is threatened by the necessary plurality of its performance. In this respect, the political logic is undermined by the internal contradictions of the brandings.

Indeed, how can a narrative of progress be maintained in a context where deviations from the script are highly conspicuous? The political project sketched here is decidedly one that embraces the principles that are peculiar to transnational production, incorporating them in promises of national progress and turning them into the foundation for authority claims. Although transnational capital is endorsed as a primary element of progress, as this discussion has illustrated, the development script of export-led growth cannot simply be appropriated. Rather, rhetorical balancing acts are required, deploying offensive and defensive tactics to promote or ward off particular ideas about the country and images of the FTZs. The ruptures and inequalities that the project is entangled with, the undecidability between progress and belatedness, between weakness and strength in the global economy, imply that the official rhetoric comes under threat when the "New Era" is to be enacted. Such contradictions also constitute the scenery against which the political agenda of the FSLN is chiseled out, the theme to which I now turn.

Revisiting the Revolution

...revolutions are the only political events which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning. For revolutions, however we may be tempted to define them, are not mere changes. (Hannah Arendt, *On Revolution*)

Revolution, counter-revolution and counter-counter-revolution or perhaps re-revolution – the political imaginaries in Nicaragua have shifted curiously. In the following, the rhetoric of the FSLN's political project will be considered. It is a project that is extensively spelled out as a continuation of the revolution of 1979 and in opposition to representations of the "New Era". Considering that the FTZs constituted a flagship in the neoliberal rhetoric, it could have been expected that the Sandinista government would direct its critique toward the manifestations of transnational capital within the national territory. Instead, the FTZs have largely disappeared from the political rhetoric. The framework established by preceding regimes is mainly maintained, and the institutions described above continue their activities much as before. What are the contexts in which the FTZs are considered or passed over? How do anti-imperialist, revolutionary claims relate to the pro-investment agenda adopted by previous administrations?

Revolution Interrupted

Sandino vive! Patria libre! We are going toward the sun of liberty or toward death, and it doesn't matter if we die, our cause will live on and others will follow us! (Ortega, July 20, 2007)

In 1984, five years after the revolutionary upheaval in which the FSLN seized power, the FSLN won 67 per cent of the vote in national elections in the midst of war and on the verge of economic collapse. In the 1989–90 election, the FSLN's campaign was well organized on all levels. The grass roots were canvassing, popular songs broadcast the message of the ruling party, and all over the country, mass meetings were addressed by Daniel Ortega, who had abandoned his camouflage uniform for jeans and T-shirt, staging himself as a man of the people rather than as a combatant. In all the opinion polls the party held a comfortable lead. The campaign of the National Opposition Union (UNO) was less coherent and outreaching, despite massive funding and guidance from the United States. When the votes were counted, it turned out that the FSLN had lost with 41 percent of the vote, against 55 percent won by a party representing conservative business interests (see Spence 1990: 115–132). The result was met with dismay in the FSLN headquarters and among international supporters alike.

As suggested in Chapter 2, the FSLN's electoral defeat can be understood as a dislocation, a discursive destabilization that cannot be managed within a particular discourse, thereby throwing its attached identities into crisis. The FSLN's political project had to be reshaped and new points of identification had to be found. In opposition, the party split into two rival factions: *Movimiento de Renovación Sandinista* (Sandinista Renovation Movement, MRS) and the Democratic Left. The former opted for a social democratic agenda under Sergio Ramirez, Vice-President during the previous Sandinista government, whereas the latter, associated with Daniel Ortega, subscribed to an "orthodox", revolutionary position (Prevost 1997; Close 2009: 111).³⁰ After the formal split in 1995, Ortega's ranks kept the name of FSLN and continued to be the stronger and more influential party. In spite of the often harsh opposition rhetoric, the rupture caused by the loss of power and, partly, a loss of political direction was arguably not quite concealed. When Ortega won the national election in 2006, after having lost three times in a row, the political agenda was not explicitly spelled out. This time the FSLN won 38 percent of the vote, giving it a minimal victory that would have been impossible were it not for the internal conflict that had split the liberals into two opposing parties³¹ in combination with the lowering of the percentage needed in order to avoid a second round – a result of the much-debated "pact" between Ortega and former President Arnaldo Alemán.³²

If the FSLN's loss in 1990 coincided with the demise of leftist governments, the rise of a unipolar world order and the weakening of left-wing ideologies, its victory 16 years later coincided with the unraveling of the hegemonic position of the United States, financial turmoil, and the

³⁰ The split also reflected factions that had shaped and divided the party all along. Initially, there were three major factions within the FSLN: one with a Maoist orientation, emphasizing the role of the rural poor in the revolution; a Marxist-Leninist one with a focus on the urban working class; and one that mediated between the other two, calling for both rural and urban action (see Prevost 1997: 149–152; Wright 1995). See Tatar (2009) for an account on how the FSLN has actively written its own history with the attempt to maintain the link between the party and popular revolt, simultaneously framing the MRS as representing elite interests.

³¹ The liberal party split when Eduardo Montealegre challenged the pact and Alemán's dominant position within the PLC (despite the fact that he was convicted) and went on to form the *Alianza Liberal Nicaraguense* (ALN), which became the preferred party of the United States and regional capital. The votes were distributed between the four major parties as follows: FSLN, 38%; ALN, 28%; PLC, 27%; MRS, 6%. The percentage needed in order to avoid a second round was lowered from 45% of the valid vote to 35% if the second-placed candidate was at least 5% behind. Given that the combined liberal vote amounted to 55%, it is highly unlikely that Ortega would have won had there been a second-round contest between the two top candidates.

³² A clear indication that the FSLN did not lack political influence during the years in opposition, the Ortega–Alemán pact was an alliance between the FSLN and the Alemán loyal elements within the PLC that ensured the two parties' influence over the courts and the National Assembly, making possible a change in the electoral laws that paved the way for the re-election of the FSLN. For his part, Alemán, who was prosecuted by Bolaños for corruption and sentenced to 20 years of prison, was, through the cooperation of the FSLN, given increasing freedom until he was released in 2008.

ascent of the so-called “pink tide”, governments to the left of the centre in many Latin American countries (see for example Leiras 2007; Lynch 2007; Robinson 2008). Internationally, the victory in 2006 was received very differently from the loss in 1990: while the defeat was met with disappointment by many, the victory arguably did not trigger the corresponding enthusiasm. In particular, the criminalization of abortion drew attention to the question of the FSLN’s ideology and identifications. Veronica Gago (2007: 17) writes that, while it is often assumed that leftist governments will open for the advancement of women’s struggles, the return of the Sandinistas “reveals a situation dramatically to the contrary”. The new law, which was approved by the National Assembly with Sandinista support in October 2006, ten days before the presidential election, replaced the practice of “therapeutic abortion”, legal abortion under limited circumstance regulated in the penal code since 1893.³³ After the first period of the FSLN’s term of office, many commentators have questioned the government’s commitment to its proclaimed ideals. William Robinson, for example, calls it “the most illusory” of the left-wing governments in Latin America (Robinson 2008: 5, see also Burbach 2009).

In what follows, the aim is not so much to evaluate the FSLN’s actual politics in relation to its discourse. Rather, I explore how the political rhetoric installs frontiers and imagines alternatives in relation to transnational capital and neoliberal economic theories of modernization and development. Arguing that the political position of the FSLN can be read as a dislocation, I examine the articulations involved in Sandinista nation-building and the discursive production of political content in a context where challenges to the prevailing economic order offer no sustaining blueprint.

The opening quotation of this subsection evokes the heritage of Augusto C. Sandinio. Through the deeds of the living, the dead live on, and those who are resisting today will be followed by others when successive generations realize their obligations to their ancestors and to those who are to come in a struggle extended in time: “our cause will live on and others will follow us.” If “revolution” in the rhetoric of Bolaños’s regime signaled a fundamental break with the past, the FLSN, once again in power carves out its political identity through reconnecting with an alleged origin. A direct lineage with the past is established, connecting the present and future aspirations to the resistance dating back to the indigenous struggle against the conquistadors: heroic protagonists such as Tupac Amaro and Huacay,

³³ “Therapeutic abortion” allowed abortion in three circumstances: pregnancy as a result of rape, danger to the life of the woman, and severe fetal damage (Kampwirth 2006: 94; 2008: 30). With the complete criminalization of abortion, anyone who performs therapeutic abortion faces between four and eight years in prison (Gago 2007: 17–18).

and the more recent Francisco de Miranda, Simón Bolívar and José Martí, are often recalled in Ortega's public speeches.

Examining the left turn in Latin America today, Nicolás Lynch contends that, with its focus on democracy and the reformist struggle against social inequality, it is distinct from earlier revolutionary attempts by guerrilla movements (Lynch 2007: 374). Yet a revolutionary imaginary is integral to the FSLN's positioning of its project. In Ortega's speeches, the names of the historical heroes in the struggles against imperialism are mentioned together with Hugo Chavez and Fidel Castro, the icons and allies of today who are urging Latin America to rise again, to "[lift] the flag of freedom and justice of those that came before us" (Ortega, January 11, 2007). Thus, in public speeches and policy documents the current government is portrayed as the second stage of the revolution that began in 1979 and was then temporarily interrupted by 16 years of neoliberalism.

Whereas in Bolaños's narrative of modernization history was represented as a sequence of unfortunate and discomfiting failures, to be overcome or literally erased, as on the CNZF website, here history is dwelled upon as a source of national and regional pride and identification, a rich heritage of 500 years of resistance to fall back upon and adhere to. Is this message not a lot more compelling? Like Bhabha's pedagogical narrative, it appears to offer a mythic beginning and a logical continuation, the possibility of unification around courageousness instead of around inadequacy. A vow to lift the ancestors' flag of freedom is, however, an obligating one that easily falls apart. It may dissolve if the revolution is persistently proclaimed but not visibly performed. The FSLN's rhetoric makes it clear that it does not opt for a reformist identification. I asked one of the FSLN's "strategists" about the party's revolutionary identification: does it make sense to talk about the ruling party in such terms? He insisted on the importance of holding on to revolutionary claims, despite limitations: "it is difficult, the question of power. It's as if we are fake revolutionaries [*revolucionarios de mentira*]. Why? Because we are in power, but in *political* power. We don't have the economic power, or the cultural or ideological power" (Interview, March, 2008).

What are the minimum requirements for a social transformation to pass as a revolution? After all, revolutions are about the power to represent society and to write its history; the "now" of the revolution cannot be anticipated or grasped until the moment has passed (see Jonsson 2008). Do the claims of affinity with a revolution that took place decades earlier operate mainly as an evocative remainder of past events and victories? The uprising against Somoza in 1977–79 was implemented by a broad multi-class coalition of peasants, students, workers, the church and liberal democrats from the middle and upper classes, where the Sandinistas, with alleged links to the opposition of the 1920s and 1930s, largely embodied hopes for democracy and sovereignty (Foran 2005: 65–74).

Unity and the quintessence of the nation are notions that have to be somehow re-evoked in a narrative of revolutionary continuity and collectivity. Provided that the aims are not largely realizable in the present, the revolutionary rhetoric appears to count upon a specific memory of the past that may give meaning to the present. Here, the names of historic figures can be conceived of as “shorthand” for a political agenda: images of Sandino, well-known songs from the revolution in the 1980s and familiar slogans. Some memories, however, might come close to what Eric Selbin (2003) calls the “trap of nostalgia”. In a teleological historiography, the past, its myths and heroes, is narrated as a “proof that the present is what is/was meant to be”. The dead heroes are called upon to witness and validate the politics of the present. As Selbin (2003: 91) asks, “who controls these spectral figures?” To be the subversive subject, to incarnate the legacy of the fathers and speak for them, *as* them, is an appealing role for political leaders to play. But such a necromantic staging also contains the risk of being exposed as unfit to both history and the future – of being unmasked as a “fake revolutionary” by the plurality of voices and events that comprise the past and the present.

Next, I will examine the content that is given to the political agenda in the FSLN’s rhetoric, focusing on visualizations in relation to the economy and transnational capital.

Against the Savagery of Capitalism

Today there are new forms of slavery, which have been modernized. Neoliberalism was the most recent project of the modernization of slavery in the world, but thank God it has failed! Because God could not support this project, which the Holy Pope called savage capitalism, and I repeat, and we will never stop to repeat, he said “the poor cannot wait”. (Ortega, July 20, 2007)

Once again re-narrating the nation, the picture painted by previous governments of a country in the process of modernization is repeatedly challenged in political speeches and in the FSLN’s policy documents. Talking to a group of investors, Ortega disputed the strongest message of the earlier administration, that of “New Era”: “...Nicaragua is not that country that they have tried to sell, one that is advancing, is on its way, has already taken off: this is not true!” (Ortega, February 28, 2007). The narrative of advancement was rejected as a means to attract investment and to create a reassuring notion of progress. In order to conceal the failure of their agenda, previous governments “invented a country that exists only in the imagination of the liars” (Ortega, January 12, 2008). At his first meeting

with the World Bank, Ortega expressed his distrust of the political order underpinned by international development institutions and organizations:

It is impossible to understand that after 16 years of working with the organizations, in times of peace [...] there is economic growth, inflation is under control, and Nicaragua together with Haiti is in the worst position! How can we explain this? Where are the results of these policies, in terms of benefit to the people?...We cannot accept the continued application of policies that keep Nicaragua at the bottom of the barrel! [...] For all the specialists that study the conditions of these countries. Something is not working out; there is something that is going wrong here...when Nicaragua is one of the countries with the best records of complying with all its agreements with the Fund, as recognized by the International Monetary Fund itself. (Ortega, February 1, 2007)

Whereas the previous government located the root of the country's problems in the revolution, in the FSLN's rhetoric it is the 16 years of neoliberal/conservative rule that occupy the corresponding position. The agenda outlined by the preceding administration in collaboration with consultants and international development institutions is denounced as a formula that, though carefully applied, contrary to its declarations resulted in few improvements for the majority. Indeed, not only were neoliberal/conservative administrations oxygenated by neoliberalism. In the FSLN's rhetoric neoliberalism figures as a point of disidentification:

In Nicaragua those neoliberal policies have created a situation of social emergency that has denied millions of citizens access to education, health and dignified work and that has forced hundreds of thousands of Nicaraguans into the distressing experience of migration and uprooting. (Ortega, January 11, 2007)

Against the backdrop of a failed project condemned by the Pope, the FSLN claims in one of its first policy documents that it strives to create an alternative to the excluding, predatory and *machista* model that neoliberal and conservative doctrines impose (FSLN 2007a: 1). Neoliberalism is also the explanation for the problems and constraints that the "second stage of the revolution" faces. Though a failure, the neoliberal system has managed to establish itself as hegemonic. In its policy document the FSLN asserts that "the principal challenge of the Sandinista Front consists in having to administer a savage capitalist economy and govern a society imbued with neoliberal values" (FSLN 2007a: 3). The situation for the FSLN is described as complex and contradictory: a socialist movement holds the presidency, but is in minority in the other authority centers of the state. As a revolutionary power forced to operate within a neoliberal hegemony, "the strategy implies defending the revolutionary measures of the government

and working as a party in persisting opposition to the capitalist system” (FSLN 2007b: 8).

What is the substance of these “revolutionary measures”? What kind of societal organization is discernible or aimed at beyond capitalism, beyond the “persisting opposition”? The content that the FSLN gives to its leftist project varies, as will be discussed, in different contexts. As pointed out above, the politics performed is not regarded to be the *real* politics; constrained by neoliberalism and its lack of hegemony, the FSLN can be only a shadow of its preferred self. Its relation to power is ambiguous: though obviously in power it represents itself as in a subordinate position, from where it has to administer a system that it opposes.

Although in the official rhetoric the ideal political agenda is represented as currently precluded, the “second stage of the revolution” is given provisional content in speeches and policy documents. On the international level, one of the rhetorical strands envisages the construction of an alternative approach in order to break with the neocolonial order dominated by the United States and Europe. Nicaragua is to become part of the “left turn” in Latin America with the objective of installing a new power bloc on the global arena, in particular through establishing an alliance with Venezuela, Cuba and Bolivia. The day after Ortega’s inauguration, which was celebrated together with Venezuelan President Hugo Chavez and Bolivian President Evo Morales, Nicaragua joined *Alianza Bolivariana para los Pueblos de Nuestra América* (Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America, ALBA). In contrast to the trade agreement that Nicaragua has with the United States (CAFTA) and the one that is being negotiated with Europe – “Nicaragua is a prisoner of those agreements” (Ortega, January 3, 2008) – ALBA is described as an alliance built on mutual cooperation in order to survive in the global economy: “It is not a question of integration; this goes further, it is a question of unity or death for the Latin America economies. Unity or death for the Latin American peoples!” (Ortega, January 16, 2008).

On the national level, one of the FSLN’s policy document states, work has to be carried out on two fronts: the current system must be humanized, but more radically, a new society has to be created. Only under socialism can the injustices produced by the present system be vanquished (FSLN 2007a). At the bottom of this project lies the construction of a new hegemony; this is contingent upon the resurrection of the nation state, which is perceived to have been dispatched to the “historical museum” in a neocolonial order that serves the interests of global capitalism (FSLN 2007b: 2). The hegemonic project is described as composed of two pillars, one political and the other economic. The political dimension consists of an “enriched democracy”: direct participation through citizens’ councils to cultivate common interests. In contrast to the political subject in the neoliberal model, described as an isolated citizen, the citizen in the

Sandinista model is to be part of a collective (the construction of the citizen will be further discussed in Chapter 4).

The economic pillar privileges development through agro-industry and small or medium producers. It prescribes horizontal accumulation by means of partnerships and self-management rather than vertical accumulation (FSLN 2007b: 6). Measures mentioned are re-nationalization of public services, progressive taxation and a fight against corruption (FSLN 2007a: 1). The Sandinista model for a “popular economy” promotes national independence and self-management for workers, students and citizens, leading toward “association and self-government”, denominated as “the most advanced sector” of the economy. Because of hegemonic capitalism, transnational capital and large corporations have been accorded the most significance. Quite the reverse, the FSLN’s depicts its principal development strategy as based on the sectors that generate most production and employment, that is, small and medium-sized units. There are only two alternatives for the popular economy, it is stated: to stay subordinated or to organize (FSLN 2007a: 11).

In contrast to the export-led development model prescribed by the former government, the FSLN’s policy documents put national circuits of production and consumption at the center of its development program. This program is not a call for the import-substitution strategy that prevailed in the region decades earlier; it underlines the importance of cooperation but envisions it in ways that challenge the sole focus on the United States. While the PLC depicted Nicaragua’s poverty and position in the global economy as an outcome of local mistakes, the FSLN contends that the global order has caused the disadvantage of the Nicaraguan economy and it establishes a conflict between national and transnational interests. Globalized capital and the FTZs that were designated as “zones of hope” are condemned as upholding the unjust divisions of labor: “Why do investors fight for the FTZs? We won’t let ourselves be fooled! It is not to do Nicaragua or the workers a favor. It is simply because they find that Nicaragua has the lowest wages in Central America, and that is not fair!” (Ortega, May 1, 2007). Corporate social responsibility was cherished in the PLC’s rhetoric of as one of the desirable aspects of foreign direct investment, producing benefits also outside the factories. In Ortega’s view this is rather to be regarded as a way for the companies to earn goodwill and further advance their positions and channels of influence:

It’s for their own profit! Because in those countries where they have imposed savage capitalism, the practice has been that when a businessman enters they say “businessman this or that is donating a school or a health care centre or whatever...” Ah! But on the other hand he has already persuaded the government not to tax him. How funny is that! (Ortega, January 10, 2008)

Investors involved in charity that present themselves as proponents of corporate responsibility but refuse to pay taxes do little, it is argued, to alleviate the impact of “savage capitalism”. However, when talking directly to investors, Ortega uses a different tone from that one when he mocks the image of the considerate businessman: “I think that the most important thing is that you feel secure in your investments and that the country, without discussion, needs more investment, above all long-term, not short-term; here there are a lot of *maquila*, and that is OK, but it is not the best for the country!” (Ortega, January 24, 2007). Insisting on the need to harmonize the relation between the private sector and the state so as to avoid conflict, he also often urges investors to participate in the fight against poverty: “...what we ask of you is the following: that investment comes with social aspects, that it contributes to the fight against poverty” (Ortega, January 24, 2007). Or, formulated as a specific request: “now that public schools are free again, there is no room for all the students. I ask you, the investors, to help us out here because the situation is really critical. Just simple constructions, we don’t want any luxury” (Ortega, February 28, 2007).

Enunciations that appear to be contradictory or at least two-sided are indeed indicative of the FSLN’s position on the economy, as revolutionary claims coexist with reassurances that no major changes of structures established by the neoliberal/conservative regimes are to take place. For example, in his first speech as president elect, Ortega confirmed that the CAFTA agreement was to remain and that foreign investment would still constitute a cornerstone of the economy:

...we have accepted the commitment to keep enriching all contributors, we are not planning any dramatic or radical changes in the foundations of the economy that has been set up during these years. We call on economic groups, corporate forces and political forces to unite to continue attacking poverty in order to erase it in our country... (Ortega, November 8, 2006)

Likewise, the policy document that makes it clear that it favors the national economy over transnational interests nonetheless stresses that, one year into its term, business continues as usual: “During the electoral campaign it was said that the victory of the FSLN would be a catastrophe for the national economy. It was argued that [...] there would be a drastic fall in foreign investment and exports [...] In reality it has been rather different: foreign investment and exports have gone up and unemployment down” (FSLN 2007c: 6). The inconsistency of the rhetoric around investment and the FTZs appeared to be manifested in the work of the different government ministries as well. An official I interviewed at the Ministry of Labor (MITRAB) described its politics in terms that indicated a rupture with the previous government. About the FTZs he stated:

The President has said publicly that he doesn't believe that the FTZs are the solution to the problem of unemployment. And he has said it on various occasions. He has said that the creation of employment with dignity is not to be found in the FTZs, and the economic development of Nicaragua is not to be found in the FTZs. (Interview, February, 2008)

The Ministry of Labor was often denounced by the private sector for interpreting the labor code in new ways, to the disadvantage of employers.³⁴ In particular, FTZ production was perceived as being jeopardized by an increase in the minimum wage and the government's general approach toward foreign investors. As an official of *Asociación Nicaragüense de la Industria Textil y de Confección* (Nicaraguan Association of Textile and Apparel, ANITEC), described the work of MITRAB: "It is a new perception...a perception that the FTZ is bad and that here they are all exploiters and frauds and every time the company does something it's because they want to cheat or smuggle, it's in their mentality now" (Interview, February, 2008). A few of the major FTZ companies had closed down during the first year of the FSLN government, and others had announced that they were considering leaving the country as well. Some commentators, like the ANITEC official, interpreted this as an effect of the conduct of the MITRAB. However, the MITRAB official denied that the closures of firms in the FTZs had anything to do with the ministry or with the increase in the minimum wage:

I watch the international news and every day international companies close down and fire a lot of people. So I don't see what's the big deal and scandal in Nicaragua. First of all, the most important generators of employment are the small and medium-sized companies. And second, the closing of companies in the FTZs has nothing to do with any of the policies of the government. With the recession in the United States, I wouldn't be surprised if more companies close down.

Sofie: So is it more like a strategy of the business people...to blame the government?

Yes. They are not capable of accepting that the market that they defend also hits them. If they were hoping to gain something from the free market, they also have to suffer the consequences of the free market.

Expressing the other tendency within the government, in an interview a representative from the Ministry of Industry (MIFIC) portrayed the politics of the FSLN as basically a continuation of the former government:

³⁴ The Ministry Labor had eased the registration procedure for trade unions, and the number of unionized workers in the FTZ increased during the FSLN's first year. Also, unannounced inspections of factories took place more frequently, and the number of fines for breaches of regulations increased. In addition the minimum wage was adjusted every six months. Although six-monthly adjustments are prescribed in the Labor Code, adjustments were rare under previous governments.

The only difference is that this government is more permissive when it comes to unions. But to conclude, the politics and the legal framework are maintained, and if there are changes it is to improve, to attract more investment. Because investment is the priority, no country can improve on its own, but can do so only by means of foreign investment, which continues to be, as they say, the apple of every government's eye [*la niña de los ojos de todos los gobiernos*]. (Interview, February, 2008)

Yet another illustration of the ambiguity of the political project is a development strategy formulated by the Higher Council on Private Enterprise (COSEP), the umbrella organization for private business. Formed in 1972, COSEP has been the main organ of Nicaragua's intertwined political and economic elite. During the 1980s the organization's opposition to government policy was fierce, and several of its top leaders were imprisoned by the FSLN (Spalding 1997: 250–252). Its development strategy was formulated in collaboration with Vice-President Jaime Morales Carazo, a former Contra commander who was prominent in the Liberal Party before joining the FSLN's ranks shortly before the election. The strategy is presented in a brochure titled *Ejes de Desarrollo* (Bases of Development), described as the result of a historic national agreement between the government and the private sector. The president is thanked for having received the plan “with such enthusiasm”: “Mr President, we entirely support your commitment to respect private property and free enterprise, and your assistance to national and international investment” (COSEP 2007). The main proposal of the strategy is described as simple and direct: “Creating wealth we reduce poverty.” Identifying priority sectors for development – tourism, light industry including *maquila*, livestock farming and coffee, for example – the document differs from the FSLN's other policy documents. Like the previous model it is based on export-led growth: “Today there are two types of country; those that attract investment and grow and those that scare investment away and decline” (ibid.). Morales further confirms the harmony between the government and private business in determining economic priorities: “We are conscious that poverty is not fought with decrees, laws, demagogic instructions or with the populist measure of turning the rich into the poor” (ibid.). Explicitly repudiating “state socialism” he contends that the struggle against poverty must center on the investment that creates employment:

It is not about drawn-out confrontations between the right and the left in endless marathons of outdated, dogmatic rhetoric, with strident and hurtful words that instead of unifying revive phantasms of the past, preventing healing, provoking a growing abyss of division, while the country and the poorest of the poor, which is the majority, sink into a chaotic vacuum...and the dark hole of despair. (Morales in COSEP 2007)

Here, the differences between the left and right are represented as outdated and unjustified conflicts. In fact, attempts at redistribution (“to turn the rich into the poor”) will only hurt “the poorest of the poor”. Thus, in the rhetoric (with more or less direct ties to the FSLN) analyzed here, assessments of transnational capital fluctuate among denunciations of it for being a threat to national sovereignty and upholding exploitative structures; invitations to investors to participate in the fight against poverty; and business as usual. The take on the global economy is not unequivocal or always consistent, making it difficult to decipher the meanings attributed to capitalism. Generally, harsher versions of the critique are primarily directed against “savage capitalism”, a formulation that is frequently repeated. Conceivably, such a critique misses most possible targets since it relies upon a scurrilous portrayal of capitalism as completely unregulated. Condemning the privileging of transnational over national capital and the premises of Nicaragua’s incorporation into the global economy creates the foundations of an alliance with economic actors who have been hit hard by free trade and deregulation. Certainly, a vow to resist savage capitalism has resonance not only among “the poor” but also among sections of the elite that found the implementation of Structural Adjustment Programs and the transition to the neoliberal market economy difficult (cf. Spalding 1997: 255–259).

The opposition to “savage capitalism” does not necessarily imply a critique of capitalism per se, but seems to postulate that capitalism might be turned in less destructive directions. The question, of course, is how “savage capitalism” relates to “capitalism” (see Grigsby 2007). Described as a socialist vocation that, lacking hegemony is forced to administer a neoliberal order, anti-imperialist/capitalist rhetoric and certain concrete measures to foster an alternative organization of the economy (for example, ALBA and the emphasis on small-scale producers) coexist with a maintained dependency upon foreign investment, CAFTA, and so on. Leaving aside the question of the compatibility between these (possibly two) ventures where the sectors that have been displaced by transnational capital are now to thrive without a substantial, systemic change, I want to raise the question of whether the “humanizing” measures that allegedly will pave the way for more radical changes may in fact prevent them from taking place.

In a time when the principle of sovereignty is dissolving, Wendy Brown (2006) suggests that several theorists on the left nevertheless have come to explore the possibilities for (re)asserting the autonomy of the political, the prospects for containing and directing the economy. A post-materialist understanding implies that capitalism is not governed by a given logic, but does it thereby follow that it could be steered in accordance with *any* logic? Engaging with William Connolly’s call for creative, micro-political interventions to alter current manifestations of global capitalism, Brown (2006: 20) asks: “If capitalism is not bound by tight logics or smooth trajectories, does this make it less ordered by anti-democratic or inequalitarian

drives, or more available to justice projects of modest economic equality, ecological reason, meaningful work and livable organizations of the social?"

Indeed, in line with the claims of Boltanski and Chiapello (2005), capitalism's strength is derived from its flexible response to measures directed against it. Disturbingly, attempts to "soften" the most adverse effects of capitalism may function as a consolidation of the system. If the challenge is framed in terms of micro-political interventions in pursuit of a more democratic economy, attached to a belief in the potential subordination of capitalism to the political, then the visualization of alternatives to capitalist modes of production and accumulation is arguably largely discarded. Described in the FSLN's rhetoric as a situation where not everything can be done "at once", if it is claimed that *something* can be done to tame "savage capitalism" (albeit in sectors that do not come into direct conflict with the interests of transnational capital), a critique of more profound dimensions of the current structure, such as the continuation of "business as usual" in the FTZ, may be postponed. As I will argue in the following subsection, the way that the FSLN outlines its agenda and envisions its alliances might delimit the conditions of possibility to formulate a more profound, class-oriented critique of capitalism.

Reconciliation and the Enemies of the Poor

Displayed on large billboards throughout the cities, circulated in media advertisements and repeated in political speeches, several slogans alluding to national unity and consensus sustained the FSLN's electoral campaign and then the launch of the new government: "*Unida Nicaragua Triunfa!*" (United Nicaragua Triumph!) and "*El Amor es más Fuerte que el Odio!*" (Love is Stronger than Hate!). Slogans such as the "New Era" and "Nicaragua advances!" were replaced by the phrase "Government for Reconciliation and National Unity", which was promoted as the motto of the new regime, embellishing all official documents. The presidential ticket, combining Ortega, the FSLN's strong man for decades, and Morales with his ties to Contreras and the Liberal Party (PLC), is suggestive of this bridging gesture. The insistence upon reconciliation appears to point to a need to come to terms with past confrontations; but, one may ask, reconciliation between whom and around what issues? The FSLN's policy documents state that the effects of global capitalism on the nation state make necessary a program to forge an alliance of all national forces. The goal is to create a "permanent consensus" with political, economic, religious and social forces in favor of national development (FSLN 2007a: 11). The endeavor is further specified: "At the political level, a program of reconciliation and national unity is maintained through alliances with the forces that are the [...] most



Figure 4. Billboard in Managua. Photo by author.

nationalist (liberals, ex-combatants of the Resistance (Contras) and the Catholic Church)” (FSLN 2007b: 7).

In this version, sovereignty and reconciliation arguably figure as nodes in the struggle for a new nationalist discourse. All constellations that are considered to be “in favor of national development” are to be included in an alliance led by the FSLN. That is, rather than pointing to oppositional interests, for instance along the lines of class, unity with the FSLN’s former antagonists is underlined. Indeed, in the policy document quoted above, broad sections of society appear to qualify as allies. However, the construction of a new hegemony seems to oscillate between consensus and conflict. As Chantal Mouffe (2005) argues in her critique of the proclaimed ascendancy of a “post-political” era characterized precisely by the formation of a stable compromise, the “we” of any consensus is constituted against a “they”, based upon the discrimination between “enemies” and “friends”.

The emphasis on “reconciliation and unity” is often disrupted in Ortega’s public speeches by a language of confrontation:

They should be absolutely clear and certain, the enemies of the poor who are here in Nicaragua and who governed for 16 years; they should be absolutely clear, the enemies of the poor on the global level, that the workers, the women, the youth, the poor in Nicaragua... have not surrendered during these 16 years! They have not been bribed! And now, the Government of the People is here and we will all go together into the fight to liberate the poor, the workers, and the Nicaraguan people. (Ortega, May 1, 2007)

Society is here apparently divided into two diametrically opposed forces: “the poor” who have not succumbed and the “enemies of the poor” who have governed in Nicaragua and who uphold an unequal national as well as global order. However, the constructions of friends and enemies as well as the definitions of conflict and reconciliation are formulated in a way that denies rather than acknowledges political conflicts and social tensions. Drawing on Mouffe’s elaboration of the post-political denial of antagonism, Andrés Pérez Baltodano (2006a) discusses the implications of suppressing conflicts in Nicaraguan politics. When “reconciliation”, “love” and “unity” are prioritized, and positions are reduced to those of the “good” and the “evil”, legitimate social conflicts are depoliticized and disqualified. Indeed, for those who declare themselves to act out of love (for the nation and the people), there is no reason to listen to those whose actions are guided by hate. Then any critical argument is dismissed in advance, and it is the hateful who bear the responsibility for being rejected by the loving ones. With the allocation of feelings, here perhaps parallels can be drawn to Ahmed’s (2004: ch. 6) elaboration on how “love” operates in right-wing discourse: it is because of the hatred of others that measures have to be implemented in order to defend the loved object, the Nation.

The “enemy” that is often evoked in Sandinista rhetoric does not constitute a stable category. In the above quotation, the “enemies of the poor” could be understood as referring to the former regimes and perhaps to the private sector as well as transnational interests and orders. Still, these enemies appear to be ambiguously connected to neoliberalism and class relations; on other occasions the forces mentioned in the quotation are embraced by the gesture of reconciliation. More consistently, former “friends” of the FSLN are located to the ranks of the enemy: the MRS, the other political party with roots in the FSLN that has attracted many of its front figures, and the women’s movement, with which the FSLN has been in sharp disagreement, not least in relation to the issue of abortion (this will be further discussed in Chapter 4).³⁵ Along with NGOs and elements of civil society with ties to the MRS, these political movements are accused of being the tools of US imperialism. The same goes for the ALN, the Alemán-critical faction of the Liberal Party.

Within the logic of the FSLN the claims of those that are singled out as enemies have no legitimacy and need not to be met with political arguments. The same can largely be said about the framing of the party’s own agenda. Often it is not represented as a proposal among other proposals:

³⁵ An illustration of the hostility against the feminist movement is a statement called “The ‘feminist’ connection and low intensity wars” by Rosario Murillo, Ortega’s wife, which was widely circulated and printed in the newspaper *El Nuevo Diario*. Murillo accused leading feminists of being pawns of the empire, mentally ill, sexists, haters of the working class, oligarchs and perverts (see *Envío* No 326, 2008).

We have to move toward the future that our peoples long for. Epithets are not enough: there is a need for actions that bring justice and equality and make us obey the mandate of Christ: 'to love each other'. Christ never said: 'exploit each other'...He said 'love each other!' and ALBA is the message of Christ to love one another! (Ortega, January 11, 2007)

The FSLN's political project is not one that can be chosen in preference to other alternatives. Rather, it is the only viable one. As in the quotation, the rhetoric justifying the FSLN's venture often does not rely upon *political* justifications, drawing on the proclaimed socialist ideology, for example, but moral or religious rationalizations are decidedly more common, such as the description of ALBA as an expression of Christian love. Whereas neoliberal globalization and "savage capitalism" – rejected by the Pope – are linked to exploitation, the current political agenda is justified as an extension of the will of Christ. In his ethnographic study *Thanks to God and the Revolution*, Roger Lancaster (1988) examines how Marxist and religious arguments and justifications coexisted and even enhanced each other in popular narratives about suffering and resistance during the 1980s. The liberation churches played an important role in raising consciousness about inequalities and in popularizing and transmitting the message of the revolution. As a sacred institution, the church enjoyed a certain protection from the Somoza regime. However, the relationship between the church and the FSLN was conflicted, with the attitudes toward the other ranging from hostility to support. From 1985 onward, church–state relations were increasingly characterized by confrontation: the FSLN accused the church of "contra-revolutionary" activities while the church denounced, for instance, the "totalitarianism" of the government as well as the secular transformations of the education system (Stein 1997). This had changed by the time the FSLN returned to power; Ortega and his wife Rosario Murillo³⁶ had become committed Catholics (see Kampwirth 2008) and influential bishops frequented the electoral campaign.³⁷

It is now the more hierarchical and conservatives elements of the Catholic Church that are cited in defense of the political agenda. While the liberation church condemned social inequalities, the language of

³⁶ Murillo, author and poet, was in charge of the FSLN's election campaign. Murillo's daughter accused Ortega of sexually harassing and abusing her over many years. Murillo sided with Ortega in the conflict, which increased the hostility between the FSLN and the feminist movement. Though Murillo has not been officially nominated for any political post by the party, she is strongly influential within it. Her official post within the government is Minister of Communication, and she plays an important role in the program of citizen participation (which will be discussed in Chapter 4). Her influence has provoked much opposition, including within the party.

³⁷ A symbol of the new relationship between the leadership of the FSLN and the church is Ortega and Murillo's wedding shortly before the election, after 27 years together. The ceremony was led by former archbishop Miguel Obando y Bravo, who fiercely opposed the Sandinista government during the 1980s (see Kampwirth 2008).

“reconciliation” and “love”, with its strong religious resonance, appears to point in a different direction. The call for reconciliation can be read as a moralistic proposal, referring more to the overcoming of emotional differences – love should guide instead of hate – than to the process of tackling existing political conflicts (see Perez Baltodano 2006a). Perhaps one of the most adverse effects of reconciliation built on moral rather than a political foundation is the complete criminalization of abortion. Choosing to side with anti-feminists and right-wing elements of society in the struggle for “unity”, the FSLN has turned its back on the feminist groups that once constituted the Sandinista core (Kampwirth 2008: 31).

Arguing against the tendency to portray the achievement of consensus as the goal of democracy, Mouffe (2005) points to the dangers of disregarding the interconnection between conflict and politics. To recognize a social order is to regard opponents as legitimate but with interests that cannot be dealt with through negotiation or reconciliation. Antagonism denotes a relation without a common ground; in Mouffe’s view, it is the task of democracy to transform antagonism to “agonism”: the confrontation between different hegemonic projects in a contest that lacks a rational solution. If the legitimacy of conflicts is denied, distinctions between “we” and “they” tend to be drawn along moral instead of political lines: “in place of a struggle between ‘right and left’ we are faced with a struggle between ‘right and wrong’” (Mouffe 2005: 5). On a similar note, Brown (2001: 30) writes about the turn towards moralism in politics: in contrast to a political or intellectual morality that is open to evaluation against other notions of the good, in an anti-democratic fashion “the moralist inevitably feels antipathy toward politics as a domain of open contestation for power and hegemony”. In Brown’s view, moralism becomes a resort when historical narratives break down and alternatives seem to be nowhere in sight. When morality becomes the guiding principle, opponents are turned into “absolute enemies”, a source of antagonism that might threaten democratic institutions and where violence possibly comes to constitute the only possible interaction between antagonist groups (Mouffe 2005: 76; see also Barros and Castagnola 2000: 35).

In the rhetoric of the FSLN, how might the relation between reconciliation and revolution be understood? How does unity and consensus relate to the “poor”, who allegedly have not surrendered to their “enemies”? What kind of reconciliation is expected on the part of those subordinated by stark class differences? Apart from a call to come to terms with the past, reconciliation also potentially entails an element of passivity, to reconcile oneself with one’s destiny (see Ahmed 2004: 35). In this regard the call for reconciliation, if directed toward voters in general, can perhaps be read as an exhortation to accept the current form of the FSLN’s politics. While it is true that the FSLN is in a minority in the National Assembly, it may also be true that the party has power and influence that it is not

prepared to acknowledge, because how then could it be an oppositional force? Thus, the FSLN maintains its revolutionary claim and identification but, in contradiction to this, is part of a broad coalition comparable to what Mouffe (2005) characterizes as a striving for “consensus at the center” that purports to prevail over adversarial arguments. The importance of public participation and citizen power is stressed, but what is dialogue taken to mean if there are no clearly distinct alternatives to choose between? The construction of a political rationality seems to be centered on an attempt to form political identities around two antagonistic poles with rigid borders. To a large extent, the division is based on the non-recognition of political opponents, which also negates the possibilities of contestation within the Sandinista camp.

Reconciliation with former enemies is justified against the backdrop of the threat to the sovereignty of the nation, framed as a necessity in the wake of imperialism and the hatred of enemies. And it is because of them that the *actual* politics of the FSLN is blocked. However, reconciliation arguably offers too weak a point of identification for the formation of a political project, and not much of an emancipatory horizon. Because of the all-encompassing gesture, a new political imaginary could not unequivocally or persuasively rely upon “socialism” (though this does not mean that socialism was not frequently evoked): the links to the right, the church and private business interests make this a difficult identity to claim. Consequently, points of identification revolve rather around nationalism and specific moral values, rendering ideological visions difficult to distinguish and leaving the subjects of the revolution largely without a political cause.

Conclusion: Projects of Globalization

Focusing on the rhetoric of the PLC’s “New Era” and the FSLN’s “Government of Reconciliation and National Unity”, the aim of this chapter was to examine the elaboration of political projects in relation to transnational capital and the authority of neoliberal rationalities. The political projects of both parties are decidedly transformative, though their problematizations of the present and visualizations of the future differ. In the context of ubiquitous poverty, “development” can be perceived as a floating signifier that the two projects attempt to define in opposition to each other. In the rhetoric of Bolaños, the problem with the present is the past: because of earlier wrongdoings Nicaragua has not become fully a part of the contemporary order. A promise of progress through integration into global capitalism becomes a justification for development policies and a means to rationalize current hardships. Correspondingly, there is no “now”

that can be held responsible since the evaluation of political measures is deferred to that which is “to come”.

Thus, in the rhetoric of the PLC, progress is inscribed as an object of *hope* that urges continuous efforts. The content of hope is connected to capitalist advancement, such as the generation of more and better jobs. Hope is described in universal terms; in the New Era, everyone has equal reasons to be hopeful. Yet, as Ghassan Hage (2003: 13–18) points out, the power of hope, as it is hegemonized in neoliberal discourse, implies that the idea of upward social mobility is being upheld despite the fact that it is not experienced by most, especially since in global capitalism, the state’s commitment to ensure the *distribution* of hope is severely limited. For how long can an exhortation to hopefulness be deferred? At what point does a problem of the past (i.e. the revolution) become a problem of the present? As Ahmed (2004: 186) argues, the emotion of hope may have a paralyzing effect if it obstructs the imagination and elaboration of a different political agenda.

In the case of the FSLN, the present – an effect of 16 years of neoliberalism – is rather the problem to be overcome, as the rhetoric of revolution suggests. Past struggles figure as an inspiration and a justification in this endeavor: the deeds of today are connected to historical, heroic events. As these two political projects highlight, “development” and “progress” are as much about depictions of history as about the future: visualizations of the nation extended in time. If the revolution occupies a central position in the FSLN’s rhetoric, it is a conceivably contradictory term that seems at least equally suggestive for the outlining of the political project: reconciliation. Unity and reconciliation, with their religious overtones, are proposed as necessary values for national improvement and to counter the attack on sovereignty in the wake of the globalizing economy, placing *love* in a position similar to that of hope in the neoliberal/conservative rhetoric. What appears to be the object of love, and what kind of political platform may it constitute? Most immediately, reconciliation emerges as a call for different political, economic and religious forces to join in love of the “nation”, in opposition to those guided by hate. For those subordinated by classed and gendered structures, the content of reconciliation is indeed ambiguous; is it an exhortation to reconcile oneself with one’s fate? Lacking a thorough political potential, the insistence on love can also be read as an assurance that the leaders are acting in the best interests of the people: whatever they do, they do out of love.

While both projects are taking shape in relation to an “enemy” or “other”, they partly follow different logics. In the PLC’s rhetoric, the FSLN is decidedly constituted as a threat. It is because of the direction that the revolution took and the mistakes in the past that the right market conditions have not yet materialized. The hegemonic attempt, however, strives to turn the enemy into an historical category with no relevance to the formation of

projects and identities today. Following a *logic of difference* (see Chapter 2), a neoliberal market economy is proposed as the answer to all social demands. That is to say, society is not organized around antagonistic poles: “we” are all individuals in basically the same position vis-à-vis the market. Conflicts are relegated to the margins of the social order when the equivalence of different social demands is denied. Without the recognition of common denominators, derived for example from opposing class interests, all demands are to be met individually by an expanding, frictionless neoliberal market order. In contrast, the FSLN’s project is based on a *logic of equivalence* that installs a sharp political frontier at the center of the political endeavor, discriminating between those “for” and those “against”. With a broad alliance and a political project often formulated in terms of “love” versus “hate” and “revolution” versus “imperialism” and “counter-revolution”, the content of social demands and legitimate political subjects is not, however, always clear.

As this chapter has shown, the FTZs inhabit ambiguous positions within both political projects, but arguably the content and extent of the inconsistencies vary. At first glance, the PLC project is constituted as an appraisal of the opportunities of globalization and foreign investment, while the FSLN introduces an opposition between transnational capital and the interests of the nation state. At the same time, however, both political projects can be conceived as delimited and deferred by the country’s position in global capitalism. Political intentions – the realization of the promises of market-based progress or the coming of a socialist future – cannot be realized under current circumstances. In this regard, the consistency of the enunciations of endorsement as well as of rejection is threatened.

In the neoliberal/conservative rhetoric, the FTZs are persistently brought into view, but only from a specific angle. In the discussion above, I have illustrated attempts to ensure the significance of expanding FTZs as being in line with the common good, defensively warding off images of the FTZs as signs of Nicaragua’s weak position within the global division of labor. However, contradictions are not derived from disagreements with the system as such. Given the current position of Nicaragua, the PLC’s endeavor consists in endorsing the alleged opportunities of globalization, turning the attraction of foreign investment in the FTZs into the privileged agenda. That is to say, tensions in the rhetoric of the “New Era” are not rooted in a discrepancy between desires and deeds; rather, the challenge amounts to the preserving of its definition of the FTZs as zones of universal hope.

In the FSLN rhetoric, the FTZs are turned into a silence: sometimes condemned, but since they continue to be a major source of employment, denunciations can only go so far. Whereas the FTZs largely correspond to the preferences of the PLC, the question of the FSLN’s *preferred* agenda vis-

à-vis the FTZs remains open. The disconcerting relation between revolution and reconciliation points to the duality of the FSLN's political project, in its policy documents described as a frustrating experience of being in power but in opposition to the system. Framed in this way, the contradictions reflect a general predicament of the left when constrained to reform a structure that it contests (for example, to work for the extension of the welfare state within the capitalist economy, or, as is more common today, to counter the continued dismantling of the welfare state).

Thus, the FSLN's rhetoric appears less consistent: in a context where the ideologies and identities of the left (in general) are fundamentally dislocated, and alternatives to the predominant order scarce, the anti-capitalist rhetoric is not extensively performed. Analogously, a vocal project of integration within ALBA and the search for an altered development trajectory are carried out along with a more "hushed" project where CAFTA and the emphasis on foreign investment and export-led growth remain. Whether the coexistence of the two projects reflects, at the core, an uncompromising but currently restrained take on the FTZ, or whether the sometimes harsh condemnation of foreign investment works to conceal an unbecoming, non-revolutionary acceptance of the status quo (or both), is an issue that is here passed over with reference to the broad-spectrum paradoxes of left-wing projects operating in a terrain of neoliberalism.

Next, I will discuss the constructions of workers and political subjects generally in relation to the divergences within and between the political projects outlined in this chapter.

4. Transformative Subjects

Proper Workers and the Ascent of the Poor

We want to walk day after day, step by step and blow by blow with determination and patience toward the goal so that every day more and more Nicaraguans realize the dream that awakens me every night: that more and more of us live with dignity [...] The Free Trade Zones are now “Zones of Hope”: hope in ourselves. Hope in the New Era in the New Nicaragua for which I will never stop working tirelessly until the last day of my mandate (and of my life) as the proud President of all the Nicaraguans. (Bolaños, August 29, 2003)

A year has passed and we, all Nicaraguans, have been working, all Nicaraguans with good will. Our first and greatest commitment was, and continues to be, to recognize the right of the people, to recognize the power of the people: the people who humbly cast their votes to elect the authorities, the people who humbly pay their taxes to finance the salaries of the public officials [...] This is what Nicaragua demands! A new society, without hunger, without poverty; a new society where torments like the terrible plague that the dictatorship of global capitalism has imposed on us disappear. (Ortega, January 10, 2008)

Hard work and dedication: both statements envision social change as a long process demanding daily efforts from everyone, and evince a conviction that the conditions of the present have to be transformed. But they set out two different paths for citizens to pursue in relation to the global economic order. In Enrique Bolaños’s account, the employment opportunities created in the Free Trade Zones (FTZs) are embraced as the key to dignity. As additional investment arrives, more and more Nicaraguans are enabled to escape from their otherwise despairing lives, a dream that comes true only with steady exertion. The other enunciation envisions, not an expansion of the existing order, but a new society in line with the people’s demands: the subject in Daniel Ortega’s representation is one who suffers under the current order and challenges its foundations. While both statements inscribe the interests of the underprivileged as their central justification, in relation to the political agendas discussed in Chapter 3 they require different types of citizens to aspire and perform the rival notions of societal transformation. The statements can also be read as revealing slightly different ideas about the relation between citizens and governors. Whereas

Bolaños portrays himself as everybody's president, who like a concerned father lies awake at night, his will and dreams constituting the political agenda, Ortega underlines that power belongs to the people in whom social demands originate. His representation also includes a modification of "all Nicaraguans" as it makes a distinction between those who work with good will and those who presumably do not, suggesting that not everyone is taking part in the formation of a better society.

Chapter 3 dealt with the formulation of political projects in the context of transnational capital. In this chapter, the *subjects of politics* will be in focus: ideas about what the citizens *are* and desire but also about what they can become in the process of social transformation and what they should be like in order to make the process possible. In line with Chantal Mouffe (1993: 60), the ways that citizens are constructed and interpellated give an indication of the kind of society and community that a political project attempts to attain. How are subjects of development and transformation constituted in the political rhetoric? In what ways do FTZ workers come to matter? The chapter examines interpellations of workers and the general public in the context of hegemonic struggle, as a way to consider political agendas in relation to the subjects that they are ultimately *for*: the workers who are promised a life "with dignity" within the circuits of transnational production or the people who demand an end to the "dictatorship of global capitalism".

The first section of the chapter discusses post-Sandinista representations of work and emancipation that also figure as imperatives for particular class and gender formations. In relation to the FTZs, the focus is on a construction of workers that navigates between the recognition of their crucial role in production and attempts to negate allegations of exploitative labor conditions. How is the narrative of globalization in terms of a "common good" accommodated to differentiations under neoliberalism and to the demand for a pliable workforce? The second section outlines the constitution of a "revolutionary" subject in Sandinista rhetoric. When the script of neoliberal capitalism is (partly) rejected, how is an alternative subject envisioned? As was argued in Chapter 3, the FTZs occupy an uneasy position in the Sandinista National Liberation Front's (FSLN) elaboration of its political project, caught between the condemnation of "savage capitalism" and a lack of alternatives. Accordingly, in this chapter I explore the possibilities of, and limitations on, articulating social demands that correspond to the structural relation between labor and transnational capital within the logic construed by the FSLN. On what premises is the "new proletariat" – the female worker in global production – so important to the former government (though in ambiguous ways), fitted into (or detached from) a project that is explicitly framed as an expression of the "will of the poor"?

Proper Production: Work in the New Era

Life gets harder day by day/ Traffic kills you the police is tough
Maquiladoras that are sewing bones/ Maquiladoras for your progress
There are powerful groups that pressure us/ They reduce our food
The democracy and the armaments/ The blow of death comes suddenly
The politicized economy goes on and on/ To the right and to the left
And in the middle are all the people /who never ever gets anything [...]
Love your country...love your country.../love it, love it...love your
country!³⁸ (Perrezompopo - *Quiere a tu país*)

With remarkable contrasts, high levels of poverty but also new shopping malls, gourmet restaurants and increasing numbers of SUVs on the streets of Managua, the signs of economic restructuring are ubiquitous. For the post-Sandinista governments the challenge consisted in successfully framing the process of transformation in inclusive terms. Not just investors but the public at large had to be convinced that the political agenda was on the right track, at least enough to allow the party's reelection. In the song *Quiere a tu país* (Love your country), Nicaraguan rock musician Perrezompopo sings about the portrayal of the *maquiladoras* as a sign of progress in a context where the common people are increasingly deprived of their security and means of survival. Abandoned by politicians of the right and the left, they are still expected to uphold their national identification and pride: "love your country!"

Against representations of the FTZs as "zones of hope", workers, unionists and human rights organizations described a reality of violence, threats, salaries below subsistence level, compulsory overtime and union busting. In addition, after a few years in operation, the expanding FTZs began to attract a lot of news coverage. Under headlines such as "The Maquiladoras are real-life slavery" and "The Free Trade Zones, sites of major exploitation", working conditions were highlighted, also in the mainstream media.³⁹ Several lengthy and violent conflicts took place between unions and factory management, receiving attention in Nicaragua as well as from the transnational solidarity movement. The US television program *Hard Copy* broadcast a report in 1997 in which a team with hidden

³⁸ The lyrics in the original Spanish: Hoy cada día que pasa la vida es mas dura/El trafico te mata policia dura/ Maquiladoras que costuran huesos/ Maquiladoras para tu progreso.../Hay grupos fuertes que nos presionan/ que nos reducen el alimento/ La democracia y el armamento/ De pronto viene el tiro de gracia.../La economía politizada va va.../a la derecha como a la izquierda/ y por el centro va tanta gente/ que nunca nunca le queda nada [...] Quiere a tu país... quiere a tu país...quiere lo quiere lo... quiere a tu país!

Thanks to Annelie Andersson for help with the translation.

³⁹ "Maquiladoras son esclavitud en vivo", *El Nuevo Diario*, December 2, 2002; "Zonas Francas, sitios de mayor explotación", *El Nuevo Diario*, March 8, 2004.

cameras posed as workers, revealing verbal and physical abuse, sexual harassment and workers' poor living conditions, leading to consumer and activist pressure on retailers such as Walmart and J.C. Penney (Armbruster-Sandoval 2005: 116–121). The program and the debate that it triggered revealed a split within the labor movement against the backdrop of the precariousness of challenging the FTZs in a context of few employment alternatives. While the *Hard Copy* reportage led the leftist union *Central Sandinista de Trabajadores* (Sandinista Workers' Central, CST) and Tomás Borge of the FSLN to publish an editorial under the title “*¿Que se vayan!*” (Get out!), the women's organization *Maria Elena Cuadra* (MEC) found the program exaggerated on several points. The MEC pointed out that closing factories would lead to increased unemployment among women with scarce resources, and feared that demonization of FTZ companies would jeopardize ongoing negotiations with employers (Bickham-Mendez 2005: 170–172).

In this part of the chapter, I analyze political articulations that attempt to ensure a connection between emancipation and integration into the globalizing economy. How are workers made suitable to production and, in turn, how are their positions in transnational circuits of production, portrayed as being in accordance with their needs and desires?

Work in Progress

In World Bank and IMF discourses, notions of progress and development are firmly linked to free trade. Through the opening of markets, Third World countries are envisioned as gaining access to new development opportunities. Economic integration became central to post-Sandinista governments, and of great importance in this endeavor was the signing of the Free Trade Agreement between the United States, Central America and Dominican Republic (DR-CAFTA). In the following quotation, the US government describes CAFTA as the opposite of war, chaos and communism:

In the 1980s, Central America was characterized by civil war, chaos, dictators and Communist insurgencies. Today, Central America is a region of fragile democracies that need US support. Elected leaders in the region are embracing freedom and economic reform, fighting corruption, strengthening the rule of law, battling crime, and supporting America in the war on terrorism. But anti-reform forces in the region have not gone away. CAFTA is a way for America to support freedom, democracy and economic reform in our own neighborhood. (Office of the United States Trade Representative)⁴⁰

⁴⁰ Downloaded in May 2007 at

Arguably a clear-cut reflection of the essence of *Pax Americana* as well as the Washington Consensus, US interference in other countries is explained and justified. Synergetically, free trade will enhance “economic reform” in Central America and benefit the interests of the United States in its “own neighborhood.”⁴¹ In the rhetoric of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC), CAFTA was framed in terms of national progress. As Bolaños expresses it in the promotional videotape from the National Free Trade Zones Commission (CNZF) discussed in the previous chapter: “Without doubt, this agreement serves as an important tool to accelerate trade and the development of our dear country!” CAFTA regulates trade between the United States, Central America and the Dominican Republic, but all countries entered bilaterally, signing individual treaties with the United States. In the agreement, Nicaragua was considered to have been given the most favorable conditions in terms of possibilities to expand FTZs, and increased foreign investment was generally put forward as one of the major expected benefits, along with preferential access to the US market.

For their part, opponents of the agreement have raised concerns about the effects of the reduction of domestic protection, increased competition from subsidized US agricultural products, the lowering of labor and environmental standards in the quest for investment, augmented privatization of public services (such as water and electricity) and the extension of the tax-exemption regime to production and services beyond the FTZs. In addition, the negotiation process has been denounced for its lack of transparency, the refusal to allow Central America to negotiate as a region, and unequal structures of influence (see Cáceras 2005; Marchetti and Mendoza 2005; for an analysis of the transnational solidarity movement opposing CAFTA, see also Finley-Brook and Hoyt 2009).

In all countries involved, the agreement stirred up protests and demonstrations, sometimes leading to violent confrontations with the police. Although there was no public referendum in Nicaragua to approve CAFTA, a massive campaign was launched promoting the agreement. A survey had estimated the share of the population that could identify CAFTA as a free trade agreement at seven percent (Carrión Fonseca 2008). This finding, along with the launch of an anti-CAFTA campaign, prompted the promotion drive. Billboards and radio commercials presented the agreement as a development opportunity, captured in the slogan “*CAFTA – our bridge to the future*”. In October 2005, the Nicaraguan National Assembly voted to ratify the agreement.

http://www.ustr.gov/Trade_Agreements/Bilateral/CAFTA/Section_Index.html

⁴¹ For a discussion of the promotion of US interests in Central America through the trade regulations of the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI), see Rosen (2002: ch. 8). CBI, which regulated duty-free exports from Central America to the US, was replaced by CAFTA.

In this section I first examine an information videotape that was part of the CAFTA promotion campaign to initiate a discussion about workers and work in the rhetoric of the “New Era”. Within the frame of a political project that justifies integration into the globalizing economy in terms of a common good, I analyze the allocation of workers to particular, diversifying positions in the envisioned processes of individual and national progress. By coincidence, I got to see the videotape when visiting the office of CNZF, where it was played to the staff by a consultant who had been hired to foster a more positive view of CAFTA. The idea was to distribute the videotape to all firms operating in Las Mercedes (Nicaragua’s largest industrial park) so that it could be shown to some 30 000 workers during their lunch break. Focusing on the benefits for the region at large, the 30-minute videotape was probably used as promotion material in other countries as well. After the demonstration, the CNZF staff discussed with the consultant whether the message was clear enough; perhaps the demonstration should be supplemented with drawings and diagrams so that people “would really understand the benefits”?

The videotape begins with a night view of a city, blinking lights vaguely revealing buildings and streets. Then the sun rises over a lake and mountains as a voiceover exclaims “Central America, land of hope!”, while the rays of sunshine grow brighter. Images from the five countries fade into each other, indicating diversity as well as unity, a rich heritage and a promising future for the region.⁴² Tradition meets modernity as we see Maya temples and women in folkloric dress, modern cities and working, smiling people who seem to gleam with confidence in the future. The speaker’s voice continues:

The tropical sun rises over this little piece of land that unites the Americas. We are five countries. A melting pot of people. One single language, one history and a destiny in common. This is Central America! A magical region where more than 30 million people share dreams and hopes. [...] We are Central Americans. A people of entrepreneurs [*gente emprendedora*] who at first light go out to earn our living. That which allows a nation to leave poverty behind is labor. Labor is what allows us to bring food, education and health to our families. It is what dignifies us as human beings. Work, and only work, can turn our dreams into reality. We Central Americans know that our future is not to be found in oilfields or in the minerals of the earth, even less in aid from other countries. Our future is to be found in the conquering of new markets for our products and services.

Viewers are introduced to FTZ workers who look forward to more investment, and we meet the owners and employees of small family firms, eager to try their luck on the US market. The agreement is said to be a chance not only for large business but for all companies characterized by

⁴² The five countries in Central America included in CAFTA are Costa Rica, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua.

quality products, committed workers and a “fighting spirit.” A woman running a tortilla factory in Honduras and one of her employees, a single mother who every morning before dawn begins her long journey to work, make up two of the videotape’s role models. The founder of the company is described as a real entrepreneur, a visionary woman who started out with two empty hands. Now she has a large staff and is confident that the free trade agreement will boost her business as she begins to export to the United States. The single mother shares her optimism and anticipates an increasing salary that will allow her to build a new house and pay for her children’s education.

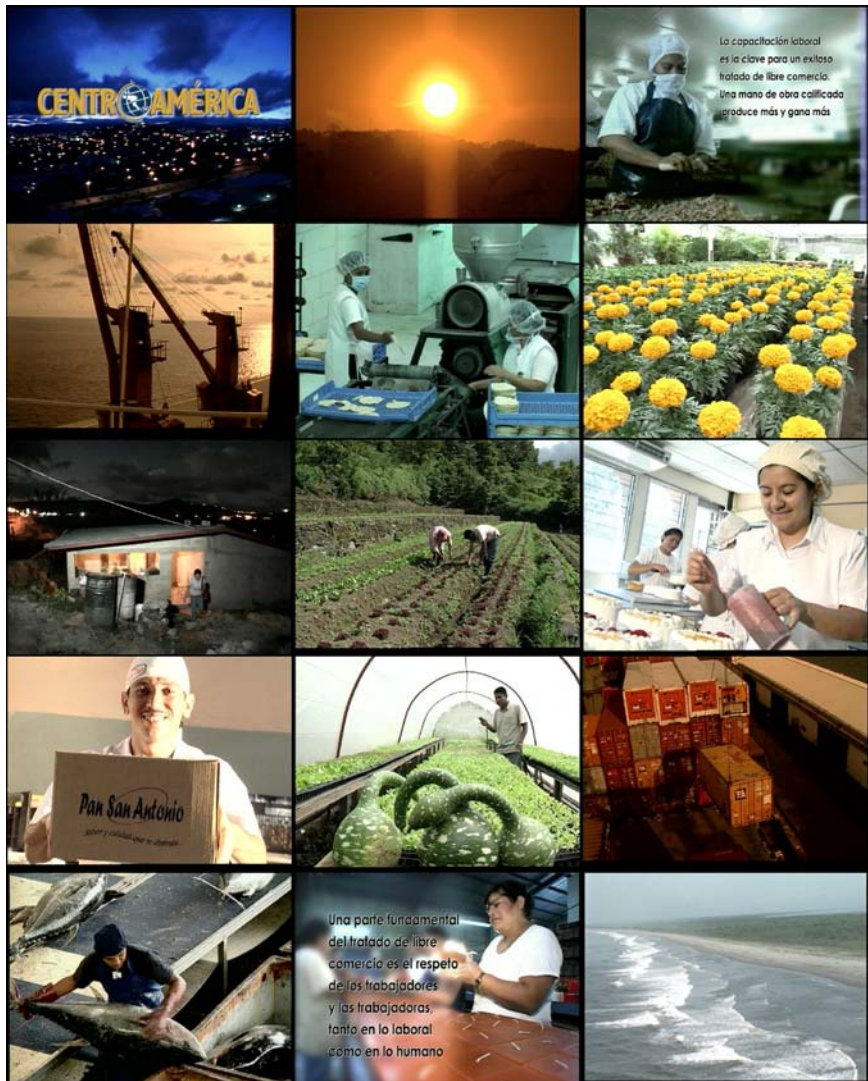


Figure 5. Stills from CAFTA promotional videotape. Used by permission from CNZF.

Throughout the videotape, workers and entrepreneurs in the five countries express similar hopes: the free trade agreement will bring more investment, more opportunities, and better education, and the voiceover gives an assurance that it will give all Central Americans access to a wider variety of products at lower prices. Defensively fending off some recurrent criticisms, the tape stresses that workers' rights and environmental protection are given high priority in the agreement; and, rebutting the argument that subsidized agricultural imports from the US will drive Central American small-scale farmers out of business, it emphasizes their increased opportunities to expand. Towards the end of the videotape, with sequences of laughing children who go to school and receive medical care, the narrator summarizes the message:

We Central Americans believe in work. To sell our products in the United States, which is the market with the greatest purchasing power, would open the door to more and better employment opportunities in each of our countries. This raises the hope for a better life. It means freedom to flourish. To be able to sell the fruit of our land, the products of our hands, the ideas of our minds, the art of our inspiration to the whole world will be the key that opens the door to a future of progress for Central Americans. Central America, land of hope!

In the film's narrative, Central America is a land of hope populated by people who can make dreams of a better life come true. A brighter future, symbolized by the rising sun and a thriving younger generation, is at the same time self-produced and dependent upon an external structure. Like in the CNZF advertising videotape discussed in Chapter 3, workers and work stand out as strategic components; it is around labor that the integration process revolves. However, with a different audience in mind, the emphasis in the latter videotape lies elsewhere. Whereas the previous videotape promoted workers as the region's comparative advantage, here work is turned into a vehicle of national/regional and individual prosperity and dignity.

But if Central America and its people possess all the characteristics and advantages described in the videotape, why has the region not yet taken off? Underlying the promises of a better future are dimly enunciated explanations of the current situation. What we see are specific problematizations of poverty that render particular interventions reasonable. Throughout the tape the region in its general composition is represented as "underdeveloped", framing the present in terms of lack. People who have succeeded started out as poor. The woman with the fighting spirit began with two empty hands, the single mother who works in her bakery is still poor; she lives in a remote shack and currently does not have enough money to pay for her children's education. The communities where FTZs have been constructed used to be poor; now there has been some progress.

These representations thus provide subject positions for the poor and the workers to identify with – the free trade agreement will not primarily benefit the already prosperous few. Further, the tape can be read as an illustration of one of the components that Arturo Escobar (1995) underlines in his critique of “the development gaze”: the subject of development must come to recognize itself as underdeveloped in order to adopt an appropriate conduct in the process of development. In the tape, subjects who identify themselves as “underdeveloped” and desire change are turned into protagonists of free-trade-led social transformations.

Thus, progress in the CAFTA narrative is contingent upon societal organization and individual conduct. Rather than protection and isolation, Central America needs free trade and regional–global integration. For the sake of their respective nations and families, citizens should be hard-working, committed and ready to invest in their own improvement, to become what Beverley Skeggs (2004: 6) construes as “subjects of value”. In the narrative of the videotape, viewers are encouraged to adapt themselves to the market either as providers of labor power or as commodity producers: to work in a FTZ or to build up a small business represent two paths out of poverty, especially so when the free trade agreement ensures larger markets for products and labor.

As discussed in Chapter 2, neoliberal morality privileges the market and individualized solutions, turning entrepreneurship into one of its most cherished values. Indeed, while the two main subject positions that the information videotape makes available, “the worker” and the “entrepreneur”, are given a similar content in terms of their equally benefiting from the trade agreement, the agency and the determination of the entrepreneur is given more attention. Central Americans are described as “a people of entrepreneurs who at first light go out to earn our living”, and the stories of people who started out with nothing and worked their way into a gainful business are retailed as the most persuasive evidence of possible success. When a risk-taking entrepreneur who accumulates her own value constitutes a model that separates productive from unproductive citizens, Skeggs (2004) argues, class interests are being inscribed into different subjects through global and national projections of the self. Such a script also entails a redefined foundation for a legitimate arrangement between the self and the collective, between citizens and the state, between the people and the nation and between Central America and the global.

In the CAFTA videotape, the market is represented as the primary site where citizens’ demands are to be met. Rather than relying upon natural resources or international cooperation – “our future is not to be found in oilfields or in the minerals of the earth, even less in aid from other countries” – work is the ticket to progress: “Work, and only work, can turn our dreams into reality.” The content of “work” in this narrative is largely reducible to activities that stimulate production for export-led growth, and

this requires the mobilization of a wide set of natural/human capacities: “the fruit of our land, the products of our hands, the ideas of our minds, the art of our inspiration”, of which all are organized in accordance with a certain purpose determined by capital’s quest for cross-border accumulation. In return for their efforts, workers are promised respectability: work “is what dignifies us as human beings.” Indeed, labor is presented as the essence of the future and a life of dignity, something that Bolaños often emphasized in his speeches. Talking to a group of workers he elaborated upon the variety of the returns to labor:

...besides the salary that the workers receive there are two other salaries that are immaterial but that I consider important. These two immaterial salaries are, first, the “psychological salary”; it is the recognition, the gratitude, the pat on the shoulder, the smile, the energy, the medal that brightens the work, because we all want recognition in life, as we are getting this morning. The other payment, the second, is a salary that we give to ourselves, the “spiritual salary.” It is the salary that turns us into better human beings. It makes us feel satisfied with the work that we are doing. It is a spiritual compensation of great significance that we give to ourselves in our minds. (Bolaños, August 15, 2003)

The articulation of labor in terms of dignity and self-esteem mirrors the modernist connection between work and the “good life” that can be traced to Marxist elaborations on labor as human-historical progress as well as to existential understandings of labor as the road to individual cultivation and self-realization (see Gürtler 2005). In the videotape and in Bolaños’s speech, work is both a promise and a duty. Here, an element of sacrifice is revealed. Under current circumstances workers are advised to weigh their hardships against the possible future: the well-being of laughing and waving children is presented as an achievable effect of work. In a way, the CAFTA tape reflects the double nature of labor in Marxist thought: progress and detainment, necessity and freedom, hardship and pleasure, alienation and self-realization (see Haug 2008). But of course, in the tape the overall content and purpose of labor are staged as development and progress, without including their opposites.

As Peter Miller and Nikolas Rose (2008) point out, in neoliberal programs of government and governance the citizen is not primarily part of a social collective, someone who has rights and obligations. Rather, the concepts of freedom and autonomy have been established as the most moral claims of political power. To the neoliberal state, legitimacy is contingent upon its ability to sustain a sphere where autonomous agents may pursue self-realization and optimize outcomes for themselves and their families. But freedom in this version does not equal the absence of regulation. Through a multiple collection of experts, agents, projections and commodities “individuals can be governed through their freedom to

choose” (Miller and Rose 2008: 82). In this regard, the videotape pairs with the transformations initiated after the electoral defeat of the FSLN, when the state’s social programs were extensively downsized and state enterprises privatized in tandem with the dismantling of rural and urban cooperatives and attempts to de-radicalize sectors in which labor unions, farmers and women’s organizations had gained a foothold (Walker 1997; Babb 2001). Following a *logic of difference*, existing alliances and interconnected social demands were to be dissolved through the installation of an expanded market logic, encapsulating diverse demands. Thus, to the post-Sandinista governments and their foreign counterparts, the rearrangement of citizenship in accordance with an individualized model became vital in the effort to uproot the revolutionary legacy. However, in the context of growing inequalities and persistently strong social movements, the attempt to install a new spirit around neoliberal values is potentially further undermined by the discrepancies in the narrative of progress.

Like the branding discussed in Chapter 3, the images portrayed in the CAFTA videotape contain contradictions stemming from Nicaragua’s location in the global division of labor. Clearly, the narrative allows for no conflicts or differences traceable to diverse positions within circuits of production and accumulation. For the workers represented in the tape, the possibility of a better life is articulated as “hope”, “freedom to flourish” and “dreams” that can be turned into reality in a “future of progress”. The term “free”, depicting both trade and zones, carries positive connotations: liberty rather than restriction and confinement. Yet freedom and border crossing are characteristics applicable only to capital and the elite (Bauman 1998; Kang 1997).

Indeed, the FTZs and CAFTA bring together two contradictory images of global space that Doreen Massey (2005) addresses: the geography of borderlessness and the geography of border discipline. The free-trade agreement that ensures the circulation of (select) products, capital and services coincides with the heightening of the anti-migration wall between Mexico and the United States and increasing regulation of Mexico’s southern border. Indisputably, the intention of CAFTA is not to open the borders for all kinds of mobility. Products and capital are the elements facilitated by the free trade agreement to cross borders into countries where they find consumers and “captive labor forces”, securely within their confined spaces (Harvey 2005: 168–169). Like the *maquiladora* program in Mexico that was implemented to counter the threat of mass immigration after the cancellation of the *Bracero* program, which had provided the southern fields of the United States with Mexican seasonal labor, CAFTA is a tactic to contain people, to fix them in certain localities. Thus, constrained mobility operates as a silence in the videotape: if it speaks to the “American dream” in its portrayal of the happy life as within reach for everyone who is

prepared to work hard, it is not a dream that should be dreamt *in* the United States by irregular immigrants.

Fabrication of Femininity

On the gates to the FTZ Las Mercedes, a large sign is posted: “*Welcome to the Free Trade Zone ‘Las Mercedes’ – where the best people work.*” In its straightforwardness, the sign appears almost as a formula summoning the worker suited to production in the globalizing economy. One of the strongest interpellations of post-Sandinista restructurings targeted “the worker”. The enthusiastic workers with confidence in the future portrayed in the CAFTA videotape parallel the representations discussed in Chapter 3. The efficiency of the workers was turned into an enticement to investment when images of the country and its people were to be changed: from guerrilla soldier to reliable factory worker. In his speeches, Bolaños persistently returned to the hardworking character of the Nicaraguans: “the laboriousness of the Nicaraguan worker; the responsible Nicaraguan who earns his salary with the sweat of his brow in order to achieve a more dignified life” (Bolaños, July 22, 2004).



Figure 6. Signpost and the entrance gate to the Free Trade Zone Las Mercedes. Photo by author.

Such representations are also imperatives that prescribe the particular conduct that workers should adopt. Indeed, in nation-branding campaigns, citizens' primary task is to become bearers of the brand, to perform the characteristics set out in the national strategy (Aronczyk 2008: 54).

Mainly passing through the gates to Las Mercedes are women in their early twenties. If foreign investment was crucial to the formation of the "New Nicaragua", what does it mean that it is a female cheap labor force that is being branded? Certainly, national hopes of global integration are entwined with gendered constructions of work. In what follows, I discuss the often contradictory positionings of women workers in the circuits of global production, starting with the pre-film commercial that I mentioned in the introductory chapter. This piece was also produced on the initiative of CNZF, but this time addressing workers and the general public. It was on frequent display during the summer of 2006, appearing both on television, often during the commercial breaks of popular soap operas, and as a pre-film commercial in Managua's large movie theatres.

The advertisement revolves around a woman in her twenties who in the first sequences interacts with her children, kissing her sleeping child on the forehead, helping another with his shoelaces; and then we see her two children embrace each other as the woman presents herself: "As a single mother I was obliged to find a job in order to support my children." Smiling, she walks in the middle of the large crowd, like the one that emerges every morning when thousands of workers pass through the gates to the FTZ. The narrator continues: "So eight years ago I started to work as a seamstress in the FTZ and after only six months they promoted me to supervisor!" She moves about in the large garment factory, still smiling, helping other employees and checking the quality of their work as the voiceover affirms: "Over time I have learned that in order to succeed in life, one must work hard and be dedicated to what one is doing. Today, I am proud to work in the FTZ!" At the end of the commercial the protagonist is smiling even more brightly as she stands among hundreds of workers sitting by their machines. The narrator exclaims: "Free Trade Zones of Nicaragua – the hope for the future!" Finally, we see the logo of CNZF set against the backdrop of a blue sky and a waving Nicaraguan flag as a male voiceover declares: "Making it better for you – The Government of Nicaragua!"

The protagonist of the advertisement fits well with the stereotype of the "average" FTZ worker: the young woman. As has been widely noted, FTZ work is coded feminine throughout the world (Benería 2003; Rowbotham and Mitter 1994). In her study of FTZ companies in Mexico, Leslie Salzinger (2003: 9–16) looks into the persisting image of the worker as feminine and docile. Despite the fact that many men have entered the *maquila* industry and although women strike and are not so docile, the image seems to endure, indicating the strength of what Salzinger calls a "transnationally produced fantasy" of "productive femininity". In this

regard the commercial appears to pair investors' demand for hard-working, compliant women.

When the FTZs are described in terms of progress and modernization and as “zones of hope”, the reference to workers as “the best people” creates a flattering position to identify with: they are among the chosen ones, and the future is dependent upon them. This is how Bolaños expressed the role of female workers when talking to a women's organization:

This morning I greet the Nicaraguan women workers who throughout history have known how to carry the banner of work, women who are committed to work, to taking care of their homes, always organizing to make the dream of a prosperous and modern land possible. You participate in one of the most dynamic industries in the world, this contemporary modern world, which is the *maquila*. (Bolaños, March 6, 2005)

The extensive reliance upon women workers in the FTZs may appear to run counter to the encouragement of women's domesticity. Indeed, while women's involvement in paid labor was posed as the key to their emancipation in official Sandinista rhetoric during the 1980s (Metoyer 2000: 20; Mulinari 1995: 73), it was the explicit aim of subsequent governments to restore the “traditional” nuclear family that was allegedly lost during the era of the Sandinistas (Kampwirth 1996: 70). Although the idea of a traditional nuclear family has long been inconsistent with the economic and social conditions in the wider society, women's position played an important symbolic and ideological role (Mulinari 1995). The depiction of women as housewives provided an alternative to Sandinista images of radical femininity, such as the female guerrilla soldier.⁴³ The ideological representation of a desirable femininity was also manifested in the political agenda, for example in the dismantling of the public sector and substantial cuts in social services. In addition, the re-masculinization of some labor activities in the context of the economic crisis made it increasingly difficult for women to participate in the labor market (Babb 2001; Fernández Poncela 1996: 52).

But in the case of the FTZs, women's participation in paid labor was a crucial and permanent part of the official rhetoric. In a speech on International Women's Day in 2006, Bolaños contentedly stated that most of the new employment opportunities created “in the Nicaragua that is advancing, the Nicaragua of the New Era, have gone to women.” The television commercial ends with the triumphant exclamation: “Making it better for you – The government of Nicaragua!”

⁴³ A smiling woman breast-feeding her child while carrying a rifle is perhaps the most famous picture from the Nicaraguan revolution, where it was common for women to participate in armed struggle; see Kampwirth (2004: 19–21).



Figure 7. Stills from TV commercial. Used by permission from CNZF.

In facilitating foreign investment, the government is assuming its responsibility toward citizens with the efforts particularly aimed at women: “the growing demands for labor in the FTZs have begun to release women from the entrapment of rural poverty and to give them new opportunities” (Bolaños, March 5, 2006). As discussed in Chapter 2, contemporary globalization narratives are similarly often retailed on behalf of groups that previously were largely neglected in development accounts. Within an overarching framework of national improvement, participation in the global economy is depicted as women’s path to emancipation.

Thus, the status of women as workers appears to be somewhat ambivalent. Reflecting the tension between conservative gender and family ideals and neoliberal market demands, on the one hand women's domesticity is emphasized, but on the other hand rural and working class women are incorporated into the sector that is supposed to ensure the prosperity of the country. But the ways that women are situated in the process of political and economic restructuring should not be mistaken for an attempt to radically change gender norms. Bolaños makes sure he distances his politics from feminism:

Today there are certain feminist movements saying that women, if they want to climb the social ladder, have to forget about their families and act like men. I think and preach with words and practice the very opposite. To me, woman should not let herself sink to the level of the man but she should stay and remain on her pedestal as the protagonist of life and of history. (Bolaños, Marsh 8, 2006)

Arguing against what he regards to be the feminist ambition, that women abandon their families and true femininity for the sake of advancement, he constructs a femininity that aspires to knit the social fabric together. The presumption of the higher moral status of women may constitute a satisfying point of identification but it is also an imperative for female altruism:

Nicaragua is advancing, and will continue to advance more rapidly and at a more secure rate with the full participation of women filled with hope, with their hearts full of compassion for the present and the future of our children and grandchildren. (Bolaños, Marsh, 24, 2006)

What kind of value is accorded in these statements to the subject responsible for modernization? While there might be reason to expect a contradiction between the encouragement of women's domesticity and their participation in paid labor, by framing women's work as a manifestation of compassion, women can constitute the main labor force in the expanding export production without descending from their pedestals. Then, potentially competing discourses come to share the same space, giving each other strength rather than subverting one another. Further, the woman in the television advertisement represents herself as a single mother with sole responsibility for her children, which is turned into an explanation for her choice to find a job in the zone. Arguably, the message would not work as well if she was not described as a single mother. With the absence of a male provider, the advertisement does not necessarily disturb a general gendered division of labor within the heterosexual nuclear family.

Though the representation of workers as important and "the best" may point to the significance ascribed to them, practices of valuation and

devaluation appear to be deeply entwined. The television commercial represents a strong interpellation of women, who are offered by the government and transnational capital a chance “to succeed in life”. However, it targets not women in general but specifically working class women, eligible for “low-end” manufacturing work. Aihwa Ong (2000: 57) discusses how differentiated positionings in globalization has led to increased fragmentation of citizenship along already existing lines of stratification based on class, gender, race and ethnicity. The role that the commercial encourages women to inhabit is very different from that of the upper classes, which is necessary to establish links with global capital on other levels. It also differs from one of neoliberalism’s most cherished figures, namely, the risk-taking entrepreneur. To be a good worker and a good subject of development may also entail compliancy and satisfaction with a designated and not so entrepreneurial role – such as learning to take pride in FTZ work. That is, diverse positionings and biopolitical measures assign citizens distinct positions in relation to global capital, which means that different types of value apply to different subjects. While appropriate to production, for working class women the ideal femininity, in its bourgeois expression, is not quite within reach.

In her study of Mexican pulp literature, Jean Franco (2004: 197–200) discusses how women are taught the values of hard work and are plotted into lives well-matched to the demands of labor-intensive industry. In the novels that she examines, the moral prescribes that women should break away from traditional family life in order to embrace the virtues of work. So while novels intended for women from higher ranks center on romantic love as the road to the good life, lower class women are advised to put their trust in labor rather than romance, the latter being presented as a luxury of the rich. In these plots, oppressive labor conditions and economic exploitation are disguised as emancipation from violent working class men and traditional family life, a potential obstacle to capitalist development in Mexico.

Working class women’s acquiescence in the position reserved for them in the process of economic integration is contingent on their embracing the right set of virtues, those of the hireable woman worker: she “must work hard” and be “dedicated”. Through FTZ work women are, according to the message conveyed by the advertisement, guaranteed a livelihood and respectability. The fact that the woman says that “over time” she has learned the importance of working hard and that “today” she is proud to work in the zone perhaps suggests an assumption that many women have the wrong attitude to work, in particular FTZ work, and that they, too, just like the protagonist in the advertisement, must come to understand that this is their ticket to progress. In addition, the reference to time and endurance can be read as a premonition of the hard conditions in the FTZs, which may come as a shock to workers, the work being something that it takes

time to get used to. Against this implicitly negative representation of FTZ work, the advertisement also underscores the possible upward mobility of the job (“after only six months they promoted me”). In his speeches, Bolaños similarly constitutes FTZ work as a good job, describing the sector as “one of the most dynamic industries in the world”. Perhaps parallels can be drawn with the upgrading of feminized domestic work in advertisements where hi-tech products and equipment add an air of professionalism to unpaid labor (Niblock 2001: 298).

In the television commercial, workers are associated with particular values such as efficiency, responsibility and enthusiasm. Or as Bolaños expresses it: “the pretty, enthusiastic single mother who every day travels by bus from Ciudad Sandino to the FTZ to earn a livelihood for herself and her children” (Bolaños, May 1, 2003). These qualities are not particularly associated with training or education but rather are characteristics that workers are assumed to already have. Values are being essentialized, and being able to demonstrate them is often required for employment in the first place (Skeggs 2004:73). So what does it mean to be appropriate to production, to be the “best people” in the FTZs? In an interview with a CNZF official, I asked for his interpretation of the sign outside Las Mercedes:

We think that...first of all because the human capital is most important in this context. Because if you think about it, these people are here, even though there is the [transportation] strike going on and many of them are living far away. But it is also people, and this is what the investors themselves have told us...if they hire someone in Nicaragua today and if they hire someone in Honduras or Costa Rica today, it is the workers in Nicaragua who learn the fastest and produce the most, in quantity and quality. So the Nicaraguans, perhaps because they are so desperate and need a job, are pushing themselves to reach high rates of production as quickly as possible... That's why we think that we have the best workers! (Interview, April, 2005)

The “best people” are here deciphered as an effect of necessity. Specific traits are constituted and sustained in order to make production profitable in its different segments. As the statement suggests, the suitability of workers is inseparable from their distressed conditions. Female suitability is entwined with the lack of alternatives and protective labor laws (Kang 1997; Mohanty 2003; Medley and Carroll 2004). The regulations and precarious labor contracts that workers are subjected to entail the constant threat of dismissal and ensure that production goals are met. An extensive apparatus of control resembling that associated with the “scientific management” of Taylorism suggests that the properness of workers is something that needs to be achieved. Through discipline and control it is ensured that workers comply with the notions that were stated as the reason for preferring them

to begin with: they have to become what they were said to already be. The values attached to the “best people” are not generalizable or immediately transferable; excellence might be an a priori idea but it is only contextually (un)realizable.

The Deficient Worker

In the nation-branding campaign discussed in Chapter 3, workers were marketed as the primary asset. Their hospitality, “richness” and quality constituted an oft-repeated argument for smooth and profitable investment. However, as I argued, such a market strategy comes perilously close to associations that a narrative of progress and modernization attempts to avoid: cheap, sweated, female labor in a context where few employment alternatives exist. In the National Development Plan, the labor force is, by contrast, represented as inadequate to the needs of the nation:

The workforce is characterized by a low level of qualification rooted in high levels of illiteracy, low levels of schooling, and limitations in access to education and technical training, which in turn has a negative impact on productivity and income levels. (National Development Plan, paragraph 255)

Additionally, at the same time as workers are being depicted as an asset or as the “best people”, real workers are likely to be judged as not quite fitting such descriptions. Being poor, working class, most often young and female and not seldom single mothers without much formal education, they hardly belong to categories that are usually highly valued. On the contrary, they are more likely to be represented as a problem: not educated enough, as having too many children and as being irresponsible. Frequently, rumors about the bars close to the FTZ were communicated to me in interviews with officials. There, workers were said to drink, fight and sell sex.⁴⁴ The ideal type of the “good worker”, or the subject of value, is something that workers are always evaluated against. Moreover, part of workers’ value is that they don’t have much value, as expressed in an interview with a CNZF official:

We have qualified labor but we also have labor that is not qualified [...] In other countries where there is a lot of employment there is no base for this type of employment. For example, in Costa Rica the workers are more qualified and demand higher salaries. But there are also other opportunities. So the businesses that we have here don’t pay in Costa Rica because the people will not be satisfied with this type of work...the investors will not find employees for their companies. (Interview, April, 2005)

⁴⁴ For a similar observation in the context of Mexican FTZs, see Livingston (2004), and for an historical account of the association between women’s labor and prostitution, see Scott (1999).

Here, vectors of valuation and devaluation operate in unison, the simultaneity perhaps being a prerequisite for the way that production is organized. In speeches and interviews, representatives of the government often sought to balance such ambivalences, for example by countering common notions about the FTZs; the predominance of the garment industry and Asian investors is defied through the insistence on a diversity of production and capital investment. As discussed in Chapter 3, Bolaños's future visions included the establishment of capital-intensive production such as car and computer assemblage. Despite the focus on female workers in advertisements and rhetoric, their presence was sometimes downplayed. In a conversation with two lawyers at *Corporación de Zonas Francas* (Free Trade Zone Corporation, CZF), the institution responsible for the legal framework of the FTZs, the issue of the predominance of female workers was described rather as part of the slandering of the Zones:

Sofie: I was thinking that, until now, the majority of the workers have been young women. Do you have any thoughts on that?

Eliza: That is part of the composition of the population. We are a young nation and young women make up the majority of the population. For economic reasons, there is still a lot of migration, many prefer that the man leaves to work outside the country and the woman stays here. That is something that has an impact. What is more, we also had the war, many died.

Sofie: But it also seems that employers prefer to hire women, right?

Eliza: That I don't know.

Gustavo: But if you look at the structure of the FTZs, there are also many men working.

Eliza: The difference is not that big!

Gustavo: It's not that big!

Eliza: The thing is that it attracts a lot of attention because of the bad reputation it has been acquiring. The issue of pregnancy leave and the issue of the treatment of women. But the difference is not that big.

Sofie: But...

Eliza: Look, this is something very positive too, that a lot of women who had other types of work that did not pay as much, they have now improved their conditions through working in the FTZs. Before maybe they worked as maids and now they have a job with a schedule and social security [...] With the FTZs they have entered new areas and hence their situation has improved. (Interview, June, 2006)

The conversation reveals a reluctance to label FTZ work as feminine, implicitly suggesting that work is created for the wrong kind of workers. In her discussion of the *maquila* program in Mexico, Salzinger traces a similar controversy around gender and labor. Replacing the *Bracero* program (temporary labor migration to the US) in 1965, the border factories were constructed to give employment to seasonal Mexican agricultural workers. While both the US and the Mexican authorities were concerned about the

unemployed male *Braceros* in the border region, transnational employers opted for women instead. The *maquila* program was represented as a failure and a threat to family structures and respectability; the media featured articles on destroyed families, women who had degenerated into drinking and prostitution and unemployed men living as gigolos (Salzinger 2003: 36–40). Likewise, although female workers are highly integral to the marketing and operation of the FTZs, there are reasons to disengage the zones from the attributes of production at the bottom of the hierarchy: the garment industry, Asian investors, and “unskilled” female workers do not necessarily match prospects of advancement.

Moreover, the image evoked by the reference to “the best people” is displaced by a persistent description of women workers as young and inexperienced, a portrayal that seems to be widely reproduced (Mohanty 2003: ch. 6). In the words of a trade union leader who in an interview described the difficulties of organizing FTZ workers: “The majority of the workers in the FTZs are young people. The majority are young girls, housewives. They have no working experience and they do not know their rights or obligations.” Even though they work full time, women are not primarily thought of as workers. In the view of the trade union leader they are still housewives. Conceivably, only some workers qualify as experienced, a definition that coincides with gendered categorizations.

To refer to certain workers as young and lacking in experience and skill can be regarded as a mediation between contesting logics and demands. Writing about the industrialization process in South Korea, Hagen Koo (2001) points to the contradictory positioning of working class subjects. On the one hand, workers were referred to as “industrial warriors” and were encouraged to make every effort to contribute to the progress of their nation. On the other hand, their development of a strong working class identity was suppressed. Depictions of the work as unskilled and the naming of workers as “factory girls” and “factory boys” evoked associations with servants, which functioned as a discouragement. Though many FTZ workers are young, the frequent insistence on their youth and inexperience can be regarded as part of the disciplining measures that workers are subjected to, as a way to consign them to “a premature state of being” (Kang 1997: 424).

The fact that workers are characterized as “warriors” or “the best people” and represented as young and unskilled points to a tension between workers as the engine of labor-intensive development strategies and the negative effects that a working class identity may have on low-cost, flexible production. In line with Foucault’s (1994) discussion of the emergence of a labor force (see Chapter 2), workers constitute both a prerequisite for a competitive position within the global economy *and* a threat. In order to adjust workers to the rhythm of production and to restrain unprofitable or menacing conduct, a whole range of measures are adopted to regulate the

relation between the workers' body and the apparatus of production, and to make possible the distinction between the "good" and the "bad" worker. Such measures also include the steering of worker's identifications in an appropriate direction: the "best people" but not with far-reaching demands regarding wage and labor conditions.

The regulation of workers and their perceived deviation from the norm of the good worker entails gendered dimensions. If the female body is portrayed as a natural object for capital's needs, it is also represented as a potential impediment to efficient production. When asked about the difficulties that many women encounter in the FTZs, the same CNZF official who gave his view on the "best people" said:

It is a question of culture. The levels of education are so low that the people do not understand that they first need to prepare themselves in order to progress in the labor market. The people do not understand that formal education is a tool... There are many who do not prepare themselves at all. So, what can they expect in the labor market? What do they have to offer? Nothing! I meet a lot of women here. It went bad the first time, then they meet another man and have more children. The man leaves them again and they have already three children. And their salary is still the same because they haven't prepared themselves. So she thinks that the pay isn't enough to help her out. And this is a social problem. Nicaragua has the highest fertility rates in Latin America because it is the poorest country, not only economically speaking but socially as well. (Interview, April, 2005)

Whereas work in the FTZs is a vehicle for economic integration and growth, the workers are represented as backward. Their shortcomings, lack of education and irresponsible sexual behavior serve as both reasons and justifications for their low wages and as the explanation of the problems that they encounter in the FTZs. As it seems, women are accused of overproducing children, thereby harming the prospects for national progress. Indeed, in Nicaragua as well as in other parts of the world employers commonly demand pregnancy tests before hiring workers, and some companies provide employees with contraceptive pills (see Livingston 2004). Discussing the formation of proper subjects through labor control and harassment in "low-end" factories, Ong (2000: 63) notes that many of the measures are centered on the female workers' bodies. So though women are, directly or indirectly, represented as naturally suitable for production, their bodies are at the same time subject to careful monitoring and regulation.

While FTZ workers around the world are most often imagined as female, this does not imply that the correlation between femininity and the ideal worker is unequivocal. The female labor force is marketed as cheap and docile but it does not entirely fit the discourse of progress. Also, the work that women are represented as being proper to and that they are expected to

take pride in is low-paid, tedious, lacking upward mobility and associated with workplace injuries, and is often performed in unhealthy locations. Again, values and assets are bound up with power situations in the global division of labor, and the line between having and not having value seems to be a fluid one. If workers are represented as always slightly deviating from the “good worker” the organization of production in the FTZs may appear less unreasonable: although the working conditions are not all *that* good, for *them* they may be perceived as good enough.

Moving on to the political project of the FSLN, I will now discuss the scope and manifestations of alternative visualizations of citizens and workers in processes of transformation within the frame of global capital.

Popular Struggle in the Sandinista Imaginary

One of the eye-catching billboards in hot pink, the Sandinistas’ symbol color, that were erected at Managua’s roundabouts and street corners after the FSLN’s victory carries a stanza from the Internationale: “*Arriba los pobres del Mundo!*” (Arise ye wretched of the Earth!). A large crowd waving red and black Sandinista flags makes up the background from which the central character emerges: Daniel Ortega, wearing jeans and a white shirt with rolled-up sleeves. His fist is raised in the sky, his body almost luminous with a halo around his head. Immediately above Daniel is an image of Augusto C. Sandino riding a horse and gazing out from underneath the rim of his characteristic hat. Both the historic leader and the people who are called upon to rise are obscured and in the shadows – the wretched as a political force is implied rather than made explicit. The poster apparently exhorts the poor to make common cause with the oppressed around the world and to direct their demands to local and global structures that unite as they disperse. As companions and guides in struggle, Ortega and Sandino, the two almost merging in the picture, seem to be the ones who pronounce the possibility and obligation of the poor to revolt. The name of the leader is written across the image of the people, as a greeting or a signature.

In this part of the chapter I analyze how the FSLN constructs its political subject, a subject that may allow for social transformation. In the previous section, I discussed subject constitution in terms of interpellations of workers as proper to export-led growth, as desiring a particular development path. This rhetoric was largely centered on representations of individual citizens as role models who through incarnating the values of work in the global economy could turn promises of progress into reality and inspire others to do the same. As glimpsed in the image and text of the billboard, the subject of the FSLN’s political project is a different one.



Figure 8. Billboard in Managua. Photo by author.

Whereas the neoliberal/conservative model contains no necessary conflicts between different social groups, as all demands are to be satisfied by the market, here society is organized around a fundamental class divide. The logic of the poster reflects the Marxist understanding of class as both a descriptive and a transformative category: class indicates a position in relation to circuits of production and accumulation but is also the foundation for the recasting of these relations.

The context where the billboard appears is in many respects different from when the Internationale was first sung, or, indeed, from the FSLN's earlier government of 1979–1990: processes of industrialization, rural disintegration, urbanization and migration have altered the composition of society. In the following, I trace the political subject in the FSLN rhetoric in relation to its political project discussed in Chapter 3. As the discussion will make manifest, the position of the (female) FTZ worker is often only indirectly discernible; unlike in the rhetoric of the PLC, she plays no evident part in the project of the FSLN. Nonetheless, to the extent that the project represents a challenge to the neoliberal framework, the articulation of possible subjects of transformation may form the point of departure for a discussion about the contents and strategies of a politics *for* those on the “flip side” of capitalist expansion.

The Power of the People: Populism and Emancipatory Striving

We have to construct this New Society. And who is going to construct it? The people are going to construct the New Society! The government is only an instrument that the people use [...] because of this, the power of the people, the citizens' power, because of this the People are the President. For this reason, the People as President! (Ortega, January 03, 2008)

A leader who is featured as an embodiment of the historical mission of the nation, supported by the masses of the present and the forefathers of the past – the image of Daniel Ortega standing in front of “the people”, above them and at some distance from them – arguably evokes associations of *caudillismo* in Latin America, the phenomenon of power concentration and personality cult. But in this and in other representations, “the people” are far from irrelevant or peripheral. Often, the governing party and its leadership are depicted as a direct continuation of the people, as suggested in the speech quoted above and in two of the government’s frequently propagated slogans: “*Nicaragua gana con vos!*” (Nicaragua wins with you!) and “*El Pueblo Presidente!*” (The People are the President!). In the construction of a new society, the government is but a tool in the hands of the people. Thus, the distinction between the governing and the governed tends to be reversed or abolished in Sandinista rhetoric, as further illustrated by the interpretation by Rosario Murillo, Daniel Ortega’s wife, of the results of the 2006 election, when the FSLN won 38 percent of the vote, as a demonstration that “the people have decided to return to power” (Murillo, January 10, 2008).

Indisputably, the relation between the people, plural but cohesive, as the foundation of power and the representatives through which the will of the people is expressed lies at the heart of the democratic idea. How is this relation portrayed in Sandinista rhetoric? The articulation of the people as the fundamental political force challenging the neoliberal order assumes several dimensions. One of them involves stressing of the ordinariness of the party leadership. The socio-economic gap between representatives and represented is depicted as small, allowing for mutual identification. In contrast to the elite that presumably dominates the opposition parties, it is maintained that the leadership of the FSLN originates in the broad stratum of society: “It must be emphasized that a large majority of the ministers of the cabinet consists of comrades who come from the people and belong to social organizations” (FSLN 2007c: 3). As members of social movements, representatives are not detached from everyday life, something that is represented as a guarantee of genuine commitment but also as an explanation of some of the problems of the new government. Speaking to the members of the cabinet, Ortega stressed its roots in society at large:

This largely explains the difficulties that this cabinet has faced: these comrades, ministers, directors of institutions...they don't have fancy last names or lineages, they come from the people! All of you come from the people, to serve the people...Indisputably, you have the capacity of the best graduates from any North American or European university and above all you have a commitment to the people and a vocation to serve. This is the great difference between the ministers of the Government of Citizen Power and the functionaries of the previous governments, where there were a lot of fancy last names, a lot of diplomats but intent only on constructing and developing a model that made them richer by the day while the poor got poorer. (Ortega, December 18, 2007)

Whereas the previous governments were run by an educated and transnational class, possessing highly valued knowledge that allowed them to circulate smoothly in economic and political circles to their own benefit, the current leaders are portrayed as honest in their endeavor to serve the common good, but, because of their class positions, sometimes lacking the tools to do so. Belonging to the people and knowing their interests, the government and the people together oppose the elite that continues to protect its interests and still enjoys considerable advantages. In this way, the government and the people, the will of the representatives and that of the represented, are portrayed as coinciding. The slogan "The people are the President!" implies an ideal of unmediated representation and identification. As Ortega puts it in one of his speeches:

There are so many battles! Land to the peasants, battles for small industries and small merchants, against unemployment, for free health care and education, against hunger. It is not Daniel demanding this, as a person...the people of Nicaragua are demanding it through the person Daniel, because in Nicaragua the people demand! (Ortega, May 1, 2007)

Thus, "the people" are represented as a whole and the President as their embodiment; what the people want is what the party does. Along with the representation of the leadership as synonymous with the people, another dimension of the position of the "the people" as the political subject in the Sandinista project is the establishment of direct democratic structures, described in the FSLN's policy documents as the "political pillar" of its project. The second year of the FSLN's term was nominated the year of Citizens' Power, with the aim of organizing citizens in councils throughout the country. At the inauguration of the program, Rosario Murillo, as the minister responsible for the project, expressed her vision:

We know that in 2008, the Year of Citizens' Power, we gather strength, we join hands, our intelligence, our inspiration because Nicaragua loves us...Together to succeed! And we know that united all of us win and make Nicaragua win. With wisdom, serenity, love, which is the will and decision of

God, our grand Nicaraguan family, everyone together, will move on!
(Murillo, January 3, 2008)

Through the establishment of *Concejos de Poder Ciudadano* (Councils of Citizens' Power, CPCs) the old state form, described as primarily a relation between the government and big corporations, is to be replaced by a model that combines the state, the councils and economic associations consisting of small and medium-size producers. Direct democracy aims at reconciliation through the massive organization of citizens and "through the symbiosis between the government and civil society" (FSLN 2007a: 6). Thus, *El Pueblo Presidente* is to be materialized through the CPCs, a structure of communication from neighborhood committees to the national cabinet in the hands of the President, via municipal and departmental cabinets (Close 2009: 118–119).⁴⁵ In effect organized as a parallel government centered on the presidential office instead of the National Assembly, the direct democratic endeavor has been extensively opposed. It has been questioned whether the CPCs can provide a pluralistic space or whether they represent a structure for partisans only, crushing already existing forms of civic participation through a system of patronage that is being imposed from above (Grigsby 2007; Muñoz 2007).⁴⁶

In the FSLN rhetoric, the establishment of the CPCs was a necessary step to renovate the structures of civil participation. According to the FSLN's policy documents, civil society had become imbued with neoliberal values under the previous governments. At best it cushioned the social destruction caused by the privatization of social services; but it is also said to have been co-opted by the neoliberal parties to become a facilitator for the operation of foreign capital and neoliberal values (FSLN 2007b). As schools of participation and forums for promoting collective interests, the CPCs are pictured as fundamentally necessary to counter the influence of the oligarchy. One FSLN policy document rebuts the criticism of the CPCs thus:

...in Nicaragua the right has lost governmental power and the old parties insist on presenting themselves as the possessors of truth, democracy and social justice. On the political level their reaction is to allege that the institutional changes are antidemocratic and dictatorial, and that the social reforms are populist, that is to say, our politics is just a mechanism for us to

⁴⁵ Each CPC level has its own coordinator, often an FSLN representative. Apart from their geographical dispersal, they also have a structure corresponding to different policy areas such as citizen's rights, education, infrastructure and health care; and the CPCs are responsible for distributing food to the poorest *barrios* at subsidized prices (Close 2009: 118–119).

⁴⁶ After several attempts to suspend the CPCs or to reduce their status to that of consultative organs, the Supreme Court (with eight members from the FSLN and eight from the PLC) declared the CPCs unconstitutional but also ruled that they may continue to exist as long as they are not funded by the state. Thus the CPCs remain, financed by off-budget funds derived from, for example, sales of subsidized Venezuelan oil (Close 2009: 119–120).

maintain power. What they really fear is losing the privileged positions that they have enjoyed until now in political, social and economic life. (FSLN 2007d: 1)

Disputing the description of the CPCs as an instrument whereby the government imposes its politics on the population, Ortega represents the councils not as a program established from above but as the spontaneous product of the popular will: “Can you imagine that mentality! [...] the CPCs won’t disappear as a result of anyone’s decree because they are simply the incarnation of the people” (Ortega, January 10, 2008).

In view of the party’s consequent insistence on knowing, representing and being the people, is not the charge of populism correct? Arguing for the existence of two left waves in Latin America, Jorge Castañeda (2006) would classify the FSLN’s political project as belonging to the “wrong left”, together with the governments of Venezuela and Bolivia. As opposed to the “right left”, which has opted for moderate reformism or “third way” social democracy (for example, in Brazil and Uruguay), the wrong kind, according to Castañeda, has its roots in Latin American populist, demagogic rule, and seeks to polarize those who are for and those who are against the United States.⁴⁷ Indeed, if revolutionary movements in Latin America once constituted a source of inspiration and hope for the left in the West, contemporary projects are met with less (or divided) enthusiasm and are often rejected as populist. Hervé do Alto (2008) attributes such a reading to the European left’s problematic relationship to leftist ideology and the popular classes: having basically lost the ideological battle with neoliberalism, the popular classes emerge as a problem to be solved rather than as subjects to defend or win over. Additionally, the charge of populism can arguably be read as an infantilization of the non-white “masses”, who in deeply divided societies are deemed to be easily and irrationally influenced by strong leaders (Lievesley and Ludlam 2009: 17).

Elaborating a conception of populism that diverges from association with irresponsible politics, Ernesto Laclau (2006; 2005) argues that a populist rupture is vital if political change is to occur. The politicization of social demands, the mobilization of the masses and the construction of a new collective popular actor are what any elite striving to conserve the status quo is particularly afraid of. Thus, Laclau disputes common depictions of populism, such as that its vagueness differentiates it from “mature” political agendas. Against the notion of populism as a failure of politics and a force simply feeding on already existing social demands and groups, he understands the construction of a group, “the people”, as the core of populism and, in effect, the core of politics. The FSLN’s project can

⁴⁷ For discussions and critique of Castañeda’s argument, see Leiras (2007); Lynch (2007); Garcia (2008); Lievesley and Ludlam (2009).

be understood to follow a *logic of equivalence*: particular demands are taken to have something in common, to be rooted for example in the power of the “empire” or the “oligarchy”. A qualification for a populist discourse, Laclau contends, is precisely the division of society into two camps where “the people” comprise a smaller entity than the community at large but claim to be the sole legitimate totality. The link between social complaints, Laclau emphasizes, is not something that is found, like the lowest common denominator, but something that is constituted by being named, indicating the significance of rhetoric.

An equivalence between diverse demands is made possible through the elasticity of the chain that connects them. Encompassing a variety of demands, it needs signs such as “freedom” or “justice”, what Laclau describes as *empty signifiers*. Precisely because they lack content they allow for a variety of identifications within a diffuse totality. In Sandinista rhetoric, which introduces a sharp distinction between the people and their enemies, “revolution” and “love” can be thought of upon as signs that, because of their lack of meaning, may include various demands for a different society. And what about Ortega himself, who appears on billboards across the city, either alone or with “the people” and the heroes of the past in the background? Indeed, the less society is kept together in a heterogeneous space where the identities of neither “the people” nor “the enemies” are easily determined, the more dependent is the populist articulation on a transcendental moment. As a last resort, the name of the leader may mark the unity of the group (Laclau 2005: 97–99).

In the context of global capitalism, which comprises dimensions that are not only economic and where subjects are increasingly overdetermined in political, economic, military and technological networks, Laclau (2005: 230, 249–250) argues that class struggle becomes “an almost meaningless formula”. Accordingly, he proposes populism as the transformative option that may expand horizons as there is no particular social group, like the working class, that is predetermined to constitute the basis of politics.⁴⁸ An effect of hegemonic struggle, the “people” emerge as a political subject through the contingent articulation of social demands that make an array of struggles equivalent in the antagonism between “the people” and “them”.

Though I think that Laclau’s dissection of the concept of populism offers an apt elucidation of the tendencies within Sandinista politics, the question is whether populism, in this context and generally, should be welcomed as an emancipatory vehicle. And how might his claim that class struggle is outdated be understood? In a response to Laclau, Slavoj Žižek (2008: 289) notes that class is consistently ruled out as a component in the analysis of

⁴⁸ This does not mean that Laclau argues that populism is always a benign, progressive force. Not representing a particular ideology, populism comes in left-wing, right-wing and conservative versions.

different struggles (it may be about ethnic oppression, sexism or religion, but whatever it is, it is *not* class struggle). The response to the post-Marxist claim that the working class, in the presence of a plurality of struggles and subjects positions, has lost its position as *the* revolutionary subject, Žižek argues, is that this is a priority that the working class *never had*. Disputing Laclau's opposition between the "working class" as an existing social group and "the people" who emerge as a result of hegemonic articulation, Žižek (2008: 286) delineates an understanding of the working class as a non-group that occupies a contradictory position: as a productive force with a distinctive relation to capital, it is needed by those in power, who, however, cannot find an appropriate place for it. Economic determinism or "pure" politics may be regarded as equally ideological. Along with the notion of the economy as a determining structure, every political or cultural condition can be reduced to an effect of the economic base, "*except* class struggle, which is the political in the economic itself". In the social organization of production, "the economy" represents the structural instability and contradiction (Žižek 2008: 293–295).

In addition to questioning Laclau's elaboration on the subject of radical politics (the "working class" vs. "the people"), Žižek (2008: 268) describes populism as containing a "constitutive mystification", a negation of complexity in the reduction of political struggles to the act of identifying and blaming the "enemy". Like the post-political strive discussed in Chapter 3, populism contains a dimension of frustration or depoliticization (given all these problems I have, *someone* has got to be responsible!). Such fetishistic outbursts of social discontent, Žižek (2008: 279–282) writes, represent a "refusal-to-know". In populism, the root of the problem is not the system as such, but the corrupt or the parasitical who take advantage of it. Therefore, populism can be described as fuelled by fear, or as Žižek (2008: 304) puts it: "the ultimate difference between true radical-emancipatory politics and populist politics is that authentic radical politics is active, imposing, enforcing its vision, while populism is fundamentally reactive, a reaction to a disturbing intruder."

In the last section of this chapter, I discuss how a certain politics of fear operates in FSLN rhetoric that mobilizes opposition against the oligarchy and the imperialists, a politics that appears to foreclose the formulation of class-oriented social demands. But first a few notes on the general composition of the FSLN's privileged political subject, which is indeed "the people".

Revolutionary Subjects

What positions are included under the rubric of “the poor” who are called upon in the poster to rise up, or “the people” who have “decided to return to power”? If the populist gesture involves the formation of an entity out of a part, what are the traits of the fraction that can be turned into a whole? In Ortega’s Labor Day speech a subject that may convey and support the Sandinista agenda emerges:

The sun is strong, right? But the workers don’t run from the sun, they don’t run from their exploiters... They fight for their rights, against the exploiters! [...] Never before has the world been so divided between the rich minority and the poor majority. Savage capitalism, the empire tries to curb our people. But our people are rising up against that empire. (Ortega, May 1, 2007)

In Sandinista discourse, legitimacy is sought through the claim to turn the wretched and the poor into the People, the constitutive political subject. Courageously, the workers and the poor stand against global forces; they do not let themselves be subordinated by the empire. Here, the split between the legitimate foundation of society, “the poor majority”, and the illegitimate counter-force, “the rich minority”, is unambiguous. To be part of the people is to struggle against the exploiters. But what are the elements and limits of such a struggle, for instance in the context of the FTZs? To raise the minimum wage, as Ortega proposes in the same speech, or to close the factories if, as he often suggests, they are manifestations of the imperialist order “where the big shark eats the little fish”? In a context where the goals are not straightforwardly specified, what would be the characteristics and actions of workers who do let themselves be subordinated? At times, the subject of Sandinista politics is articulated in more all-encompassing terms. Here, the people are not explicitly defined in terms of what they do or what they want; like a family, the nation–people constitute a natural and continuous entity:

The people united will never be defeated...! The people, the women, the men, the youth, gals and guys, the boys and girls...that is the people! From the girls and boys to the grandparents, the great-grandparents and the great-great-grandparents, this is the people! What a beautiful word...the people united, the family united. To say the people united is to say the family united. (Ortega, January 3, 2008)

The transformative potential of “the people” as a political subject is conceivably marked by its two significations. As pointed out by Giorgio Agamben, the concept of the people has a double meaning in European languages, not least in Spanish: *el pueblo* means both the *People* as in a unified

political body and the *people* as in the ordinary, the poor or inferior classes. In Agamben's (2000: 32) words, the people "is what cannot be included in the whole of which it is a part as well as what cannot belong to the whole in which it is always already included." As a term, "the people" designates both the site of power and those who are largely expelled from politics, a peculiarity that reveals the split between "the people" and "the People", the excluded and the included.

One tension in the constitution of a suitable political subject is that between "the people" and "the mass". "The mass" and "the mob" as irrational and unpredictable, as threats to social order, have throughout history been regulated, disciplined, criminalized and pathologized (Jonsson 2008; Laclau 2005). In this respect, the formation of a nation-people can be conceived of as the attempt to contain the masses. Allegedly representing and turning the poor majority into the People, the FSLN has still to constrain its unpredictable dimensions. For instance, the FTZ workers are not only perceived as a subversive element in the benign sense. To the Sandinista official who took over one of the top positions of the CZF after the change of government, the workers of his section are not primary a force for social transformation but rather elements that must be restricted:

But what would happen socially if these 90 000 people who are working were unemployed in the streets, looking for something to do? Many would have been involved in drugs, criminality and robbery. So we have one universe today where people are working, we would have another universe where people are not working but dedicated to social disorder. I am telling you that in some way the fact that they are working is preferable at this moment, that they are occupied, that they dedicate eight hours a day to something and work to at least modestly satisfy their needs than if, in contrast, they had no occupation. (Interview, March, 2008)

The mass that must be contained and occupied in order not to provoke "social disorder", the maintenance of stability thus outweighing arguments about unacceptable conditions in the FTZs and salaries below subsistence level, can, however, also be turned into a geopolitical argument. On various occasions, Ortega asserted that in conversations with US representatives he had made clear that without a new political agenda their country would continually be invaded by irregular immigrants, regardless of CAFTA and no matter how much they tried to close their borders:

Every time I say that free trade must be transformed into fair trade; but they only complain about the immigrants from Mexico and Central America. I am telling them that they have to recognize the inequalities, so that our economies can really develop, otherwise they'll continue to come, risking their lives. Once they understand this, they won't have to invest in the wall. (Ortega, August 26, 2007)

The transformation of the people into the People is not merely an act of recognition in FSLN rhetoric. While the people who implement, support and benefit from the government's policies are sometimes represented as *a priori* constituted, the agenda simply reflecting a will and needs already in place, the people are also represented as a problem, an obstacle to the fulfillment of the political project. After all, the FSLN was returned to power with a mandate representing only 38 percent of the vote. To achieve hegemony in a society that over 16 years has been permeated with neoliberalism is represented as the crucial challenge facing the party. Neoliberal values, it is argued, are entrenched in the population and, consequently, the people must be transformed. The economic and the political pillars that are described in the FSLN's policy documents as the foundation of an alternative society are contingent upon the formation of a new consciousness: "Without a new political subject, without a new economic subject, a new social model will not be possible" (FSLN 2007a: 6). In an interview with one of the FSLN's "strategists" about the role of religion in the Sandinista project, the values of the people emerged as a limit to radicalism:

If we want to win the consensus of the people we can't challenge all popular values. For example, I am an atheist, I don't believe and I have the right not to. But if I don't, if I...this is not my priority, it's not *my* revolution, it's the revolution of the Nicaraguan people who have traditional religious values. If you asked me "what do we do with the churches?", I'd tell you "we turn them into libraries or discos!" But that's madness! I'm representing the popular will, which I can't go against. (Interview, March, 2008)

Here, the people who define the path of the revolution are portrayed as more conservative than what would perhaps have been the preferred agenda of the party, indicating the ambiguity of the derivation and tenure of "the revolution" – since at the same time the real interests of the people, who are still in the grip of neoliberalism, are represented as obscured. A policy document expresses the need for the formation of a new consciousness thus:

For the Sandinista Front, the principle site of the ideological battle, in the heart of the population, will be the Councils of Citizens' Power, where the people will have the chance to question the neoliberal system and access a political education that they have lacked all this time, which from now on is the most challenging project for all the other forces that pursue social hegemony. (FSLN 2007b: 9)

The role of the CPCs in the "ideological battle" is thus to educate the people, to train them as political actors and provide them with an arena where they can challenge neoliberalism. Although the construction of "the people" appears to oscillate between being not (yet) quite proper and

constituting the origin of the FSLN's agenda, here one of the most consequent definitions of "the people" is made manifest: party support differentiates the people from their enemies.

A similar equation between popular interest and the politics of the FSLN was prevalent in the analysis of the party's electoral loss in 1990. In their article "Can the Subaltern Vote?", Medovoi, Raman and Robinson (1990) question the portrayal of the election, widespread in both the mainstream press and within the left, as an instance where the people had spoken. Drawing upon, and titling their essay with an allusion to Gayatri Spivak's (1993) text "Can the Subaltern Speak?", they elaborate upon the relation between interests and representation. In the interpretation of the election results within the mainstream media and the right, a hungry and tired people emerged, rather than a people under attack. If the victory of National Opposition Union (UNO) was the result the electorate's desire for food and peace, the politics sustained by the United States could be framed as part of an authentic will. In leftist interpretations, the loss became a manifestation of forsaken objective class interests: in an election that was declared to be transparent and fair, people seemed to have put their trust in the conservative business elite instead. Arguing for a reopening of the difference between desire and interest, Medovoi et al. write that people saw themselves in UNO's self-representation "but only because it looked into the postcolonial economic and military mirror. Instead of seeing their class interests on the Sandinistas, they saw in UNO their desire to end the embargos and wars that had impoverished and decimated the population" (Medovoi et al. 1990: 148).

In line with Spivak's (1993) discussion, the article argues for the significance of acknowledging the two meanings of representation: political proxy and aesthetic re-presentation. The two meanings of representation, Spivak contends, are always concurrently present but often conflated: the symbolic representation of heterogeneous subaltern subjects as coherent political subjects or groups ("the workers", "the women") is perceived as a transparent origin of their authentic desires. But, Spivak argues, the subject and its desires are constructed through the very act of representation.

When the FSLN's politics is viewed, in self-representations as well as by its interpreters, as an *expression* of the popular will rather than a force that *defines* the popular will and class interests, the line of demarcation between representing and appropriating the will of the people is blurred, and the multiplicity of subject positions is effaced. If the will of the people is already known and acted upon, what is then the relation between direct democracy and what Žižek (1989: 146–147) describes as the "formula of the totalitarian misrecognition"? The misrecognition consists in that the party is believed to be the party because it represents the will of the people. But, Žižek argues, it is in fact the other way around: the people is the people because it supports the party. A statement such as "the whole people supports the party"

cannot be proved wrong, because this is “the only feature which in all possible words defines the People”. Someone who opposes the party immediately passes from the ranks of the people to the ranks of the “enemies of the people”.

Arbitrarily, in the FSLN rhetoric some features are ascribed to the popular will (for example, religion and traditional values) while other characteristics of the people need to be reformed to allow for the emergence a new revolutionary subject. To varying degrees, the FSLN assumes responsibility for its political agenda. Furthermore, while any transformative project is necessarily implicated in the struggle for hegemony, if the people are largely defined in terms of party support, how might plural positions within the people be envisioned?

Feminism and the Transnational Menace

The day before International Women’s Day in 2008, *Movimiento Autónomo de Mujeres* (Autonomous Movement of Women, MAM) published a full-page announcement in the leading newspapers. Under the heading “Orteguismo and women: the politics of gender hate”, the government is fiercely condemned for being authoritarian, demagogic and misogynist; its politics is denounced as an attack on the women’s movement and on civil society at large. Government programs are depicted as denying women a role as agents of economic development, and the abolition of “therapeutic abortion” is represented as an assault on women’s integrity, additionally condemning them to certain death in the case of complicated pregnancies. The statement continues:

In short, the gender politics of the government of “reconciliation and national unity” is similar to the German fascism that proclaimed the traditional *kinder, kirche, küche* (children, church, kitchen) for women: messianic politics and clerical rhetoric about compulsory maternity is on offer in the red–black heaven [referring to the colors of the Sandinista flag] of the poor. (MAM March 7, 2008)

As indicated here, the category of women has become fundamental in the struggle over the content of emancipatory projects and their appropriate subjects during the FSLN government. How does the female version of “the poor” fit into the FSLN’s transformative agenda? In drawing the line between the people and their enemies, different subjects are assigned to different positions with varying relations to Sandinista politics in terms of threats and aspirations. The weekly magazine *El 19* gives a vivid insight into

such constructions.⁴⁹ As part of the Citizen's Power initiative, the paper presents governmental programs, describes obstacles and intentions, and rebuts the opposition's assessments. Thus *El 19* is implicated in what the FSLN describes in one of its policy documents as the "ideological battle in the heart of the population" through which the needs of strategic segments of society are defined and citizens are interpellated as subjects to and for the political agenda.

The groups that emerge in *El 19* can be roughly divided into three categories: enemies, allies, and components of the FSLN itself. Firmly relegated to the outside, subjects that have no place within the political project, are groups that were once part of the party: intellectuals, authors and artists (e.g. the poet Ernesto Cardenal) and politicians who went on to form the Sandinista Renovation Movement (MRS), as well as representatives of different organizations within civil society. Numerous articles with titles such as "The masks are slipping" and "The Return of Somozismo" expose these groups' roots in the oligarchy that over time has led them to abandon earlier political convictions, in line with their *real* class interests. Then there are those that used to have problematic relations with the FSLN; the Catholic Church constitutes probably the most significant example of an organization that is now to be included in the reconciliation effort. Various articles and interviews with priests make manifest the good relations between the government and the church. Yet it is a description of a well-functioning and supportive coexistence in the sense that, for example, members of the clergy are reported to approve of different Sandinista projects and to have forgiven Ortega for earlier acts against the church.

Other groups *must* be convincingly represented as core components of the FSLN in order to establish and maintain the equivalence between the party and the people, such as women, impoverished rural and urban workers, and youth. Comprising the explicit beneficiaries of most of the FSLN's projects and portrayed as the key electoral base, women and youth in particular are, however, also those whom the opposition attempts to reach. Clearly reflected in *El 19*, representations of these categories become essential in the struggle for hegemony, something that I examine in what follows.

Two types of feminism emerge in the issues of *El 19*: "false feminism", which is promoted by the oligarchy, the right and the imperialistic forces, is

⁴⁹ *El 19* came out in 16 hard-copy issues between August and December 2008, after which it became solely web-based. It has a full-color, tabloid format containing between 20 and 30 pages with sections on news, opinion, sports, culture, gender, economy, interviews and reportage. Some articles have named authors, others are editorials or signed by "various authors". In the following discussion, for the sake of readability I cite only issue and page numbers. Titles and authors are indicated in the list of references. The name of the magazine refers to the 19th of July in 1979, the date of the triumph of the revolution.

distinguished from the “gender practices” of the FSLN. These opposing projects are depicted as corresponding to two types of women: those who look like women and live like women, and those who do not. In particular, the portrayals center on the constitution of a frontier between ordinary women on the one hand and MAM, its representatives and allies, on the other hand. These latter groups are described in a remarkable number of articles (at least 25) as elitist, corrupt, perverse, oligarchic and neo-colonialist. An article titled “Who are those women?” presents a psychological profile in order to explain how the “pseudo-feminists” ended up as “abortionists”, describing them as psychologically traumatized by abusive men whose behavior they have begun to copy: they live with other women whom they are said to abuse and they harbor a “hormonal hatred against men and Sandinismo” (No 6: 16–17).

The battle over femininity and political change is organized principally as a matter of “life” and “death”. Numerous articles are devoted to the issue of abortion, in which global and local inequalities and threats against the nation appear to crystallize. A special reportage, “The big business of abortion”, describes how neocolonial forces and “false feminists” use abortion as a stick with which to beat social values and family norms so as to mobilize against the government (No 5: 10–12). Concepts such as “sexual diversity”⁵⁰ and “women’s reproductive rights” mask attempts to legitimize murder, and the women of MAM are said to have found a “life form in the promotion of death” (No 11: 9–11; No 12: 32).⁵¹ The struggle to decriminalize “therapeutic abortion” is represented as alien to Nicaraguan values as it is condemned by the Church and allegedly by the majority of the population.⁵² In addition, because of their “deviant” life styles, the “abortionists” are particularly unqualified to have a say in the matter: “in order to know what

⁵⁰ In 1992 the National Assembly passed Article 204, which states: “Anyone who induces, promotes, propagandizes or practices sex between people of the same sex in a scandalous way commits the crime of sodomy. It will be penalized with one to three years of prison” (Kampwirth 2006: 94). See Babb (2004) for a discussion of gay and lesbian activism and mobilization against the sodomy law. In March 2008, homosexuality was decriminalized when Article 204 was abolished in the new penal code.

⁵¹ The MAM network was accused of triangulation of funds and laundering money. It had received funds from Oxfam and Swedish Forum Syd for a campaign focusing especially on the issue of reproductive rights. At the time, the network was not registered at the Ministry of Governance and received the funds through another organization involving the same people (for example, Sofia Montenegro, persistently portrayed as a CIA agent (*El 19*, No 9: 18) and Carlos Fernando Chamorro, a member of the Chamorro family, described as the most influential oligarchic family and previously the chief editor of *Barracuda*, the FSLN’s newspaper). After some months the charges were dropped.

⁵² The Nicaraguan feminist movement, too, is split on the issue of abortion. Some groups have opted for a more moderate strategy, focusing on the re-legalization of “therapeutic abortion”, whereas networks like MAM advocate the legalization of abortion. For conflicts within the feminist movement over visions and strategies, see Kampwirth (2008). For a discussion of the anti-feminist politics and the national and transnational efforts to reinstall “traditional values” and coordination against abortion, see Kampwirth (2006).

it is like to be a mother, first one has to give birth to a child” (No 12: 32). Driven by their own frustration and hatred of the party, and as devoted atheists, they don’t want women to have children, they promote same-sex marriages, and are driving society toward anarchy (No 6: 14).

As Maud Eduards (2007: 83–90) points out, the issue of abortion is bound up with dominant ideas about the nation that give reason for a particular political regulation of bodies. According to the logic espoused in the magazine, the leaders of MAM make a fortune from the “business” of abortion, which is also part of a larger, imperialist picture. Without considering Nicaraguan values, European countries (represented as more imperialistic than the United States when it comes to this particular issue) attempt to impose abortion as a necessary part of human rights. Delineated as “decadent empires”, these countries are condemned in *El 19* for first having enforced a neoliberal agenda that generated extreme poverty. Trying to disguise the misery that they created, they spend millions on abortion under the flag of modernity. In a neocolonialist manner, the rich world wants to enforce its culture and control the fertility rates of the Third World (No 9: 24). Contrary to the claims of modernity, this type of feminism is represented as a mark of the past, of the old world system of injustice and poverty that is now being opposed by the revolutionary forces (No 2: 18). The people, especially women, it is reported, see through these organizations’ declarations of government oppression and take to the streets to demand social justice and denounce women who “promote abortion” (No 9: 19).

In his interrogation of what he calls “reproductive futurism”, Lee Edelman (2004: 3) suggests that the symbolic position of the Child, “the fantasmatic beneficiary of every political intervention”, functions as a delimitation of the political discourse, regulating what *counts* as politics when a heteronormative, future collectivity is inscribed as an unquestionable, ultimate justification. Clearly, the idea of the coming generation is essential to the logics of both the PLC and the FSLN. CAFTA which in the videotape is portrayed as a guarantee for the laughing children, the single mother who in the television commercial has realized that she must adapt herself to the virtues of hard work, and the opponents of abortion; all representations rationalize current hardships in the name of the future. In this way, the “figural Child alone embodies the citizen as an ideal, entitled to claim the full rights to its future share in the nation’s good, though always at the cost of limiting the rights ‘real’ citizens are allowed” (Edelman 2004: 11). Within the logic of reproductive futurity, queers, feminists and supporters of legal abortion become a threat to the social order as such. In the life-and-death struggle that *El 19* depicts, backed by the Empire they negate the future of the Child and, hence, of the Nation, thus relegating their “impossible” positions and demands to the outside of the political order.



Figure 9. *El 19* magazine covers.

Against the portrayals of harmful feminism, several articles in *El 19* insist that it is not women or women's organizations as such that constitute the problem. On the contrary, they insist that women are integral to the progress of the revolution. With headlines such as "Women yes, lies no", benign examples are given of women who organize within the framework of the FSLN (No 9: 22). One article presents a nationwide women's network

as committed to the grass roots: “you don’t frequent luxury hotels to hold seminars, spending money in the name of gender” (No 7: 8). Female activists attest that there is no general persecution against women’s organizations and urge international agencies to stop financing campaigns that destabilize the government: “we will accomplish more as nation if we really decide to love this country”, and for the dignity of women “we work hand in hand with our Government” (No 4: 4; No 5: 15). Unlike the “false feminists”, who correspond to the elites and/or “marginal groups” (i.e. homosexuals), the FSLN is portrayed in the magazine as representing the majority of women, asserting that most women want to live and work with men for the betterment of their families and the nation as a whole (No 2: 19).

The programs attached to the FSLN’s economic reorientation ascribe to women a protagonist position. Unlike the urban FTZ worker, “the rural woman is the subject of agro-industrial development” (FSLN 2007b: 7). The FSLN’s flagship programs for economic development and redistribution, “Zero Hunger” and “Zero Usury”, are both financed by Venezuelan funds.⁵³ Zero Hunger aims to eradicate rural poverty through equipping selected women with a cow, some pigs, chicken and grain so that they can feed their families and eventually repay the cost from what they produce – in the MAM statement denounced as a mechanism for tying women to unskilled labor. Through Zero Usury, small producer collectives of the “self-employed” get access to microcredit at low interest rates.

Focusing on the preferred economic subject, the small-scale producer, both programs specifically target women. *El 19* describes the projects as being founded upon Christianity and socialism, and women figure as a guarantee of their elaboration because of “their nature as caring mothers who want to feed their children, and they are better at saving and administering their resources” (No 12: 18). Or as Ortega expressed it in one of his speeches: “Because the mother does everything, she is doctor, cook, and laundress, she does everything! Helping the children, of course; it is the father and the mother there in the allotment of the mother” (Ortega, August 26, 2007). Although fathers are provisionally added to the picture, it is frequently stressed that it is the responsibility of women that makes the program successful. She will distribute what she produces and pay back what she borrows: “The men might sell it, and then – that’s it!” (Ortega, February 1, 2007).

⁵³ The Venezuelan money that finances Zero Hunger and Zero Usury does not go into the budget, which means that it does not have to be approved by the National Assembly. This arrangement gives Ortega–Murillo full control over the money, something that the opposition has criticized (see Nítlápan–Envío team 2008).

Another group crucial to the FSLN that is represented as in the risk zone of being hijacked by the opposition is youth. In collaboration with segments of civil society that are openly hostile to the government and President Ortega, it is reported that workshops financed by the US embassy are held all over the country with the purpose of recruiting and deceiving youth (No 7: 22). Some of them are declared to have been corrupted already. One article describes a student protest, which on the television news is shown being brutally dispersed by a group of men loyal to the FSLN. The protesters, young women and men, who were carrying banners with messages such as "Once again a revolution has been betrayed from within" and T-shirts saying NO are presented in *El 19* as an "insignificant group of daddy's boys", as manipulated by their parents into being "pawns of chaos" and "beardless little agents of the Empire". In the article, the manipulators are condemned for wasting the talent and vigor of youth, who should fight for their fatherland just as the national heroes did in their time. Because it is against the spirit of youth to be reactionary, "to obligate them to say NO...is a crime" (No 8: 2).

Thus, *El 19* represents Nicaraguan youth as inherently rebellious, enthusiastic and revolutionary. In earlier political projects, it is stated, they were reduced to cheap labor in transnational corporations. Now, "the role of the young woman and man is to propel change in the political, social, cultural and economic structures" (No 8: 15). In contrast to the student protesters (described as manipulated with arguably heterosexist/emasculating denominations, such as "daddy's boys", "beardless" and "little agents", apparently omitting the female protesters), the Sandinista youth are portrayed as defenders of the revolution. Several articles describe how thousands of young Nicaraguans have been mobilized on the streets to rebel against the oligarchs and the neoliberalism that impoverished them for decades. The right has no comprehension of their problems: "they don't know what it's like to look for cash to help your mother at home or to worry about school fees" (No 15: 5). Because of the class position and determination of the youth, the right is accusing them of violence on the streets and tries to intimidate them in any way they can. Thus, youth are represented as essential to the establishment and enforcement of the political frontier between "the people" and their "enemies". The right is threatened by increasing class consciousness because it is in its interest to keep the workers uninformed and cheap. But, it is stated, its attempts to repress the youth are in vain: "It is over. The streets are ours, the power belongs to the people and the People are the President" (No 14: 14).

While reconciliation is put forth as a dictum, FSLN rhetoric creates a pronounced political frontier that forms around a logic of equivalence. Groups such as MRS, the women's movement and parts of civil society are equated as "enemies of the poor", "imperialists", "counter-revolutionaries",

and a threat to the nation. In every way, they differ from the FSLN (together with its allies), which has come to embody the will of the poor, sovereignty and righteousness (the will of God, compare Chapter 3). In line with the previous discussion about the construction of “the people” through distinguishing it from its “enemy”, mobilization tends to revolve around an element of fear; and in this context imperialist forces and control over resources are central. The concern over transnational capital in the rhetoric that I have explored here is not primarily about control over production but rather about control over minds. Accordingly, it becomes clear that the social demands that in Laclau’s understanding constitute the core of populist endeavor are not primarily *directly* formulated in relation to the capitalist system. More consistent than class-related demands directed toward global and local circuits of accumulation, national culture and values are put forth as the objects that are threatened by interconnected imperialist enemies. Above all, it is through the infrastructure of civil society that the ideals and ideologies promoted and funded by international cooperation agencies can get access to strategic subjects such as women, the poor and the youth.

In this regard, the analysis of the FSLN expressed in policy documents, speeches and *El 19* come close to problematizations of Western supremacy and development politics as a “civilizing mission” premised upon dominant forms of knowledge (Said 1993). As discussed in Chapter 2, development measures have increasingly been expanded from a focus on the economic and have come to encompass all spheres of social life. Indeed, an “enormous social engineering project” carried out by an array of internationally funded organizations, a process that in the case of Nicaragua took off in the 1990s, largely imposes the goals, knowledge and vocabulary of societal transformations (Pérez Baltodano 2006b). The “NGOization” of social and political space tends to create a relation of dependency and intellectual subordination between donors and receivers, delimiting the scope of these organizations’ critique of the existing order as their visions and measures have to be accepted and underpinned by international cooperation.

According to the FSLN, these cooperation agencies have set an agenda that defines the measures and goals of gender politics, providing the opposition with a platform and resources and at the same time excluding the articulation of particular issues, notably the premises and effects of neoliberalism. Against the backdrop of an economy dependent on foreign direct investment interwoven with a civil society relying upon donor money, particular subjects for development are created. In this juncture, the positioning of women as subjects to be “saved” may work as a justification for development politics and the expansion of transnational capitalism (Spivak 2000a). Indeed, (Western) depictions of gender inequalities in the Third World often focus on local patriarchal relations in isolation from

other historical, economic and political conditions (Mohanty 1993; Abu-Lughod 2002). As suggested in FSLN rhetoric, projects that are compatible with the dominant economic order are more likely to find resonance within the international community.⁵⁴

Establishing an opposition between sovereignty and national values on the one hand and a particular form of feminism bound up with imperialism on the other, a distinction is drawn between externally imposed agendas and ideas and local, authentic needs and desires. Though the FSLN does not reject feminism as such – on the contrary, it represents itself as the real feminists – particular feminist and queer issues are denominated as inherently external to national culture. In correspondence with the values of the Catholic Church, “pro-life” politics, heterosexuality and “family values” are put forth as objects to be defended. Thus, the conflict with and opposition against imperialism come to be founded upon issues such as sexuality and abortion, pointing to the FSLN’s redefinition of “friends” and “enemies”, of left and right politics as well as of the “national”. Indeed, as Kampwirth (2006) points out, the mobilization in Nicaragua from the 1990s onwards against abortion, which also received international support from religious networks, was initially explicitly framed as a mobilization against the FSLN as well, which was said to be responsible for the deterioration of “traditional values”. While both “pro-life” advocacy and “pro-choice” advocacy are clearly involved with transnational networks, the issue of abortion illustrates how the FSLN has detached itself from parts of the feminist and transnational solidarity movement in the name of the future of the Nation.

Through being represented as given entities, national culture and values are given a fetishistic, depoliticized character and, in effect, certain articulations of sexual rights are not acknowledged as legitimate or even as real political convictions but rather as pretexts for destabilizing the government. The “false” feminist movement and other elements within civil society are portrayed as gateways for imperial and oligarchic interests and as threats to national unity. In a circular motion the FSLN, which criticizes NGOs and international cooperation for neglecting the effects of neoliberal capitalism, thereby appears to end up in the same terrain. If the stress is laid upon *cultural* rather than *economic* imperialism, references to transnational capital and the effects of global production are not easily discerned. The working class, with a structural relation to globalized circuits of production, is then apparently engulfed in the opposition between “the people” and their “enemies”.

⁵⁴ This is certainly not to suggest that issues such as reproductive rights are uncontroversial in donor contexts, as is made clear by, for example, the US development policies of former President George W. Bush, which disallowed federal money to “promote” abortion abroad.

Conclusion: Subjects of Value in Societal Change

Within the representations that I have analyzed here, what subjects have access to positions that might be transformative? Clearly, the prospects of transformation differ in the two overarching projects: on the one hand, the accomplishment of an already initiated project of economic integration where goals and measures are principally defined, and on the other hand a call for a new order. Accordingly, the citizens, “the people” and the workers are mobilized and related to the site of power in different ways. Representing (and appropriating) particular dimensions of the people, the FSLN characterizes itself in terms of a certain lack of power, manifested in the initiative *El Pueblo Presidente!* and in Ortega’s depiction of himself as an embodiment and tool of the popular will. This stance can be compared with Bolaños’s imposition of a political agenda where the nation and its citizens have to be remade and come to embrace particular values in order to match, and benefit from, global markets.

In the rhetoric of both projects, perhaps the most legitimate and deserving subject is the one suffering from the impoverished condition of the country. Indeed, the rhetoric of both Bolaños and Ortega contains a palpable idealization of the “common people”. Bolaños talks about the “enthusiastic, pretty single mother” who goes to the FTZ every day, and about honest, hard-working people. Ortega wants his politics to reach “the most humble peasant far out in the mountains” (Ortega, January 11, 2007) and cherishes reliable women targeted by Zero Hunger and Zero Usury. The humble and the poor are the subjects of the “greatest commitment”. How can such apparently positive portrayals of the poor and the working class be understood and fitted into the global division of labor? Žižek elaborates upon what he calls a “Dickensian admiration” for the poor but happy, those who are regarded as belonging to an unspoiled world free from the grubby struggle for money and power: “but (and therein lies the falsity of Dickens) from where is the Dickensian gaze peering at the ‘good common people’ so that they appear likeable, from where if not from the view of the corrupted world of power and money?” (Žižek 1989: 107). The glorification of the common people may disguise structures of subordination and, moreover, the idealized poor appear as figures of passive endurance rather than of action.

Along with the humble and the poor, the entrepreneur is a cherished figure in the official rhetoric of the two parties, but with different inclinations. If the entrepreneur in the neoliberal model is to be connected to the globalizing economy, in the Sandinista version she represents, perhaps not a replacement of the previous scheme, but a parallel agenda centered on rural, small and medium-size producers: national sovereignty and self-sufficiency rather than (or in addition to) export production. To a

certain extent, I think that the entrepreneur represents a possible “solution” in the rhetoric of both the PLC and the FSLN that allows for a promising alternative to the FTZ worker: the female entrepreneur might be turned into a link still missing in contesting discourses of national progress. But, arguably, the entrepreneur or the self-employed constitute a solution that in different ways runs the risk of being displaced by the global division of labor.

While FTZ workers are delineated as “the best people” in the representations of the “New Era”, they form, as I have argued, a sector and a labor force that does not quite match cherished neoliberal values of autonomy, risk-taking and accumulation, values that are rather in harmony with conceptions of the entrepreneur. In conjunction with poverty reduction, microcredit has emerged as a major development measure in the neoliberal era. Mike Davis (2006: 174–185) interrogates the image of the “heroic self-employed”, a favorite figure among development agencies and advocates of capitalism’s potential: with small loans the poor, almost always women, are turned into entrepreneurs, supposedly enabling them to leave poverty behind.

But the future that is envisioned in, for instance, the narrative of the CAFTA videotape where entrepreneurs obtain access to the US market is potentially disturbed by the figure of the self-employed within the country’s fastest-growing sector, the informal economy, marked by displacement from rather than connection to the global economy. In a context where neoliberalism and Structural Adjustment Programs have resulted in the stagnation of the formal economy and an explosion in the informal economy, Davis contends that such self-employment is better conceived of as “forced entrepreneurialism”. With no alternatives, and microcredit having a small impact on macro structures, more and more people, Davis argues, are becoming so marginal to the formal, global economy that there might be good reason to talk of the emergence of a “surplus humanity”. And in order to ensure the reasonability of the system, “the mute figures of the sick and starving and displaced are cast not as the victims of capital but as the luckless nonparticipants” (Cherniavsky 2006: 41).

Though perhaps redundant within the overall structure of global capitalism, the self-employed woman still seems crucial as a discursive justification: legitimacy has come to be based upon the supposed empowerment of subordinated groups, women in particular. The critique of institutions such as the World Bank and the IMF for their neglect of women as producers finds a counter-expression in this agenda: self-maximizing, entrepreneurial “rational economic woman” who pays back her loans and passes profit on to her family. However, framed as an instrument of female emancipation and consciousness raising, in practice financial sustainability tends to be the guiding principle (Mayer and Rankin 2002: 804–805).

In the case of the FSLN, the challenge consists in convincingly representing the small-scale producer who starts out with a micro-loan, the prototype of the “new economic subject”, as part of a strategy to revoke the previous prerogative of transnational capital. In the representations of both governments, “forced entrepreneurialism” within a disintegrated informal sector represents an element that must be silenced in order to allow for, on the one hand, the endorsement of the neoliberal order or, on the other hand, its replacement.

At first glance, the position of FTZ workers enjoys varying degrees of visibility in the rhetoric of the PLC and the FSLN, but arguably it is a position that both discourses partly attempt to avoid. In the PLC’s nation-branding campaign, workers are marketed as an asset and given a key position within the process of transformation. But at the same time FTZ workers are discouraged from identifying themselves *too* much as workers, which could jeopardize low-cost production. Thus, they are highly visible but only as suitable for capital. As discussed in Chapter 3, the future figures as an organizing principle in the PLC project. Likewise, CAFTA is depicted as the gateway to a more prosperous tomorrow – Central America is “the land of hope” – and the FTZs fuel individual and national aspirations for a better life. Not unlike in a religious formula, workers are advised to have hope, but in this instance in the market. And, just as in religious accounts, the promise of the future will not be realized without some sort of sacrifice; by working “with the sweat of one’s brow”, the future must be *deserved*. Through adjusting themselves to the needs of transnational capital, workers, or perhaps their children, can look forward to a brighter future. The subject of value is one that can be developed in accordance with the dictated framework: individualized narratives that preclude explanations of structural constraints.

One of the issues of disagreement covered in the MAM manifesto concerns the peripheral role that the FSLN assigns to women in economic development. Indeed, whereas the “new proletarian” was central to the visions of the “New Era”, globalized circuits of production and FTZ workers do not occupy a corresponding position in the critique formulated by the “Government of Citizen Power”. Occasionally, workers appear as tokens of resistance; allegedly they have not surrendered during the 16 years of neoliberal rule. But in the FSLN’s crusade against “savage capitalism”, the FTZs occupy an incoherent position; although publicly portrayed as an outcome of imperialism, the dependency on the sector remains. Consequently, rather than constituting the foundation for subversive articulations, the sector and its workers tend to be put within parentheses. Although the FTZs constitute a core sector, and despite the emblematic function of the female worker in the rhetoric of the previous regime, in the FSLN narrative she appears not to be part of a revolutionary plot. She can be included under the rubric of the “poor”, as a general subject suffering

under “savage capitalism”, but since anti-imperialist rhetoric makes no consistent connection to globalized production, the “new proletariat” is apparently not assigned a particular position in the process of social transformation.

Next, I will move away somewhat from the analysis of the official rhetoric to examine how FTZ workers might interpret and negotiate the diverse interpellations that they are subjected to at the intersections of national political projects and the demands of transnational orders of production.

5. Classifications of Belonging (Dis)identification in Global Production

Ciudad Sandino is a town about half an hour by bus from Managua. Once a revolutionary stronghold, the city later became notorious for high levels of unemployment, criminality and gang violence. Now, several Free Trade Zone (FTZ) factories have been allocated to the area, turning manufacturing into one of few plausible occupation options. Together with a community organizer, I had come to one of the poorer districts where “everybody” works in the Zones. The organizer pointed to just about every house that we walked past and explained: “There three daughters work in the zone...the guy over there got fired when he tried to start up a union.” It was a Sunday afternoon, and most workers were enjoying their only day of the week off. We gathered in a shaded backyard for a group interview with women who all had different connections to the factories: workers, former workers or relatives of workers. When I asked whether the jobs that had been created in recent years in the FTZs had translated into any positive effects in their community, one of them, making a sweeping gesture, told me to just look around and judge for myself: “Is this not poverty?!” Others joined in, and expressed worries about the consequences of FTZ work: health problems, the recruitment of youth to the zones, so discouraging them from getting an education, the turning of their *barrio* into a ghost town during the daytime, leaving many children unattended.

Reluctantly being dragged into the conversation by the others, a woman in her early twenties, who at first did not seem very keen to talk to me, gave an account of her experience of FTZ work that at first struck me as anomalous:

Sofie: So, what do you think about the work in the zone?

Mirna: There...it's fine. The wage is good.

Sofie: It's good?

Mirna: Yes.

Sofie: How much do you earn?

Mirna: 1000 or 1200 a fortnight, at the most.

Sofie: Is that enough to support your family?

Mirna: Yes, it's enough. [...] Well, I feel good there. Everything is fine. They don't treat us badly. (Interview, April, 2005)

It was one of my first interviews with FTZ workers; but as I listen to the recorded interview, it is obvious that Mirna's response was not what I was expecting. After all, how could the salary, which was far below the estimated subsistence level, be "enough" to support her two children? From where we were sitting I could see her small concrete-block house with its roof of corrugated iron. My guess was that she was unsure of my intentions and therefore not prepared to tell me her *actual* thoughts. Or maybe she just did not see the point of talking to me; to say that everything is just fine could be an attempt to end the conversation quickly. Nonetheless, on the lookout for another story, I kept on asking questions about overtime, production goals, regulations and her feelings about the work:

Sofie: But how do you feel when you come home after work, how do you...

Mirna: How do I *feel*? I come here all worn out. Yesterday, I couldn't get up. My whole back was aching and my husband had to help me. Well, you get worn out. And if you don't hurry, they yell at you. It's a lot of stress.

In what seemed to me a complete reversal of her earlier account, she went on to tell me about the heat in the factory, how they did not have time to leave the sewing machines to drink some water, how bathroom visits were recorded and limited to one a day, and how the manager kept promising them a bonus if production goals were met without ever keeping his word. On the bus ride back to the city, the community organizer asked me whether Mirna had told me that her husband had developed serious lung problems from working in the zone. She had not. We discussed how to interpret her initial positive evaluation of the FTZs: had the working conditions been normalized to the point where they had come to constitute the only imaginable reality?

The interview can, in a way, be read in the light of two opposing "master narratives" about gender and work in the globalizing economy. Emphasizing contentment, the first part parallels the view put forward by the government at the time. In the rhetoric of the Liberal Constitutionalist Party's (PLC) "New Era", FTZ work was represented as being in line with national and individual interests, offering workers progress and dignity, though perhaps not an instant solution to the problem of poverty. This narrative urges workers to have faith in future improvements, if not for themselves then at least for their children. When positive evaluations were later combined with accounts of regulation, stress and abuse, the interview, by contrast, becomes consistent with notions of unequal power relations in the global division of labor, which is sometimes part of the Sandinista National Liberation Front's (FSLN) rhetoric. Emancipation and exploitation: both narratives may be turned into a justification for political agendas that are framed as being in line with women's aspirations.

Chapters 3 and 4 focused on the “official rhetoric” in relation to transnational capital, neoliberal ideology and visualizations of alternatives. The workers that I talked to in Ciudad Sandino and elsewhere constitute key subjects in both the PLC’s and the FSLN’s formulations of political projects. In the rhetoric, they figure as a comparative advantage in the shape of “abundant labor”; they are encouraged to embody the characteristics of the “best people” so as to ensure profitable production; they are represented as potential entrepreneurs who may prosper thanks to free trade agreements; they are interpellated as mothers who on account of the government’s attraction of foreign investment are guaranteed the chance to care for their children; they are constituted as the majority that has been deceived by neoliberal politics; they are advised to revolt against inequalities and they are constructed as the source of the government’s legitimacy. As such, they are portrayed as essential to the conflicting means and ends of political rule.

However, as I argued in previous chapters, in the rhetoric of both the PLC and the FSLN (female) workers were contradictorily positioned in discourses of globalization, progress and change, and often rendered as not quite apposite to the fulfillment of their “historical mission”, always slightly deviating from the ideal type citizen who desires and facilitates particular societal transformations. In this chapter, I depart from workers’ *structural positions*, conditions that shape and confine options and life chances, in relation to transnational capital. In accordance with discourse analytic conceptions, structural positions are here understood as experienced and given meaning through discourse; through *subject positions* that are being constructed in processes of political struggle (Smith 1998; see Chapter 2). Moreover, workers are not simply determined to answer the interpellations that they are being subjected to. Especially in times of frequent dislocations, for example in the presence of rapid globalization, neoliberalization and commodification, *political subjectivities* are of direct significance as the discursive structures that designate subject positions are dissolving (Howarth 2000: 109–111; see Chapter 2). In the wake of profound societal transformations in Nicaragua – revolution, war, counter-revolution, neoliberal restructurings and “the second stage of the revolution” – subject positions are arguably being restructured and, as discussed in Chapter 4, they are located at the midpoint of opposing hegemonic projects. When existing subject positions and identities are altered or thrown into crisis, processes of *identification* become pronounced. In an undecidable terrain, subjects are compelled to identify with particular political projects through which dislocated social identities may be given new content.

Work in the FTZs is imbued with expectations, imperatives and contradictions. In this chapter, relying principally on interviews with FTZ workers conducted during my three visits to Nicaragua (in 2005, 2006, and 2008), I examine how positions in relation to transnational capital are being

represented and negotiated by workers. The aim of relating workers' accounts to the discussions of previous chapters is not to "correct" the official rhetoric; workers are not perceived as being on the outside of politics (cf. Scott 1992). Rather, the ways that processes of economic integration are interpreted by workers may allow for an assessment of the *social effects* of labor, that is, the interconnections between value production and subject formation in the context of capitalist globalization where "the body is an accumulation strategy in the deepest sense" (Haraway 1995: 510). At the same time, it is a strategy of accumulation that is largely absent, which *must* be omitted in representations of (individual) progress and modernization that cannot harbor signs of exploitative conditions of labor. Thus, if global production and contending versions of the Nation are inherently dependent upon workers' adoption of particular virtues and conduct, how might FTZ workers respond and relate to the discourses that subject them? A central objective of this chapter will be to analyze how workers invest in certain types of subjectivities (cf. Skeggs 1997). How do they make sense of the ways in which they are interpellated and positioned within discourses that make them suitable for capital or "the revolution"?

This chapter follows a different structure than the previous two in the sense that it is not chronologically organized, based on the government in office. The attempt has not been to map workers' evaluations of the two governments as such; rather, the aim is to examine processes of identification in transnational production, of which the agenda of the ruling party is but one dimension. Here, the idea is to approach the social and embodied effects of globalization, the connections between "micro" and "macro" discourses that organize production (cf. Harvey 2000). Addressing interactions and disruptions in the global division of labor on multiple scales, the chapter proceeds from a "global" stance, raising questions about the conditions of possibility of undertaking research in a context profoundly marked by unequal positions in relation to the globalized production of commodities and knowledge. How may interviews with FTZ workers be accounted for? Drawing upon postcolonial theories of representation, the subsection focuses on "the encounter" – the particular encounters that I had with workers and more generally – as criss-crossed by historical and contemporary patterns of power and domination. The purpose is thereby to elaborate upon the interviews as *interactive situations*, not only as sources of empirical material but as intrinsic to the analysis of classed, racialized and gendered manifestations of the global economy, producing diverse sets of experiences and positionalities.

Following the discussion on theoretical and methodological frameworks of research projects embedded in the global division of labor, subsequent sections present different themes that loosely correspond to some of the issues raised in Chapters 3 and 4. In relation to the propensity to install women (and) workers as crucial political subjects in the rhetoric of the PLC

as well as the FSLN, I discuss experiences and sentiments of (dis)belonging in processes of nation-making and global market integration. The often contradictory positionings of workers in the conflicting rhetoric of national progress are then addressed, proceeding from workers' accounts as a way to explore processes of identification and disidentification in relation to FTZ work. Next, I examine the relations that seem to be brought about or interrupted as workers are made appropriate to production: upon what effaced or established connections does workers' adequacy appear to rest? Finally I turn to workers' portrayals of social transformations, the ways in which subjects and strategies for a reshaping of current labor relations are imagined. Thus, the chapter is an attempt to explore how the division of labor divides and connects across the intimate and the global.

Encounters within the Global Division of Labor

In her ethnographic study of white, working class women in the UK, Beverley Skeggs (1997: 35) writes that after conducting interviews she often had a feeling of "physical and metaphorical escape". Having grown up in the same area and under similar conditions as the women she interviewed, her recognition of convergences and privileges was crystallized in the guilt-impregnated thought: "it could have been me". In this study, my sentiments of unease in interview situations were connected rather to the breaches in the global division of labor: it could not that easily have been me. As a PhD candidate from Sweden, I had come to Nicaragua to write about divisions of labor that I, through patterns of consumption and production, was implicated in but from a structural position in relation to transnational capital that differed substantially from that of the FTZ workers I met. Engaging with workers on the "flip side" of economic growth, in research projects that attempt to "translate" between contexts, ethical and methodological dilemmas arguably intensify. As Spivak (1981: 156) is careful to point out, this is not to argue that "only the native can know the scene" or an exhortation that inevitably ends up in a self-centered gesture (cf. Butler 1995: 442–444). But, given wide distances between the researcher's world and the context that she writes about, "the distinctions might easily be missed" (Spivak 1981: 156).

Thus, if the demarcation between appropriation and representation is not easily drawn in politics, the same can be said about theoretical or analytical accounts. The description of the interview episode that introduced this chapter points to some of the conditions of possibilities – enabling and delimiting – of representing experiences of work in the globalizing economy. On the tape, I sound a lot more convinced by Mirna's account of exploitation and control in the factories. Her initial stand seemingly anticipates and counters common perceptions of work in the zones;

contradicting the image of an exploited Third World worker, she claimed to be content with her work and its salary. This raises the question of what stories *can* be told. Or rather, may workers' stories be heard only if they match already established truths, in line with predominant notions about "Third World women" (cf. Trinh 1989; Mohanty 1993)? Between the pitfalls of establishing an equal sign between "being" and "knowing" on the one hand and the constitution of workers in terms of an "otherness" that lacks in knowledge on the other hand (see Skeggs 1997: 19); what can interviews with FTZ workers be taken to say something about?

My meetings with FTZ workers were diverse in terms of context, content and extent, but in various ways they were all mediated by and made manifest the stratifications intrinsic to global circuits of production and consumption. Writing about encounters in transnational settings, Sara Ahmed (2002: 570) urges feminists not to assume that "we" can get access to the "truth" of those who are positioned differently by the flows of global capitalism. If otherness is something that cannot be fully grasped or translated from one context to another, this raises questions about the conditions that frame encounters and modes of representation: why us, why here, why now? That is to say, what past and present structures of labor and constructions of knowledge brought about or interrupted the encounter? To recognize how encounters are made possible through global relations of power represents an attempt to let differences and antagonisms have an effect on the encounter as such.

Sometimes the encounters with workers were disrupted rather than brought into being, perhaps most markedly so when on rare occasions I had the opportunity to visit the factories. The global division of labor installed a palpable barrier as I was shown around by the factory manager, as he explained the different stages of assembly and sometimes stopped to talk to workers, who were noticeably reluctant to slow down their production pace. Placed in the position of the foreign visitor or inspector (at one point I was even referred to as the "Swedish investor"), I was to my discomfort invited to participate in the evaluation of workers and their achievements: "Look at *her*, how old do you think she is? She is so short, she looks like she is 13 but, no we don't have child labor here." Or: "Look how fast she is!"; and turning to her he asked: "How many pieces a day do you make?" Within the frame of the factory zones, productivity is upheld through opposite sets of relations to supervision and evaluation. In the position of the foreign visitor/observer, I could get a glimpse of the working conditions in the FTZs – the heat, the stuffy air, the chemicals, the noise, the monotonous, rushed movements that piecework necessitates – but these visits foremost reflected the violent effects of the global division of labor that compartmentalize space and experiences. Differentiated relations to the FTZs sometimes became a topic in conversations with workers:

David: There are so many stories from the FTZs, and there are many that perhaps I can't tell you about, you have to see it. And if you...it's not to underestimate you or something like that, but if you come to the FTZ, they give you coffee and serve you cake. They welcome you and walk with you like in the Catholic processions; they'll pamper you [*la andarian chineada*]. (Interview, April, 2005)

Though the managers of most factories were a lot less enthusiastic about visits, often denying entry altogether, David is right to remark that, for a brief guest in the FTZs, the daily components of work are largely beyond reach. Different positions in the global division of labor produce different types of knowledge and experience, and as David points out, it is likely that company managers and FTZ officials would want me, as a foreign visitor, to get a positive perception of the zones. On some occasions, my unclear position vis-à-vis the zones was translated into an element of distrust that framed encounters with workers. For instance, when I joined a group of NGO volunteers who were visiting workers to invite them to a meeting, I was introduced to María. She was a social worker but, unable to find a job in line with her training, she now worked in the Zone. At first she declined my request for an interview; how could I prove that I had not been sent by the company or the government in order to seek details of union affiliates? Without being able to actually verify that I had not been sent by anyone, I stressed that she would be anonymous and that she did not have to tell me the name of the company where she worked. After I had told her a little more about my project and my acquaintances in unions and workers' organizations, she suddenly said "let's start" and almost seemed impatient when I asked if she was sure. It turned out to be a good interview, and I felt that we connected, emotionally and politically. But when we said goodbye she gave me a rather cold look and said "so, I'll see if I still have a job on Monday morning".

To be sure, my encounters with workers took place in a context of differentiated relations to risk, purpose and effects. For me, who did not risk anything, the interviews were to be part of my dissertation and thereby had a direct and decided purpose. For workers who, as María rightly recognized, may run a risk of losing their jobs in a highly anti-union context, the reasons for the interviews were, obviously, a lot less evident. When I was about to conclude an interview with Pedro, an FTZ worker of many years who I talked to in his backyard in an illegal settlement lacking basic services such as electricity and running water, the following conversation took place:

Pedro: So this is on behalf of the Ministry of Labor?

Sofie: No, no, no. I'm doing this for a university in Sweden, I'm going to present it there. Because I'm interested in this...the globalization of

production. And the products that are made here are exported to the US and Europe and...

Pedro: So, FTZs don't exist there?

Sofie: No...no, they don't...Also many factories have been shut down because they have moved to other countries where it is cheaper to produce. For example, before there was a large garment sector in Sweden but today it hardly exists.

Pedro: No, probably because they see that the labor force here is a lot cheaper. (Interview, July, 2006)

I always began interviews by introducing myself, explaining that I was working on a dissertation, that I was not part of any organization and that I was interested in workers' perceptions of the FTZs. During the interview, Pedro had been outspoken and critical of the production order in the Zones, which is why I was both surprised and startled when he associated me with the Ministry of Labor, known at the time for siding with capital at the expense of workers. For example, there were frequent stories about the ministry passing to employers lists of names of workers who were attempting to form unions. Pedro continued the discussion about differences and production allocations in the global economy by asking me about wages in Sweden:

Pedro: About how much does a worker earn over there?

Sofie: Oh, well...it's difficult to compare because the living costs are a lot higher. But a worker earns...perhaps...30 000 córdobas a month.

Pedro: In córdobas? Counting it in córdobas?!

Sofie: Yes, something like that...

Pedro: For 30 000 we wouldn't complain! We could build a house...That is the big difference. They are always trying to find out where they can gain the most. That is their form of exploitation, paying the labor force less.

Sofie: That is why I...

Pedro: But I think that the one that is most to blame is the government. They have to find ways to demand better salaries. For Bolaños it seems sufficient just to give employment to Nicaraguans.

The minimum wage in the FTZs was at the time about 1 480 córdobas a month. Some workers I interviewed made around 2 400 córdobas a month, but that included pay for overachieved production goals and overtime that well exceeded the maximum 48-hour working week stipulated by law.⁵⁵ I remember feeling reluctant how to answer, and listening to the tape I hear how I start out by contextualizing the question, presumably to cushion the effect of the answer. Also, the salary that I cited is rather on the low side.

⁵⁵ When the interview was conducted (July, 2006), the minimum wage of 1 480 córdobas a month equaled about 85 USD. The minimum wage in Nicaragua differs among sectors and covers only a fraction of the estimated costs of living (in 2006 about 2 800 córdobas a month, but excluding costs for housing. The estimations were changed in 2008 to include housing and to count for a higher daily calorie intake, amounting then to about 8 000 córdobas a month).

To answer the question about workers' salaries in Sweden brought the extreme differences in the global economy to the centre of our discussion and firmly positioned me on the wealthy side of the division of labor. Perhaps part of my unease was connected to the suspicion that Pedro would then regard me in a way that fits one of Spivak's (1981: 179) formulations. About encounters in contexts of discontinuity, she writes that the "investigated" often have few reasons *not* to see "the investigators as sweet and sympathetic creatures from another planet who are free to come and go". But on the other hand, the inequalities and interconnections within globalized patterns of production and consumption were among the essential motivations of the study. Was I not prepared to admit and take responsibility for my own position?

Part of the uncertainty about my position might stem from the purpose and the setting of the project. Clearly, in terms of who is studying whom, the study fits into the scheme discussed in Chapter 2 whereby the Third World is turned into an arena for Western knowledge production. Many workers had experiences with NGOs and foreign unions and visitors, not all of them positive. Within a framework where the premises of the relation are largely determined by those exercising financial control, workers invest time and cherish expectations of improvement, but the objectives of different types of collaboration are not always clear from workers' point of view (or necessary relevant), and sometimes projects just end without notice or trace. One worker expressed her doubts about the interest in FTZs, mine and more generally, in these terms:

María José: Many people come from other countries and are interested in what is going on in the FTZs...But sometimes I wonder about their purpose. Why do you want to know what's happening, what is the purpose? Everyone always has a purpose. I think it is important to know how the clothes that are sold in the rich countries are being produced. One might think that something is nice and want to buy it. And they don't know that the person who produced it was mistreated and humiliated. (Interview, May, 2005)

Here, crucial questions are raised: what type of knowledge is needed in order to elaborate a critique of the present manifestations and effects of the economic order? What is the purpose of interviews, and what type of content is being aimed at? Though María José expresses the need to raise consciousness about unequal conditions of production and consumption, she is unsure about the objectives of the transnational attention to FTZ work and how it might come to benefit those who are currently "mistreated and humiliated". This uncertainty, which sometimes made workers assume that I was from the Ministry of Labor or pertaining to some other recognizable category, was something that also became manifest in my own difficulties in finding points of entry in discussions with workers. The

following conversation serves as an example of how the objectives did not always make a lot of sense to the interviewees, or even to me:

Sofie: Maybe if you could start by telling me a little bit about your work experience in the FTZ?

Flor: Work?

Sofie: Yes...like for example...how long have you worked there?

Flor: Well, I have worked there for 16 months.

Sofie: In the same company?

Flor: Yes.

Sofie: And...what do you do?

Flor: There...I'm inspecting.

Sofie: Inspecting?

Flor: Yes, the pants.

Sofie: Yes...Ok. And...what do you think of the work? Is it OK?

Flor: No. On the one hand, yes, because I know how to do it. This is my work experience. This is what I know.

Sofie: Yes...And on the other hand?

Flor: On the other hand it is tiring because I am standing the whole time.

Sofie: Aha. (Interview, July, 2006)

The interview was punctuated by silences. These silences, I think, speak to the difficulties of both asking and answering questions about work in a context so profoundly marked by lack of alternatives and the brutal negation of replaceable workers' interests in "flexible" production. If workers and I could sometimes find a common ground in the denouncement of contemporary capitalist relations as they are manifested in the FTZ, if we could similarly identify with a leftist position, to them FTZ work still represented an indispensable source of income. That is to say, though the FTZs were often an object of critique, to many workers it made little (practical) sense to think beyond the zones that largely framed their lives. As Flor puts it: "This is my work experience. This is what I know". Also, doubts about the purpose and possible effects of the interviews underscore the quandary that María José alluded to above: Why do I want to know about workers' experiences? Why must I know about their feelings about the FTZs? "What do you think of having to leave your house at five in the morning, getting back at eight and still not having enough to make ends meet? How does it feel?" Is it possible to think of such a question as anything other than parasitism or even voyeurism (cf. Mulinari 2005: 126)? What could such inquiries add to a general critique of capitalist accumulation? I already know about the salaries, the overtime, the conditions in the factories, the layoffs and the unpaid social security. Many of these stories have of course been told to me by workers; they have given me insights that I would otherwise not have had. Workers have offered me their analyses, explanations and contexts. But still, the problem is not only one of lack of information but also revolves around the ways in which

recognition of the division of labor and one's position within it might be translated into political action (cf. Robbins, 2002).

At the beginning of this chapter I posed the question of whether workers' stories can be heard only if they match already essentialized truths. Writing about the status of speech in emancipatory projects, Wendy Brown (2005: 92) asks whether speech and voice have become an obsession in our time, producing an endless stream of testimonies and confessions. Paradoxically, the effort to give marginalized groups a "voice" may install a monolithic discourse in which the "story of the greatest suffering becomes the true story", in effect silencing the groups that were to be empowered. And yet *not* to talk with workers would be to assume that everything has already been said and that there is nothing else to be learned. The uneven burdens and experiences of pain, exertion and exploitation in circuits of production and consumption, that the interviews reveal, can, with Sara Ahmed (2004: 39), be thought of as manifestations of the "impossibility of 'fellow feeling'". This impossibility need not work as a disjointing wedge; confirming the unevenness of development and knowledge production it may constitute a "call not just for attentive hearing, but for a different kind of inhabitation" (ibid.): a call for collective politics based not on common feelings, injuries and experiences but rather on the challenge of current blockings of commonalities. In following sections, I hope to show how interviews with workers become significant not primarily in revealing the "greatest suffering" but in analyzing capitalist globalization in its violent everyday expressions. In this respect, the limitations and interruptions of encounters, I think, should not only be regarded as lost opportunities to gain access to information and knowledge but also as actually generating important insights about the effects of the global division of labor.

National Belongings

Theories of globalization, feminism and postcolonialism bring issues of (dis)belonging on multiple scales to the fore. Concurrent processes of mobility and confinement, inclusion and deprivation are constitutive parts of states and citizenship. Approaching "states" in the broadest sense (global, nations, minds), Judith Butler and Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak's conversation in *Who Sings the Nation-State?* spans over the politics of belonging and non-belonging in Guantanamo or Gaza and in the statelessness of neoliberal managerial states that, when stripped of structures of redistribution and welfare, can offer "no robust citizenship for the people down below" (2007: 90). As Butler puts it (2007: 4–5):

We might expect that the state presupposes modes of juridical belonging, at least minimally, but since the state can be precisely what expels and

suspends modes of legal protection and obligation, the state can put us, some of us, in quite a state. It can signify the source of non-belonging, even produce that non-belonging as a quasi-permanent state.

How do workers make sense of their states of belonging? In the rhetoric of the PLC's "New Era" and the FSLN's "Government of Reconciliation and National Unity" or "Government of Citizen's Power", claims pertaining to the common good are vital. At least to some extent, workers are central within these narratives: they are required to perform political aspirations, to give their legitimacy or consent. As political representation and appropriation merge, the politics of both projects claim to coincide with citizens' or workers' needs and hopes: such as their alleged desire for globalization or citizens' power. As illustrated in, for example, the television commercial discussed in Chapter 4, the FTZs were framed in PLC rhetoric as a manifestation of the government's commitment to universal improvements, for instance channeled through the female worker/single mother in the advertisement: "Making it better for you – the government of Nicaragua!". The development strategy of attracting investment and its supposed effects were intrinsic parts in conversations with workers, the FTZs constituting a ubiquitous topic that was often situated to the context of clashing interests:

Juana: Even if they bring a huge amount of investment, what does it help if they are going to pay us miserably? We won't achieve anything...Look, I go every day, every day to that company to work. Here everybody knows me and they see me. Look, what I end up with every second week is 1400 córdobas. But that means killing myself, killing myself daily...there are people who earn even less, 800 perhaps. It's nonsense what we earn. So there is no point in the government bringing a lot of investment if they are not giving us a good salary. What for? It makes no difference. We need...look, we are growing old in there, because I entered really young and now I'm 30. And in this whole time, I haven't done anything. I haven't done anything! You don't do anything, in the zone you don't gain anything. It's difficult. No one can achieve anything in the FTZ. (Interview, July, 2006)

In contrast to the forward-looking overtones imbuing slogans such as the "The New Era" and "*Nicaragua avanza!*", notions of time and direction are here disputed. For Juana, the nation-building project, as she experiences it, has not entailed the materialization of a new phase. Having spent her time, effort and life working in the FTZ, she perceives that she has not gained anything in return or gotten anywhere. Her inclusion in the alleged process of national advancement through export-led growth is represented as a *loss*, not as progress or gain: loss of time, aspirations and youth. More investment will in her view not change anything; possible improvements will not be for the workers in the FTZs, who are described as continuously investing more than they attain. Low salaries and lack of opportunities for

the working class are part of a structural relationship derived from conflicting interests between pro-investment policies and workers' needs.

Calling into question the description of an advancing nation, the claimed commitment to improvements for everyone, and also the very notion of a universal citizenship and inclusive political agendas, Jorge, a union activist and FTZ worker, argues that the state is functioning as a state only in relation to privileged citizens:

Jorge: The thing is that in Nicaragua we don't have a state governed by law. The laws are not observed here. All the repression of the workers that exists...there is no rule of law here. The one who has the money is the one who grabs hold of it all. It's as if the worker doesn't even have the vote. He has the vote at election time. Now in this year when they are campaigning they look how to persuade the people and promise everything. But when they are in power...they don't remember the people. Also now in the campaigns the politicians say that they are going to reform the FTZ laws, that they will make [the companies] observe them, but when they are well established, nothing. We continue in the same condition or things even get worse. More poverty. The poor are getting poorer and rich are getting richer. (Interview, July, 2006)

The nation is represented as riven by class differences and, only provisionally, workers have to be convinced that the political agenda will benefit them. The government and the economy are in the hands of an elite: those who benefit from the current order are the state and its allies, not the least foreign investors, constituting forces with an antagonistic relation to those whose conditions are described to be worsening. Indeed, a profound dependency upon foreign finance tends to produce spheres that are largely detached from the broad strata of society, in terms of both an NGO-structured civil society reliant upon international cooperation and a state that relies upon foreign approval and resources. In Nicaragua, pressure from the United States and other foreign key interests has arguably been of more significance to the ruling political class than seeking strong domestic support (see Perez Baltodano 2006b). In Jorge's view there is no real intention to alter patterns of social inequity, an issue that is temporarily added to the picture during election campaigns.

Differentiated positions within the nation-making project leave noticeable, sometimes monumental, marks on the physical landscape of the city, so reinforcing the premises of belonging. Indisputably, Managua has gone through large-scale changes, implying that *Nicaragua avanza* is a valid truth for some: large shopping malls, movie theaters and fancy restaurants are manifestations of reconfigured class relations and the integration of the country into globalized patterns of consumption.

Sofie: Now you see a lot of wealth in Managua, the big shopping malls...

María: But we can't go. I'm not going to spend 400 pesos at Plaza Inter. My kid has to eat. Only Bolaños and the deputies can go [laughing]. But I don't think they go to Plaza Inter here, they go shopping in other countries. (Interview, April, 2005)

For the majority, the products of the malls are no more accessible now than during the time of the trade embargo, when consumer goods did not enter the country – which does not imply that their presence is without impact. Consumer goods are on display in the shop windows as proof of progress and an allurements, as an indication of opportunities still out of reach. Yet, as María suspects, on a global level Nicaragua is a provincial country, and for the prosperous elite cities like Miami are just a short flight away. The products that are unattainable for workers are still disdained by the elite, pointing to transnational consumption hierarchies.

Through diverse mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion, the city is rearranged in accordance with new conceptions of belonging where the FTZs constitute but one aspect of the socio-geographic organization of society into fixed, separated units. The emergence of a transnational class and its relations to, and regulation of, the poor and the working class are described by Dennis Rodgers (2004) as an ongoing “disembedding” of the city. In contrast to other places, where the elite has largely retreated to enclaves in order to escape the brutal effects of neoliberalism, what Rodgers calls “fortified networks” are constructed for the small group of privileged in Managua. Living in guarded individual homes rather than in gated communities, the rich have ensured their access to selected parts of urban space, thereby simultaneously disconnecting entire sections from the framework of the city. As part of the explicit aim to make the city more comfortable for urban elites, the luxury restaurants, nightclubs, membership sports clubs, guarded office areas and shopping malls that mushroomed in the 1990s are all connected by high-speed multi-lane roads. Channeled into a system of roundabouts, traffic never has to stop, which reduces the risk of being carjacked. In these networks, the elite can keep the high levels of crime and insecurity at a distance. The renovation of the main highways at the same time as the roads of less interest to the elite continued to deteriorate was, as Rodgers notes, met with approval by all political parties, including the FSLN.

When security is privatized, the poor are denied admittance to certain areas by armed guards; but their general access to the city is also circumscribed by the fortified networks that Rodgers describes as a “revolt of the elite” that counters the earlier “revolt of the masses” (Rodgers 2004: 123). Indeed, the high level of security that was proposed in the brandings of the FTZs as an argument for investment does not reflect the reality of the poor, who are more likely than ever before to be the victims of traffic

accidents, violence and the crime that has exploded in Managua during the last two decades (Rodgers 2006).⁵⁶ Here, one may recall Spivak's discussion of hospitality in postcolonial settings (see Chapter 3) and ask who the city is *for*. The access of the poor to the sites that they are assigned to is indeed precarious. To travel long distances by means of public transportation, often disrupted by the recurrent bus strikes, to the FTZs that tend to be located far from housing areas was part of most workers' daily routine. That workers often had to walk long distances to reach the factories was marketed as a sign of their commitment (see Chapter 3), and was hence not articulated as a problem of, for instance, urban planning.

Discussions on development and social inequality frequently revolve around the marginalization and exclusion of certain groups. Women, in particular, have been portrayed as relegated to the margins of the economy and particularly so in relation to Structural Adjustment Programs (Nagar et al. 2002). Also, representations in development rhetoric of women as empowered through integration into the global economy tend to rest upon a perception of a past/present marked by exclusion in contrast to the promise of a future of inclusion. In the interviews, workers often described themselves as producers of value in their responses to the ways that the establishment of FTZs was fitted into discourses of universal progress:

Sandra: The ones that benefit are the selfsame investors, they are happy filling their pockets. They put it beautifully: oh, more employment! More and more companies, more FTZs, more employment. It's true that employment helps but it would be better if there would come work opportunities that were not FTZs. Other types of employment [...] Sometimes I think, they say that there is no money...but they open all those shopping malls and people are poor. So I don't understand. This is the development they are talking about; but about development of work so we can have it better, nothing! (Interview, April 2005)

Here, logics of production and consumption are juxtaposed against prevailing notions of development. Workers' accounts of restricted access to the expressions of national progress did not typically imply that they looked upon themselves as marginal to the processes of change. Rather, they recognized their work as crucial but as something that was turned to the benefit of privileged groups: "they are happy filling their pockets". As this indicates, inserting an opposition between inclusion and exclusion is less productive than looking at how different groups are connected or disconnected from other sectors and different aspects of the social, usually in ambiguous ways. In Sandra's representation, workers are needed for the

⁵⁶ As Rodgers (2006) points out, figures apparently demonstrating low levels of criminality are most likely large underestimates. Most of the violence occurs in poor, urban areas where the police have limited patrolling capacity and victims are unlikely to report offences and violence.

production of value but the notion of development is constituted such that workers' improved positions and opportunities are not included. The new shopping malls are symbols of development in her account, but they constitute an economic sphere that remains closed to the impoverished population, both as sites of work and as sites of consumption.

The division of labor under globalization has arguably implied not only an amplified interconnectedness through networks and flows but also enlarged gaps between sites of production and consumption, social as well as geographical in character. As a consequence, the historic link between employment within an expansive sector of the economy and a certain degree of upward mobility is frequently snapped. Indeed, some of the fastest-growing segments of the global economy rely on female, migrant or Third World labor. But as Saskia Sassen (1999) points out, their precarious employment conditions imply that they are denied entry into the "labor aristocracy". Their position and the conditions of their attachment to "the nation" and the "the global" revolve around production rather than consumption. The reinforcement of the "cheapness" of certain workers necessitates that the urban proletariat is "[not] systematically trained in the ideology of consumerism", which also provides an opening for coalitions of resistance (Spivak 1993: 83). A clear manifestation of the redundancy of some domestic markets, the FTZ phenomenon is premised upon the geographical and socio-economic separation between consumers and producers.

In a context where signs of progress, such as a growing supply of consumer goods, can connote what they are "meant" to mean only to the privileged few, indications of persistent poverty tend to occupy an abject position. If the FTZs are to indicate modernization, they cannot at the same time harbor associations with pre-modern conditions. In David's story about Bolaños' visit to the FTZ factory where he worked, the actual site of production remained hidden:

One day, President Bolaños came to inaugurate a new factory. We were all there, in the factory modules, and it's another story, but we had been given masks to wear. They should give them to us periodically because they don't work after a while. So this day they were handing out masks, thinking that the President would enter. But not even that, he stayed outside at the reception. Someone else would have said "I'm going to see how the people work" and then he would have noticed, he would have seen how the system works. (Interview, April, 2005)

The factory in its usual state is not intended for visitors; many workers told similar stories to David's about hectic cleaning and distribution of masks and other types of security equipment on the occasion of visits or supposedly unannounced inspections by the Ministry of Labor. The workers were wearing their masks but Bolaños did not come to see them, the

external structure of the factory perhaps being easier to contain within the framework of progress in the “New Era”. However, in workers’ narratives a lack of interest in working conditions is often not connected to a non-knowledge about irregularities and violations in the FTZs:

Carolina: It’s not as if the authorities don’t know. They know perfectly well what’s going on in the FTZs [...] There have been various situations and the government doesn’t act. On the contrary, the government institutions don’t support the worker, they don’t do anything. (Interview, July, 2006)

The possibility of the FTZs and their labor force to inhabit alternative configurations of belonging was evaluated differently by workers. Here, the belief that a return of the FSLN to power would involve the intention or the capacity to alter conditions of work often constituted the dividing line. When I interviewed workers in 2006, a few months before the upcoming elections, expectations varied widely. In some accounts, the persistent insistence on a commitment to improvements articulated both in liberal and in Sandinista rhetoric, albeit with different terminologies, contrasted with workers’ notions of continuity, stagnation or deterioration:

Carolina: I think it’s a sad reality that we are living here in Nicaragua. It doesn’t matter who wins because they are only interested in their wellbeing, their own wellbeing and their families’, and they don’t look at those who are on the bottom. They are there for us because we put them there, and supposedly they are there for us, but they don’t work for the rights of the worker [...] The current president promised to fight corruption and now he is involved in other corruption scandals. At least I can’t see a good future for us as workers. Maybe one day if a *maquila* worker becomes president! Maybe then things would change!

Questioning the trope of change, Carolina envisages things remaining the same, regardless of which of the established parties wins power. Distanced from those that it should work for, a political class has captured the state for its own benefit, in Carolina’s view negating the function of representative democracy: “supposedly they are there for us”. When the interests of the political establishment do not converge with those of FTZ workers, political change is half jokingly portrayed as contingent upon the emergence of a new political force with a different class composition: “if a *maquila* worker becomes president!” While some questioned the Sandinistas’ intentions and also their room to maneuver in actually imposing significant changes, others were indeed convinced that changes were to be expected following a Sandinista victory, for better or worse:

Juana: Now the boss from Taiwan says that they'll leave if the Sandinistas win.

Sofie: Do you think it's true?

Juana: They will! Daniel Ortega says that he doesn't want anything to do with the gringos, nothing. Then, you can imagine! So to my knowledge, if Daniel says that he doesn't want anything to do with the gringos, this will affect us, the poor. Because we don't have anywhere to go, we have to go to the zone. I'm not for any party. If Daniel wins, he'll tell them that they have to pay fair wages, but then they'll go.

Angela: There I agree with you. Daniel will say "look, you are investors, very well." But he will demand and make them follow the law. He will say "look how much the subsistence level is, you have to increase the wages. Give my people a fair wage, my friend!"

Juana: But they'll never accept that, they would leave, all of them! Who will suffer? We will. The poor! The government always just cares about its own benefits. There are people who would die for him [Ortega], not me. So if the FIZs disappear, we will suffer. Because what could Daniel bring [instead]? (Interview, July, 2006)

In this conversation, the functioning of the global economy is related to the possibilities of a poor country like Nicaragua making demands on transnational capital. In Juana's view, Daniel Ortega is carving out his political position using anti-imperialistic rhetoric, but the cost will be paid by the workers, who do not have any alternatives. Angela, who was active in a Sandinista youth group, expressed her confidence in Ortega and nourished the hope that conditions in the FIZs would improve with a change of government: faced with reasonable requests for higher wages, investors would comprehend the need to pay the workers more. Juana, on the other hand, saw no reason why investors would agree to increase wages, and thought it more likely that they would relocate their productive operations. Her perception of the scope to challenge the current order was limited to taking an oppositional stand, which, without prospects to alter the conditions or structures as such, remained an option only for those already in secure positions.

In the summer of 2006, there were many rumors to the effect that investors would leave in the event of a Sandinista victory. Workers recounted that their supervisors actively intervened, telling them not to vote for the Sandinistas: "if you vote red and black, we leave." This threat seemed not to have been widely acted upon. When I returned in 2008, some large investors had indeed closed their operations, but this had arguably more to do with the global recession than with the return of the FSLN to power. The workers whom I asked about investors' reactions to the election result usually attested that, despite their manifest concerns during the election campaign, investors appeared to have accepted the FSLN's victory with equanimity. As one worker expressed it during a group interview with the members of a small union formed at the company *TechNica*:

Before the elections, yes, all of them said that they were leaving if the Sandinistas were to win. But now, no. The Nicaraguan is really cheap, dirt cheap! In Guatemala they pay well. In Costa Rica they pay well, it's only here that they pay super-bad. (Interview, February, 2008)

Also, after the election Nicaragua's position in the global division of labor remains the same, leaving investment incentives unaltered. After the FSLN gained power, the minimum wage was revised every six months in accordance with the labor law, which was rarely enforced during the previous governments.⁵⁷ However, the workers at *TechNica* described how the company found ways to avoid increased costs, for example by lowering the worth of each operation, implying that workers earned less for surpassed production goals. In these workers view, they are still part of the most exploited labor force in the region and yet the tension between transnational demands and local aspirations persists.

What is marketed as the provision of unique opportunities and a political commitment to the maintenance of a benign, pro-business climate may from another angle indicate the indifference of the government to ensuring acceptable conditions for workers:

David: I come to your house and say, "I want this and this and this", and you say "sure, take it!". I am gaining and you are losing. But if you say "No, this is what I am willing to give you", then you are obliging me to give you more benefits, and you're not going to give in knowing that all those benefits will stay at my place. (Interview, April, 2005)

The investor is here pictured as a guest turned host (compare Chapter 3). The hospitality of the state, its effort to please the investor, is in David's account described as self-effacing: having no idea of what it wants to achieve from its engagement with transnational capital, other than its promulgation, the state is prepared to accede to all the demands of the investors. Alluded to in the above quotation is the idea that the state should instead acknowledge that the accumulation of capital must always materialize in a local context, translating into a certain leeway for negotiating the content and limits of hospitality as well as the structures of entitlements and belonging.

In workers' accounts, many different types of collectivities, divisions and identifications are expressed. Recurrently, political projects are portrayed as disintegrated. In the citations above, workers describe a state that is not governed by law when it comes to defending the rights of the population at

⁵⁷ Between 1995 and 2006 the increase in the minimum wage in the FTZs was 18 percent. Between 2007 and 2010, the minimum wage was increased four times and currently amount to 137 USD a month (to be compared with 85 USD in 2006). In Guatemala the minimum wage is 173 USD and in Honduras 145 USD. The estimated living costs in Nicaragua in 2009 was about 400 USD (*La Prensa*, January 20, 2010).

large; a merged political and economic class that has no real interest in the wellbeing of the majority; and a political elite that chooses to look in the other direction rather than to confront the precarious conditions in the FTZs. The accounts are often organized around a sharp division between “we” and “them” that take on diverse shapes.

The “we” that is evoked in the interviews most often appears to refer to a workers’ collective or to signal an identification with the poor majority. Workers represent themselves as producers of value and as such as essential to the process of economic integration from which they are at the same time detached (“we won’t achieve anything”, “we continue in the same conditions” and “we will suffer”). This “we” is contrasted to an often unspecified “they”, which interchangeably seems to denote the government, the elite and investors. It is a “they” that is represented as indifferent to the needs of workers and “the people” and that has interests in opposition to the “we” (“when they are in power, they don’t remember the people”, “they are happy filling their pockets”, “they know perfectly well what is going on”, “this is the development that they are talking about”). These representations of power and powerlessness, of inclusion and exclusion, I think, speak to a starkly divided society, offering a “pseudo-citizenship” (cf. Cherniavsky 2006: 26) to disposable workers, where premises of inclusion are at the same time manifestations of impossible belongings.

Categorizations of Work

[Capital] is abstract and spectral, in the special sense that although bodyless it must pass through unanticipatable moments of embodiment, carry codes with history, slip into mental material, mess with temporalization and phenomenal desire and hope fed with memory and example... (Spivak 2000a: 43)

Transnational production is materialized not only in specific localities but also in and through bodies and “mental material”, turning workers into a prerequisite and a problem for capital accumulation. In the contradictory historical formations of class, workers have been given both incentives and disincentives to identify with and invest in the position ascribed to them in the division of labor. Discourses compete on how to handle the masses that processes of industrialization and schemas of categorization create: on the one hand the degenerate and dangerous classes that were needed for the realization of value but tended to be denied the status of humanity, and on the other hand the workers as the protagonists of the future (see Chapter 2). Inseparable from any such classed conceptualizations of degeneracy, idleness, morality and strength are formations of gender and race (see

McClintock 1995; Skeggs 1997): who are the subjects that are encouraged or restricted from occupying which positions within circuits of production?

The contradictions inherent in the positions available for workers, enabling and restraining, imply that such positions cannot be easily inhabited. Proceeding from the ways that FTZ workers give meaning to their experiences, in the following section I focus on strategies to respond to divergent representations and interpellations: workers as “the best people” and “unskilled” and work as “emancipation” or “exploitation”. To borrow a question from David Harvey (2000: 103): “What effects does the circulation of variable capital (the extraction of labor power and surplus value) have on the bodies (persons and subjectivities) of those through whom it circulates”? In exploring workers’ assessments of how bodies “come to matter” in FTZ production, my aim is to approach ways to make sense of diversifying categorizations in transnational production.

On one level, to become an FTZ worker entails the possibility of producing a self in connection with a recognizable and respectable category:

Eléna: My experience has been that I have come to know the work. I feel like a good worker because I do the job well. They have taken me for a good worker, or the supervisor of my area thinks I’m a good worker. I have gotten to know people, for example the Chinese. I have become acquainted with them. It’s nice that it is like that, though at times they, like...bother you. But you learn a lot of things there, you make friends. It’s nice there. (Interview, July, 2006)

Work is an essential part of social constellations, not only a means of survival. To invest in a prescribed position, to regard oneself as a worker and to be acknowledged by others as a good worker, to “feel like a good worker”, is, in Eléna’s account, represented as a source of self-esteem and a way to enter into relationships with others. In the workplace she has acquired friends and knowledge that enable her to be recognized. Yet there are dimensions of FTZ work that seem to counter strong identifications, the possibilities of fully *being* workers. Tensions that sustain and dissolve the category of the worker are evident already in the process of hiring. Outside the factory gates, a crowd usually waits for the management to come out and select some of them. By and large, it is not their potential qualities as workers that are primarily evaluated:

Sandra: My brother doesn’t have a job now. It’s more difficult for men.

Sofie: Why?

Sandra: I don’t know, they always say that they want young women. If they see someone who looks a bit fat or old, no! “No fat, no old” they say. You have to be young and skinny! (Interview, April, 2005)

The preference for female workers and the evaluation of their physical appearance was often commented by workers. As Sandra points out, it is the body of the young, slim woman that best corresponds to the employers' perception of the ideal worker, arguably echoing the transnational fantasy of simultaneous female docility and dexterity (cf. Salzinger 2003). It was also often alleged that employers singled out the workers they found most attractive: "They only want models", as Mercedes said, laughing (Interview, February, 2008). In line with the idea of "unskilled" labor, workers are not being hired for any particular assets that they have acquired but rather for considerations made "outside" of labor relations: physical appearance and no record of union participation are generally more important than, for instance, job experience. Youth and conceptions of beauty are also characteristics that typically fade with time: value, then, is something that is being hollowed out rather than accumulated with the progression of production. Here, the relativity of time and youth in the factories is considered:

Carmen: I told the supervisors that I would bring some girls with borrowed IDs and no problem. I have done that a lot, some were only 15. When they are 18 they are already old workers. That is the only way, the money goes directly to feed their younger siblings. But of course they are too young to work like that. One of my daughters has problems with her lungs. In the future, we will see a lot of sick young women. So what does the government want? A pile of corpses? (Interview, March, 2005)

Healthy, fit and young bodies (though if too young they must be represented as old enough) may be a requirement for hiring. However, these characteristics are often sacrificed in the process of production (cf. Harvey 2000: 103). As Carmen stresses, youth fades fast in the zones, and the fear of falling ill from the dust of all the fabrics and dangerous chemicals is ever present, particularly in a context where no safety nets exist: "When one finishes it feels like there is a lot of dust in the body. They say that it produces cancer but I don't know" (Flor, Interview, July, 2006). This adds to the notion of a time limit in the organization of work in the factories. Physically and psychologically arduous, it is usually not the kind of work that workers can endure for very long: "Even the Chinese say that after three years you are useless in the zone, already damaged" (Emilio, Interview, July, 2006).

In sum, FTZ work is not a long-term option. After a few years in the zones many workers feared they would have acquired physical problems that would make it even more difficult for them to find another type of job, the work experience from the zone being of no particular advantage in the labor market. Indeed, in the FTZs temporariness operates on various levels. Companies might pack up and leave – many stories circulate about companies that had closed down during the weekend without paying or

even notifying their workers. Subcontracted orders are difficult to foresee; depending on whether contracts are won or lost, the demand for labor may rapidly change. Moreover, in a workplace where hiring and firing occur on a daily basis, identification with a particular position in production is always conditioned and provisional:

David: The worker keeps thinking, “tomorrow I’ll be off, sacked”, but then they are not actually fired that day. The worker thinks of this, it affects the work, the situation at home, the worker’s conduct in the company, it’s a difficult [*fregado*] problem, it’s like psychological torture. (Interview, April, 2005)

The practice of unpredictable layoffs is effective in undermining the organization of unions. In addition, the generation of a strong identification as workers is obstructed by the ways that the labor situation is framed. Workers’ accounts are laden with metaphors for their experiences of being subjected to production:

Sandra: The Koreans are very strict. It’s like they prefer robots to people, that don’t move, don’t breathe, don’t turn in any direction but concentrate on what they are doing. Like machines: only the work. (Interview, April, 2005)

Esperanza: We finish at seven and at six we already want to leave. There we move slowly, waiting for the hour to pass so we can get out. You get so tired... You have to be like a martyr to work there. (Interview, April, 2005)

Juana: I’m going to tell you honestly that you feel like a prisoner in there. Because there is no exit to the outside... You get out and it feels like you have been in long tunnel. You feel like a prisoner and when you get out you feel free, free but like if you have no idea. (Interview, July, 2006)

Eléna: ...the ways that they yell at us, they don’t treat us like persons, more like garbage. (Interview, July, 2006)

Verónica: This is a regime of slavery, it’s not a regime of work. (Interview, July, 2006)

With associations with martyrs, robots, prisoners, slaves, garbage and machines, workers describe the regulations of the self, by themselves and others. To comply with the demands of the management and the organization of work involves adaptation to the extent that the activities in the factories hardly any longer correspond to conceptions of work. The sensations of being in a prison or tunnel, to barely be able or allowed to breathe or move in any direction; these portrayals forcefully pinpoint the claustrophobic order of the factories. Here the only leeway to resist the discipline, and become a little less of a robot or a machine, might be to work

slower the last hour of the day, as described by Esperanza. The ways in which the category of the worker is given a substance that impedes identification and recognition are further reinforced by management referring to workers in ways that flatten them, representing them not as workers or persons. In particular, workers often imitated their South Korean or Taiwanese supervisors who were there on short contracts and often arrived without being able to speak Spanish:

Eléna: When we are working and do something wrong, they say, or rather, they scream in the way that they speak: “How work?” “How think?” And they yell “horse, horse” [*caballo, caballa*]. One day a boy...a piece turned out wrong and they blamed him. So they cancelled his contract and said “boy horse” [*muchacho caballo*]. So I got in there because that is ugly, he was a colleague of mine. So I said to *la china* “what do you mean horse, he is not an animal he is a person”, I told her. “No, horse!” she told me. “No, he’s not a horse, he’s a person!” I thought that she was going to tell me off but she didn’t say anything. (Interview, July, 2006)

When workers are positioned as lacking in value and knowledge, disidentification and resistance against objectification becomes an important strategy to confront repression. Degrading designations contrast with the marketing of the Nicaraguan labor force as especially qualified and the descriptions and interpellations such as the large sign outside Las Mercedes: “Welcome to Las Mercedes, where the best people work”. As I discussed in Chapter 4, workers are ambiguously positioned as suitable for production and as deviating from the notion of the “good worker”. This is how one former FTZ worker expressed the tensions and inconsistencies between opposing narratives:

Martha: In what ways are *maquila* workers the best? Are they the ones that best put up with their conditions? The ones that are most easily trodden upon? It is like they have made investigations in order to determine what type of worker suits them best. And so they have found out that it is young, poor, uneducated women. Because of necessity, women are more responsible. The single mothers are the ones that are most easily enslaved; they work the hardest and are the ones that fall ill first. You can see how the burden affects them, both physically and psychologically. They break down the workers [...] All the time, they tell you that you are stupid, that you are not worth anything and the worst thing is that after a while you start to believe them. (Interview, May, 2006)

The sign that declares that only the “best people” work in FTZs is in Martha’s account related to how workers are disciplined and controlled in accordance with capital’s needs and to the difficulties female workers have in resisting the conditions to which they are subjected. Rejecting the potentially flattering interpellation, the reference to the “best people” is here framed as an aspect of the repression in the zones, more as a mockery of

workers whose precarious situations and lack of alternatives make them easy to control, and thus, from the perspective of capital, adding to their value. The specific targeting of young women and single mothers, in the TV-commercial connected to positive values such as dedication and resolution (see Chapter 4), is here represented as a deliberate, exploitative strategy. In line with Martha's argument, to be good in the view of capital means to be "easily trodden upon": to correspond to the idea of the proper worker "is therefore not a piece of luck but a misfortune", as Marx (1973: 644) expressed it. Thus, it is not contradictory that "the best people" come to think of themselves as stupid and worthless.

The propensity not to treat workers as persons, as grown-ups (the frequent reference to workers as girls and boys), to construct them as someone without knowledge or integrity, entails the constitution of workers as objects and work as boundless. A variant of the conceptualization of some segments of the labor force as deviating from the category of the "real" worker (for instance, the characterization of workers as housewives, see Chapter 4) is the conceptualization that negates other dimensions; to be seen and treated *only* as a (certain kind of) worker where no other dimensions are given importance. As Mirna put it: "the Koreans want one to live only to work" (Interview, April, 2005). In a gesture of reduction and confinement, to be a worker is to be persistently available or not to work at all. Though overtime is regulated, and compulsory overtime is illegal, in many companies there are no ways to avoid it, as David said imitating his supervisor: "If you came here it was because you wanted to work!" (Interview, April, 2005). Workers often depicted the FTZs as a trap: some of them entered them in the hope to of being able to finance further studies, only to find that to be an impossible combination:

Verónica: But if we had dignified jobs with better salaries, better health and education conditions, I think that it would be a lot better. All of these conditions have been denied the worker. These are rights that the worker is denied. The workers don't have time to study. One day maybe one will aspire to be something more than only a seamstress in a *maquila*. They deprive us of the notion of becoming a little better. People think that because one is in there, one is a person who is not capable of being a little better off tomorrow. But we are all capable of whatever work we dedicate ourselves to. (Interview, July, 2006)

Many of the workers that I met were trying to study at night or on weekends; quite a few had had to make a choice between work and study since they were missing out to much of school when forced to work overtime. Others, like Verónica and María, had already completed other careers but because they were unable to get a job within their field, their only option was to work in the FTZs. Unlike in PLC rhetoric, which insisted that FTZ work was to be the engine of progress and modernity, in

workers' accounts the conception of *maquila* work as an unskilled and low-status occupation dominates. Expressions such as of "ending up" and "being stuck" in the FTZs reflect a polarized labor market where "flexible specialization" implies that large segments of the population do not need much education: citizens are needed on different levels of global transactions, and to be content with FTZ work is also to be a good subject of development (see Chapter 4). As David commented on the government's main strategy to counter unemployment: "If more *maquilas* come here...man! They should just close down the universities then!" (Interview, April, 2005).

While David was being sarcastic here, the same argument was often made in interviews with officials from organizations and lobby groups. ProNicaragua, for example, stated that it was working for better communication between investors and the government so that resources could be allocated to sectors where there was investor demand. Thus, more emphasis on technical careers or basic education was requested. The same ideas are reflected in an interview with a representative from the US Chamber of Commerce, AMCHAM:

We have to invest in education, basic education. People have to stop studying law and international relations, we have enough of that. I'll be very unpopular if I say this in public but we don't need more lawyers. There are a lot of people who go to the university and an enormous group of young ones that haven't even finished primary school. We have to change that pattern and invest in basic education, we don't need the enormous amount of professionals that we have in this country. (Interview, March, 2008)

In the development rhetoric of, for instance, the World Bank, it is often suggested that the reason for women's subordination is that they have not yet entered the global economy in sufficient numbers because of their lingering lack of "human capital". According to this logic, if they are well disposed and properly prepared, there are jobs for them to take on that would facilitate their advancement. But, as S. Charusheela (2003: 290–293) notes, in the racialized and gendered structures of the global division of labor, location tends to count for more than education, which is not particularly relevant to the hiring practices in the FTZs. Thus, while education is arguably fetishized in development discourses, here too much or the wrong kind of education is represented as a misuse of economic resources and, in the view of an official of the Free Trade Zone Corporation (CZF), it is also a factor that will add to workers' frustration:

Because when you have people that are trained and they can't find a job, they feel bad because what they get economically is very little in relation to their intellectual capacity. That capacity is not necessary in this type of industry because, as you have seen, the tasks they perform are easy. To put

two pieces together, you don't need a university degree, right? [...] You know, I suddenly feel that we are wasting money because we are investing in university education for a lot of people who don't get any benefit from it because they end up in activities with no complexity whatsoever. Why waste time and money? (Interview, April, 2005)

Education is framed as an overindulgence and as an obstruction for workers who are to inhabit a particular position within the global division of labor, a position that vacillates between being stripped of substance (“no complexity whatsoever”) and being all-encompassing; workers are reduced to the skills that are demanded in factory work, and there is no need for external referents. The idea that the “intellectual capacity” of workers may indeed match the capacity needed “to put two pieces together”, is a mode of locking workers into the position of the “unskilled”. Thus, the passages quoted unerringly correspond to Verónica’s observations above: “They deprive us of the notion of becoming a little better.” Parallel to the discourse of self-improvement, the constant accumulation of the self, is the fixation of other subjects to locations that they should not be trained to leave.

An important aspect within feminist theory and politics has centered on the question of work: the recognition of women’s work as “real” work and the acknowledgment of their contribution to production. The constitution of women as non-workers, as housewives despite their income-generating activities, and as secondary and temporary wage laborers has been analyzed as an important component of women’s subordination and as crucial to the reproduction of heteronormative, capitalist relations (Mohanty 2003; Wright 1997). But to a certain extent one can also imagine the misrecognition of work and the disidentification with the position of the worker as means of resistance. In post-Sandinista discourse, women were not obscured as workers, at least not unequivocally so. Marketed as efficient and as a labor force with valuable qualities, women were interpellated to correspond to the branding of the nation, to become proper workers. FTZ work was portrayed as a valid, good employment option brought about by investment and a judicious political agenda, not as a temporary or secondary source of income. Against such portrayals, workers invested FTZ work with other meanings:

Sandra: When I was in school, I thought I didn’t want to work in the zone, but whatever...A lot of my friends are in the zone too, the majority. A lot of them wanted to study, to advance economically, but no. And it’s not the kind of work that a person deserves. It’s really sad, the situation. (Interview, April, 2005)

María: There is no employment. There are so many people working but there is no employment [...] Here there are no alternatives except the FTZ,

which is a false alternative. False for us but ingenious for the government, very ingenious. (Interview, April, 2005)

Here, FTZ work is represented as deviating from what workers deserve or as no employment at all. From these workers' point of view it should not be counted as real work. Indeed, to reject the portrayal of FTZ work as in line with their interests and, accordingly, the position of the good worker that they are interpellated to take pride in can be perceived as a form of protest. It is a way of interrupting the logic that envisions only two options: female dependency and exclusion, or female emancipation through integration into paid labor in the global economy. Clearly, this does not necessarily imply that Sandra and María were not interested in keeping their jobs; at that time neither of them saw any other alternatives. In fact, some workers were even prepared to take steps to help their employers to stay in business. In an interview with Laura who was part of an independent union that she and her co-workers had clandestinely founded, she told me that the union had offered to help the company to keep its clients in response to the frequent warnings that the factory was to be closed down for lack of orders:

We don't know if it's just a strategy they've got. But we've told them many times that we as a union...if it is because of the order intake, if it's too low because there are no clients, that we as an organization can call the clients, the brand, and tell them to continue to work with [the company], as long as it respects the labor laws, right. Because we think that first of all it is important not to leave the workers without jobs and second that they respect our rights. But the company hasn't answered us, and we've said it many times, so I guess it's just a way for them to put pressure on the workers, to say that they'll close down. (Interview, March, 2008)

During the interview, which lasted almost two hours, Laura told me in detail about the violations that the company continuously committed. At the time, she had been suspended for almost a year after having been accused of sabotage around the time that the union was formed. Her case was attended to by the Ministry of Labor, and after a year without income she still hoped to be rehired by the company, which had not presented any evidence against her. Despite her harsh denouncement of the company and the FTZ system in general, she was prepared to commit herself to its survival. Choices about work are made and measured in a terrain marked by perceived alternatives and expectations, on the self and from others, where the status of workers and work are under continuous negotiation (cf. Kabmanivanh and Tollefsen 2010). But to Laura, Sandra and María, rather than being framed as a part of a "solution", the jobs in the zones were indicative of difficult conditions, of a "sad situation" or a "false alternative".

Disruptive Relations in Value Accumulation

The FTZs are embedded in social relations. Some of these are diffuse, not quite established; and some relations appear to be interrupted by the ways that production is organized. The formation of relations to other workers is a requisite for organization and the formulation of collective demands; but, within the regime of the zones, workers are kept apart and positioned as mutual competitors.

María: Outside you'll find a lot of people who want to work. Sometimes you might be sick or have problems but you have to go to work. So they don't understand that. I have a son who is eight years old and I can't go to any of the meetings at his school. I can't go because I can't miss work. I can only see on the exams if it goes well or bad but I can't meet the teachers...So on the one hand it helps us to survive. But on the other hand it represses us. This Friday is his birthday but I can't be there. You can't put feelings or personal things first. Because that is how it is, if we don't work, we can't eat and we starve to death. We sacrifice our families, health and dignity, that's how it is. (Interview, April, 2005)

Those who have not yet entered into a direct, formalized relationship with the companies are consistently present, a "reserve army" that becomes internalized as a mechanism of self-regulation by workers who see the lines of unemployed, who know that workers are fired and hired on a daily basis. Employers point to potential workers: if you are not happy with your job or prepared to work overtime, someone else surely will be. As Massimo De Angelis (2001) notes, the competition and command over labor have become less visible and locatable: digitalized market transactions – the "watchtowers" of the global economy – fuel competition with close and distant workers, those on the factory floor, outside the factory and for instance in Vietnam (see Chapter 2).

Other workers and potential workers are also used as an argument against an increase in the minimum wage in the FTZs. One aspect of this is the necessity of remaining competitive in relation to other countries specializing in labor-intensive production. In the view of a representative of the Nicaraguan Association of Textile and Apparel (ANITEC), Nicaraguan labor has to remain significantly cheaper than the alternatives in neighboring countries because of deficiencies in infrastructure and in the political framework: "We are still in our diapers" (Interview, February, 2008). But an increase would also threaten the weakest segments of society, it is argued, as it would lead to inflation, and most people do not even have a job with rights and fixed salaries. As reflected in an interview with a CZF representative who condemned the increase in the minimum wage that the new Sandinista government had imposed: "He who is in the informal sector, to whom is he going to complain? The Ministry of Labor has no

control over this; the unions have no control over the informal sector, so who is really looking out for him?" (Interview, February, 2008). In solidarity with the unemployed and those within the vast informal sector, salaries must be kept down so that the rising prices of consumer products do not make their situation even more difficult. Omitted from this account of the connection between minimum wages, inflation and the living conditions of the unemployed is the impact of the elite's ways of life.

Diffuse relations with other workers competing for employment opportunities in Nicaragua and across the globe tend to be bound up with the dissolution of other sets of relations. María describes in the above quotation how she has become distant from her family, how she finds herself on the outside of social encounters when her job, in the presence of the risk of being fired, always must be given priority. Similarly, a former FTZ worker expressed feelings of having been disconnected:

Martha: It is as if people are paralyzed by fear. I myself feel as if I have changed fundamentally since I quit. I felt so isolated when I worked there, I felt like I didn't have any contact with my family. I didn't know what was going on. I came home and went to bed, I was almost too tired to hug my daughters. Nothing... It's like a separate world being in there. (Interview, May, 2005)

The perception of being in "a separate world" is arguably enforced by the managements' refusal to acknowledge workers as belonging to more complex social contexts, which adds to the concrete limitations of workers' interactions with others. The invalidation of their emotional ties and caring responsibilities is reinforced through the demands of invariable availability as manifested in overtime demands and denials of permission to leave at times of sickness or personal problems:

Miriam: Your mother might die, your son, your brother and in the zone, they don't give you permission to leave. They don't let you. What do they say? "So your mother is very sick at the hospital? That's why she's at the hospital!" They don't give permission, they don't help. (Interview, April, 2005)

Workers are reduced to factors of production. Akin to the positioning of workers as *only* workers and yet as infinitely replaceable on the shop floor, they are constructed as disposable in their social relations. Someone else may (and often must) take their place. Thus, workers are expected to adapt to the clashing demands of societal re-regulation. At the same time, the burden of Structural Adjustment Programs, the cuts in governmental spending on social services, falls heavily on the poorest segments, which also comprise the core of the workforce in an ever more flexible, insecure labor market. The increasing difficulties citizens have in navigating the

requirements to be available for production and to assume a larger share of responsibility for the care and education of family members arguably leads to the “exhaustion of society” (Bieling 2003: 58) in the face of incompatible demands.

The arduous character of FTZ work is described to determine relations outside the factories as well:

Verónica: Once when I worked as a supervisor I experienced only conflict. I was fighting *la china*, it almost drove me crazy. I came home and I treated my children the same way that she was treating me. My husband said, “This is not the FTZ. What they are doing to you, you are doing to the kids”. And it made me think again, because it was the truth. So I thought it’s better to act it out with her, so we had even *more* conflicts. I think this happens to a lot of people: what they experience in the FTZs they go on to experience at home. They [the management] are imposing a norm...the discipline of the FTZ. (Interview, July, 2006)

Workers’ experiences of subordination, humiliation and conflict are not confined within the factory walls. The norm of the FTZs that Verónica describes not only implies that relations with others are being disrupted, they also affect the character of social interactions. The events of the workday are not something that is easily shaken off.

In the quotation above, Verónica describes the conflicts that she had with a South Korean manager. As discussed in Chapter 3, Asian investors were recurrently depicted as the most “problematic”, a notion that was reflected in workers’ accounts as well: “*los chinos*” were often represented as the most demanding employers. In part, I think, this has to do with the practice of Asian investors to bring supervisors on shop floor level from the country of origin, instead of hiring supervisors locally as US companies tend to do. Arguably, this makes the encounter with the “transnational” more palpable and direct:

Eléna: They are the bosses but they used to be like us – workers. They are from another country; this is not their country but they come here to order us. They think that they are superior to us, but it’s not like that. (Interview, July, 2006)

In the citation, Eléna points to local and global class relations. As she suggests, the Korean or Taiwanese supervisors who are hired on short-term contracts are usually themselves from working class positions and are brought to Nicaragua to superintend production on the lowest level. It is in the contact with them that the discipline of the zones is enforced and negotiated. The ways that workers often imitated their supervisors’ broken Spanish and called them “*los chinitos*” (the little Chinese) reflect the attempt to destabilize relations of domination and subordination. Perhaps, the different representations of Asian and US investors may also be traced to

hierarchies between nationalities and ethnicities. While “*gringos*”, in the narratives of workers as well as representatives of different institutions, were sometimes also described as exploitative and demanding, the supremacy of the United States is arguably more settled. In contrast, the positions of Asian countries are more fluid and hierarchies less definite, thus implying that people of Asian descent are more likely to be the targets of (degrading) ethnic stereotypes.

Some workers portrayed their encounters with supervisors as formed around relations that never really come to fruition. When I asked Pedro about his perception of the interaction between workers and management, he depicted a situation in which workers are not distinguished enough for a relationship to be established:

Look, I don't know what to tell you. For them, we are numbers. Numbers. Including when one goes to the bathroom, they say that the time belongs to them. They are paying us for the whole day, they say. So all the time is theirs, we are occupying a time that belongs to them. They want us to go running. They always threaten us with the salary or they give you a warning. (Interview, July, 2006)

Pedro's description of intangible relations, reducing the workers to numbers on management's lists, comes close to the essence of what Marx (1973: 296–97) elaborates as abstract labor: “As *the* use value which confronts capital, labour is not this or that labour, *but labour pure and simple*, abstract labour; absolutely indifferent to its particular specificity but capable of all specificities.[...] capital...confronts the totality of labours potentially, and the particular one it confronts at a given time is an accidental matter.” To capital, labor is abstract because it is interested only in using it, not considering the concrete characteristics and differences; in this regard capital treats all workers as identical. As Pedro points out, in profit maximizing labor counts merely as working time (parallels can be drawn to Marx's (1847/2005: 57) depiction of the worker as “the carcase of time”). This reduction is facilitated by the fragmentation of the production process into delimited, simple operations that are easily superintended and evaluated, typical characteristics of FTZ work.

As a pseudo-commodity, labor power differs from other commodities; it is the commodity that workers sell and that capitalists may deploy as they like, but they do not have the full right to the person who harbors the labor power. This distinguishes capitalist accumulation from slavery. However, the line of demarcation between the deployable and the non-deployable is not given. As Marx underlined, at the heart of capitalism is the struggle over the needs of labor and capital's infringement of the integrity of the worker. In Pedro's description, the endeavor in the FTZs is to approximate the

pseudo-commodity of labor to an actual commodity: workers are numbers and in all respects the time of the workday belongs to the company, something that meticulous regulations persistently remind workers of: “we are occupying a time that belongs to them.”

To ensure value production, capital must subdue workers’ external needs, must control the conflict between what a worker might desire and the demands of production. Because of labor’s character as a pseudo-commodity, “the residual ‘subjectivity’ of the worker poses unique problems for capital because it gives rise to a definite recalcitrance to being ‘exploited’” (Arthur 2001: 30). Since capital’s capacity of value accumulation is dependent on its efficiency in mastering the labor force, it must curb the “remaining” subjectivity of the worker that resists being entirely appropriate. The ways that workers are disciplined in the workplace and the transgression of their space of integrity were often an issue raised in the interviews:

Martha: On the contrary, people would work better without all the pressure in the factories. Now all day you think about the fact that you are thirsty, that you need to go to the bathroom, that you have a headache but you can’t do anything about it. One worries about the kids, about making a mistake and all the time you are surrounded by harsh comments. And then of course you make mistakes! People work best on Monday mornings, when they have rested during the weekend. But then the stress starts to accumulate and they begin to make mistakes. So why all this control if it is not even profitable? Because they think that this is some kind of slavery, that they have the right to control us. (Interview, May, 2005)

In Martha’s description, the disciplining of workers is not directly related to goals of production but is rather a manifestation of power. If, as Christopher Arthur (2001) suggests, capital must win the class struggle in order to produce value, the worker decidedly represents a contradiction and vulnerability from the perspective of capital, reflecting its dependent yet antagonistic relationship with labor. Indeed, the bodies of the workers might be marketed and disciplined into docility, but they can never be *entirely* docile. While to be a good worker is to almost not be at all, to resemble a robot or a machine, as workers put it, production is still dependent upon the *productive* capacity of labor (its “form-giving fire”, as Marx (1973: 361) put it). The antagonistic relationship between labor and capital and the workday as a site of struggle between the needs of workers and the demands of value production alluded to by Martha in the above quotation are also elaborated upon by Pedro:

I don’t know how they make their orders but to them it’s beneficial to tell the client that on this date they will deliver, to tell them that they will deliver before the other companies. But what they do is to manipulate the worker. The one who suffers the consequences is the worker. We have to finish by

the date they tell us, calculating upon our capacity. Everything that they do is by means of us, with our exertion. That's how the contract with them works, it's not like they do us a favor. The next day we have to accomplish the same. "Yesterday you produced this much, you have to manage the same, you can't lose! If you do, you don't get the incentive pay." So we have to work with the same capacity every day, every day it's the same. They win but we don't. (Interview, July, 2006)

In the production of profit, the subject is "predicated as structurally superadequate to itself" (Spivak 1996: 117). In the quotation work is represented as alienated and boundless; profit is made possible through the negation and exploitation of labor power. Capital's abstraction of labor clashes with labor as "sensuous", with Marx's (1844/1997: 309–314) designation of humanity not just in terms of having senses (thoughts, will, love and so on) but also in terms of being individually and collectively able to act upon them. Massimo De Angelis (1996: 13) contends that the activity of abstract labor has two diverse significations depending on the perspective from which it is observed or realized, namely, the perspective of capital and the perspective of labor: "on one side it means *abstracting* from the lived experience of the workers, on the other side it means the *lived experience* of the abstraction." For the worker there is no activity that is completely deprived of the "sensuous", and even the most simple of tasks has some kind of quality implying that it is not entirely abstract (Arthur 2006: 21–22). Rather, the abstractness is present as a contradiction between the workers' needs and aspirations on the one hand and their restraints on the other. It is from the perspective of capital that work can and must be regarded as abstract and external: an entity to be controlled. As pictured in Pedro's expression "they win but we don't", the two contradictory, antagonistic positions vis-à-vis work is a site of constant struggle. De Angelis (1996: 38) describes the oscillation between objectification and resistance at the point of value production as well as in societal organization as an expression and reification of class relations:

If *treating* people as objects means to implement historically specific ways of implementing the work relation vis-à-vis working class resistance (that is to say the refusal to be objects), thus *seeing* people as objects (fetishism) means to conceptualize – at different levels of generalization – historically specific ways to implement the reifying capitalist work relation upon society vis-à-vis working class resistance.

Entangled with profound societal recasting along the lines of neoliberal globalization, for subjects who are positioned as (almost) suitable to transnational production, the relationship to the FTZs often defines and overshadows other sets of relations. It demands workers' time, energy and priority, tinges other interactions and still it is a relationship that typically does not quite materialize; the subjectivities of disposable, serialized workers

are objectified in relations that are stretched out and crystallized in global and local nexuses and hierarchies. However, as simultaneously prerequisites for and problems of production, how do workers envision opposition to the norms of transnational capital and their own positions in processes of globalization?

Images for Transformation

In previous chapters, the political projects of the PLC and the FSLN were discussed as transformative efforts with contrasting views about the relation between the present and the future; an embrace or a subversion of the current order, ascribing to workers contending interests and obligations. How do workers represent their positions within processes of transformation, and what appear to be the conditions and available points of reference to imagine change *for them*?

The majority of the workers whom I interviewed had only vague memories of the 1980s. Still, the period of the revolution often figured as a point of reference or contrast in our conversations, as in the interview with María: “In this house we are Sandinistas. My dad was in the war. My sister studied at the university, it was free. My mom worked in a garment factory too but it was owned by the people, there were unions” (Interview, April, 2005). Or as David described what he perceived as a discrepancy between the radicalism of the past and a present lack of dedication and direction:

Man, what happened with all the people that existed in the 80s? What happened to all those people? Now in the 2000 and something, it's like people are not interested in anything, they are conformists. I don't know what happened; maybe they looked at the lame governments and got discouraged as well. (Interview, April, 2005)

Political devotion, an economy focused on the domestic sphere, a strong unionized labor force and a radical ambience are elements that David and María perceive to be eroding. However, though María says that her family is Sandinista, she does not think that a return of the FSLN to power will be translated into a political agenda for the poor. Times have changed, she says: “In order to transform the zones, the whole government must be replaced, the whole government. And this will never happen. There are the liberals and the Sandinistas and people don't even bother to vote. It doesn't help.” The radicalism that David inquires about in the above quotation was experienced by many workers as simply beyond the possible. To organize in order to advance the improvements, which they indeed regarded as imperative, was yet not an option:

Sofie: Would you like to be part of union?

Juana: No

Sofie: No?

Juana: I'd lose my job.

Sofie: But if it was possible...?

Juana: No, it's forbidden, rights cannot be claimed. We don't have rights as workers. Only they have rights. If the Ministry of Labor comes, they bribe them. (Interview, July, 2006)

Rights are not something that can be acted upon in the face of capital's demands. In Juana's view there is no point in organizing since the interests of the government are intertwined with those of transnational capital. But passivity or counteractions by the state on the issue of labor conditions and workers' rights prompted other workers, despite limited possibilities, to attempt to form their own spaces in which to promote improvements:

Carolina: The government will not come to defend my rights. Thus, I have to do it myself. And maybe in a future when we have a union in all FTZs and in every company we could sign a collective labor agreement and in this way make them follow the law. (Interview, July, 2006)

Union activities are precarious in the FTZs. In some companies there are only so-called "white unions" which, controlled by management, operate as instruments to maintain order and to counter the formation of so-called "black unions", which are known to promote labor rights. In addition, the white unions prop up the percentage of unionized workers, which looks good in the statistics deployed to demonstrate that the FTZs observe the Labor Code. On various occasions, workers told me similar stories: a group of workers meeting clandestinely, secretly finding others willing to be affiliated and submitting an application to the Ministry of Labor to be registered as a union, after which the Labor Code ensures a certain measure of protection. But often the management found out and the initiators were fired. Or workers managed to get registered as a union, but then affiliated workers were fired for lack of raw material or for other reasons that did not violate the Code's enforcement of the right to organize. After the FSLN's victory in 2006, the Ministry of Labor significantly shortened the turnaround time for union registration, reducing companies' opportunities to bust unions before they were officially registered and the number of union affiliates in the FTZ had also increased.

Formal recognition by the company is, however, by no means a guarantee of influence. During the group interview (2008) with members of the small union at the company *TechNica*, workers spoke about being consistently ignored by the administration, which simply did not show up at scheduled meetings to negotiate the union's demands. Moreover, a white union was registered at the company, awarded office space as well as

recognition. The management had signed with it an agreement establishing workers' obligations but saying little about their rights. Showing me the agreement, which for instance prescribed that workers should be entitled to receive a piece of candy in a "festive wrap" on their birthdays, the unionists I spoke to expressed their frustration because of the impossibility of even articulating substantive demands when the standard was set by what they deemed to be non-demands. Now they feared the company would simply continue to ignore them as to renew the agreement with the white union once it expired.

Thus, albeit with limited influence and power, independent unions have managed to gain a foothold in a few FTZ factories despite widespread anti-unionism. Independent unions such as the one at *TechNica* often developed links to some of the large, national workers' unions or human rights organizations, constellations that could exert pressure especially in situations of open conflict, such as mass firings of unionists. Some of these instances received a good deal of attention in the local media and also in the transnational solidarity movement (see Bickham Mendez 2005; Ross 2004). As described by Ralph Armbruster-Sandoval (2005), the presence of the transnational solidarity movement was noticeable and at times a source of conflict with the local unions. Carlos, who had long been active in union work within the FTZs, portrays an unequal situation where those with financial capacities also expects to have the last word: "They say like we are bringing this money and we have the right to tell you what you should do, and maybe it does not correspond to the needs that we have as an organization, to push the work forward, but rather results in us going backwards." As Carlos makes explicit, solidarity tends to be conditioned. Taking place in situations marked by stark differences in terms of resources and risks, it is the one who acts in solidarity who defines the premises and content of the interaction.

At the same time media attention, locally and abroad, was often used as a strategy to counter irregular layoffs. After lengthy conflicts and months of unemployment, fired union activists were sometimes reintegrated. Verónica, who when I first met her was part the independent union at her workplace, had managed to be reintegrated after being suspended from work for almost a year, in close connection with the formation of the union. She told me how the union had used all available channels to raise awareness about the irregularities at the factory, leading to consumer boycotts against the company in the US. Despite her harsh assessment of the working conditions in the FTZs, the difficulties that she had endured during the establishment of the union, and the fact that she was trained for another, potentially better-paying job, she was not prepared to leave the zones:

Sofie: If you now were given the opportunity to work as a nurse, would you take it?

Verónica: I don't think so. I say that it's exhausting to keep working and that I don't want to go on working in the FTZ. But I'm always thinking about the zone, you see? It's like an obsession that I have [...] I have a plan to get a job in one of the Chinese factories, to start up a union there. It will be hard because they recognize my name. But it's a goal that I have. (Interview, July, 2006)

As I understood it, her dedication to the zone did not primarily derive from her identification as an FTZ worker but rather reflected her attachment and commitment to the labor movement; the difficulties of organizing prompted her to deliberately enter factories reputed for poor working conditions and anti-union actions. Further, she viewed her possible resignation as a victory for the company, as a way of giving them what they wanted:

Verónica: It's tiring to be in the struggle. There are things that you win and things that you lose. But this is something I do because I feel that if I withdraw, the union will lose ground. And moreover, I don't want to do the company a favor by leaving. That day there'll be fireworks, they'll have a party. I don't want to give them that pleasure!

When I returned to Managua a year and a half later, the company for which Verónica had worked had closed down. The management just abandoned it, leaving contracts with retailers unfulfilled and workers' salaries unpaid. Along with hundreds of other workers from the company, Verónica was unemployed when I met her again. She had few hopes of finding a job in the FTZ: "They say that I'm already old, that I'm fat, that I'm ugly and apart from all this I'm a unionist and for all those reasons they won't give me a job. I say whatever, what can we do?" Also, she described how, no longer having a position within production, she was becoming increasingly detached from the labor movement. Other unionists had stopped calling her. Workers continued to come to her house to ask for advice when conducting conflicts with their employers, but Verónica was feeling exceedingly incapable, isolated and depressed; "With my experience and all, I think I could be of some help, but like they say, died the dog, finished the rabies [*muerto el perro, muerta la rabia*]" (Interview, February, 2008).

Indeed, in the relations of production, identification as a unionist offers another position than "the worker". Carlos, who had begun to work in the garment sector in the late 1970s, had been a unionist since the 1980s. Having experienced changing conditions under different governments, labor rights that were expanding and diminishing, he explains the decision to become a unionist as the most defining one that he had made:

Carlos: So I said that I will dedicate my time, my life to the labor movement; but in reality it has been a really hard fight because I have neglected my family, maybe my children haven't gotten on with their education...But until this day I don't regret that I became a unionist, to know that we are on the side of the working class. (Interview, March, 2008)

For workers like Carolina, Verónica and Carlos, to be part of independent “black” unions implied the possibility of carving out a space for collectivity that the overall organization of production attempts to negate. Once expelled from the productive process, Verónica found that she became increasingly disconnected from the labor movement, that she was deprived of a base from which she could act. Indeed, though profoundly limited, a position within the structural relationship between capital and labor may constitute a foundation for political struggle. Identification with the position of the unionist allows workers to recognize themselves not only as producers of value or as producers of societal transformation to which they do not always have access, but also as producers of alternative visions of change and, perhaps, of change itself.

In this chapter I have examined workers' representations of the FTZs and their contextual settings as well as attempts to make sense of the positions that workers are encouraged or constrained to occupy in processes of economic integration. Many of the signifiers and subject positions that I discussed in Chapters 3 and 4 as essential to the formation of political projects of the PLC and the FSLN have their equivalents in the narratives of workers. However, with distinct relations to transnational circuits of production, the meanings of dignity, development, “the best people”, exploitation and revolt in workers' narratives tend to deviate from those established in the official rhetoric of the two parties. While PLC and FSLN rhetoric make distinctions between on the one hand subjects that are recognized as desirable parts and guarantors of their respective projects and on the other hand those who do not match future aspirations, I think that workers' accounts have made manifest that categories never quite fit and that interpellations may never be fully answered: being “the best people” or the subject of revolt is a position that is always slightly out of reach. Still, such representations and interpellations are difficult to ignore and they are among the principles that structure workers' lives.

For instance, the position of the good worker who is offered dignity through FTZ work or the position of the worker who refuses to be curbed by her enemies is simultaneously sustained and negated by classed, racialized and gendered expressions of the global division of labor. Indeed, compulsions to take pride in FTZ work appear to rely upon the

construction of a subject that through its relation to capital may be empowered in aspects *external* to labor relations (for example, Third World women who are envisioned to be better equipped to counter patriarchal relations if they are ensured a steady income, see Chapter 2). At the other end of the spectrum, the exhortation to rise against repressive structures seems, from the vantage point of FTZ workers' position, largely to lack content and backup. Against the backdrop of the FSLN's multiple agendas and the persistent dependency upon transnational capital, the preferred subject of "the second stage of the revolution" appears to necessitate another structural position on the labor market, detached from global production.

Likewise, the issue of the imperative of resistance and its discursive conditions of possibility are relevant in the context of transnational solidarity movements as well as in research projects in postcolonial settings. Certainly, in this study, the question of how diverse experiences in global production gain significance – for whom and through what kinds of representational structure? – is crucial as well. What are the possibilities and problems attached to attempts to theorize and act from privileged structural positions within the division of labor? Indeed, also, in projects that are critical to the current order, "the other" may be appropriated as a resource or as a sign of difference. Ethel Brooks's (2002: 95) examination of transnational anti-sweatshop protests reveals a propensity to focus on the "spectacular" – child labor, compulsory use of contraceptives and physical violence – while the very conditions characteristic of sweatshops, such as long hours, low pay and high production quotas, remain largely untouched by solidarity movements and scholars of women's transnational labor alike. Testimonies from workers are used to bolster the impact of campaigns or to make theoretical arguments about Third World labor. Thus, Brooks examines how workers' testimonies about abusive working conditions are used as the foundation upon which solidarity is built. But, she argues, it is consumers and activists with relatively secure positions within the global division of labor who are inscribed as agents; they define and have (or *are*, as responsible consumers) the solutions to the workers' problems. Accordingly, it is the stories that ratify the agency and effectiveness of First World solidarity that tend to be heard.

Elaborating upon conceptions of responsibility in the presence of sharp global inequalities, Doreen Massey (2006: 93–94) draws attention to the significance of space. She notes that, in contrast to recent apologies for historical wrongs (the violence against Aborigines, for instance), it appears difficult to articulate an accountability for present wrongs, affecting those distant in space rather than in time. These are typically not wrongs that are closed but rather wrongs that are ongoing and they are often conditions that cannot be denominated as "abnormal": on the contrary, it is the content and effects of "normality" itself that is at stake (see Young 2003).

Appointing activists and academics as agents that look out for the interests of those on the “flip side” of the global division of labor tends to obscure the role of class privileges in the global economy as part of the problem. This is possible only insofar as testimonies from FTZ workers are read as depicting *deviations* from the system and not the system *as such*. As I think was made explicit in the interviews with FTZ workers, the “ordinary” organization and regulations of orders of global production that we are all implicated in are, indeed, “spectacular”.

In the concluding chapter, the discussions of each chapter are brought together so as to further elaborate upon images of transnational capital and the premises of their visualizations.

6. Visions of Capital

Conclusion

In crucial respects, the globalization of capital takes shape through narration. Tropes and statements are circulated and reiterated; they are lent credence and thus play a part in consolidating economic orders and in facilitating change. Privileging particular knowledge regimes, some representations are more common and influential than others. Manifest examples are institutions such as the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, whose conceptions of globalization also function as prescriptions for their client countries to follow. Often these narratives are told on behalf of those who not yet have come to experience the alleged benefits of global economic interactions. Globalization, in this version, is spelled out as a promise to the “margins” of universal integration.

As dominating as the delineations of the Bretton Woods institutions may be, an idea of this study was to examine visualizations of capital that take place on various scales, drawing upon, altering and expanding available ideologies and imaginaries. In line with Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello’s (2005) argument, the endurance of the “spirit of capitalism” is derived from its ability to incorporate external moralities and to turn them into its own foundation. In a specific setting, namely, the process of economic restructuring in Nicaragua, I have analyzed situated “spirits” or “counter-spirits” in the envisionings and identifications of Free Trade Zones (FTZ) workers and in the rhetoric of economic actors and of two overarching political projects: one that can be labeled neoliberal/conservative and another that labels itself revolutionary. Though previous chapters have offered an analysis of aspects of this specific context, I think that the discussion can be instructive in a broader context as well. That is to say, I hope that this study of hegemonic interventions, identity formations and alternative visualizations in conjunction with global production and divisions of labor may be illuminating for assessments of processes of reification and decentering of neoliberal political-economic orders. In this concluding chapter, I bring together the discussions of the previous chapters in a synthesizing analysis.

The chapter is organized as follows. First, I summarize the contending visualizations of capital in transformative agendas that this study has traced:

what subjects and political objectives are being conjured in the multi-scale conjunctions of transnational production? I then return to the elusive position of FTZs as it appears in chains of production, processes of nation-building and workers' representations, suggesting that their simultaneous features of openness and confinement, visibility and impermeability, both make possible and foreclose political claims in relation to the organization of production. The study concludes with a discussion on justifications of current manifestations of global production as I return to the linkage between work, gender and emancipation in theoretical as well as in political articulations.

Transformative Visions

The electoral defeat of the Sandinistas in 1990 marked the beginning of a profound transformation agenda in Nicaragua that, in line with demands from the United States and the International Monetary Fund, aimed to dismantle the revolutionary legacy. Material and ideological endeavors merged as the structure of a mixed economy with state-owned firms, collectives of small-scale producers and a significant labor union presence was to be replaced through privatization, deregulation, flexibilization of the labor market and an emphasis on export production. Free trade agreements and foreign direct investment, mainly located in the tax-exempted FTZs, were to ensure the country's integration into the globalizing economy.

Here, I have analyzed how political rhetoric during the Liberal Constitutionalist Party (PLC) government of Enrique Bolaños (2002–2007) struggled to eradicate lingering images of revolution and radicalism. Departing from political articulations directed toward presumptive investors, workers and the general public, I examined the branding of Nicaragua as an ideal destination for transnational capital; the framing of neoliberal restructurings in terms of a “common good”; and the depiction of FTZs as vehicles for (female) emancipation and societal improvement at large. Efforts to induce reforms of the state, the economy and citizenship with legitimacy were thereby highlighted, while it was simultaneously demonstrated that the rhetoric of progress was threatened by inconsistencies flowing from Nicaragua's position in the global division of labor as well as from indisputable class differences.

When the Sandinista National Liberation Front (FSLN) returned to power at the beginning of 2007, the political economy and national self-representations were once again redirected. The branding of Nicaragua as an investment haven and the framing of free trade as a promise of national and individual advancement are now being disputed as the FSLN intends to revive its revolutionary origins and join Latin America's “left wave”. Parallel to the integration within ALBA and a renewed focus on small-scale

producers through programs of hunger alleviation and micro-credit, however, CAFTA and the dependency upon foreign direct investment located in the FTZs remain. In the political rhetoric of the FSLN government of Daniel Ortega (2007–), welcoming gestures toward foreign investors and assurances that the general economic framework is to be maintained coexist with public condemnations of the FTZs, which are represented as manifestations of exploitative patterns of accumulation and exchange.

Economic transformations in Nicaragua have been analyzed in this study in terms of hegemonic struggles to construct legitimate political projects. Appropriate subjects are constructed in conjunction with globalized orders of production; citizens, “the people” and workers, who, through the adoption of prescribed forms of conduct, may facilitate particular transformations. Such interpellations are among the contexts that shape labor relations, which I discussed in relation to workers’ visualizations of the content and effects of FTZ production.

The focus on rhetoric is motivated not by a belief that it is directly reflected in any political measures that have been implemented. But in a fundamental sense governments are dependent upon language in order to “represent the domain to be governed as an intelligible field” (Miller and Rose 2008: 31). Programs are spelled out, the social and the economic are staged in particular modes that render certain interventions legitimate and, indeed, possible as reality comes into a particular existence. In processes of economic integration, neoliberal globalization and corresponding notions of development comprise some of the most readily available imaginaries of political and social interaction. This does not mean that neoliberalism provides a ready-made blueprint for action. As I have underscored, political projections are always characterized by a certain degree of inapplicability: neoliberalism as an abstract idea does not effortlessly coalesce with a national rhetoric of progress, nor is it easily refuted. Thus, part of the aim of examining political rhetoric was to explore what kind of futures are imagined and opened up. In this regard, rhetoric can be thought upon as constituting a horizon of the possible.

Though there might be reason to talk about neoliberalism as a *pensée unique*, it is always expressed in a multiplicity of ways in particular contexts, pointing to the significance of examining its local production. Further, if state power is conceived of as transformed or “graduated” (Ong 2000) rather than unraveling in the wake of globalization, what is the leeway to work *against* the contemporary functioning of transnational capitalism? Next, by way of concluding, I stress a few of the central rhetorical claims of the PLC and the FSLN, alternating between offensive and defensive stands as they attempt to undermine contesting arguments or counteract opposition. Organized under headlines that aim to embrace key rhetorical components of the two governments’ attempts to formulate coherent

political projects in relation to transnational capital, I start with the PLC's "New Era".

By and large, the legitimacy of the neoliberal state is founded upon its ability to foster economic growth. Yet, as I have shown, profit accumulation did not constitute the sole rationalization of the PLC's political endeavor. Rather, it was justified morally by reference to the common good. But in a context where growth is modest at best and class divisions deepening, what are the rhetorical constituents to arouse enthusiasm for economic integration?

The deferred rationality of neoliberalism: As reflected in the denomination of the "New Era", a break with the past dominated PLC rhetoric. Though progress is highly unevenly distributed, the commitment of the government (Bolaños as an indefatigable salesman for his country) and everybody's hard work was to ensure that improvements benefit at least future generations. Thus, hope was staged as a privileged sign, turning the good intentions of modernization into a rationalization for the present.

A present without consequences: The blame for persisting problems was attributed to the mistakes of the past, notably the revolution. There is nothing essential in the present that will prevent the realization of political and economic reform (Nicaragua is a patient recovering in hospital). On the contrary, engagement with the present reality of the global economy has not been ample enough. Without structural explanations for current conditions, adversities are framed as the outcomes both of a failed national project that is unable to match the demands of global markets, and, on an individual level, of failed lives.

The discursive fixation of progress: The enunciations of progress were taking place in an undecidable terrain, where the signs evoked as proofs of a successful political agenda simultaneously indicate a weak position in the global economy. Rhetorical efforts centered on the sealing of the equation between the FTZs and improvement. FTZs are represented as providing worthwhile jobs that workers should take pride in; and, countering associations with low-wage production, it was argued that all countries strive to install FTZs (even Sweden and Switzerland) – negating the global division of labor.

The equality of suffering and advancement: Justifications of the political agenda were outlined in inclusive terms, regarding both lingering problems and future aspirations. Citizens were represented as suffering equally under current conditions, as equally having to adjust themselves to allow for improvement and as having equal reasons to have faith in the future, provided that they were prepared to "work with the sweat of their brow". Following a logic of difference, all interests are to be met by the market, relegating class divisions to the margins.

A will to powerlessness: A certain degree of “will to powerlessness” (Daly 1999: 222) characterizes the political rhetoric of the PLC: globalization is a project, with standards set elsewhere, which has to be administered. Metaphorically, the Nation is described as a company. Claims of legitimacy are partly founded upon an alleged absence of ideology: the government is merely facilitating the incorporation of the country into the global economy in order to allow for a belated modernization.

To move on to the FSLN’s “Government of Reconciliation and National Unity” or “Government of Citizens’ Power”, what are the rhetorical foundations of a project that is attempting to carve out an alternative to the existing order, presenting itself as “the second stage of the revolution”? The hegemony of neoliberalism makes it likely that the formulation of a project on the left comes to rely upon defensive rather than offensive claims (cf. Peck and Tickell 2006: 46). In the case of the FSLN, though, it has a revolutionary legacy to fall back upon, and its transformative agenda coincides with regional projects of integration on the left.

A pale copy of itself: Reversing the previous government’s picture of progress, the FSLN argues that poverty has intensified, despite the compliance with all development program criteria. But after 16 years in power, neoliberalism has become hegemonic and is backed up by imperialist forces, is promoted by the media, the right, and the oligarchy, and is anchored in civil society. The room for maneuver is described as constrained; the political agenda is not the *preferred* but rather the only feasible one. In the shadow of neoliberal hegemony, in power but in opposition to the current system and under persistent attack, the party is represented as reduced to a lesser version of its real self.

500 years of resistance: The FSLN inscribes its political agenda as an extension of past struggles; it is the second stage of the revolution, and draws upon the heritage of rebellion against imperialism on the continent. It is a fight motivated by intolerable inequalities and the revolutionary spirit of the people (it is against the nature of youth to be reactionary). The imperialist forces that have shattered the nation state are being countered by a new regional orientation, manifested in ALBA, in direct democracy and in the emphasis on small- and medium-sized producers – but also through an alliance with the party’s former foes.

Fight against poverty versus savage capitalism: The continuation of the political-economic scheme of the previous governments (such as the FTZs and CAFTA) is sometimes rationalized with a sense of resignation, but foreign investment is also depicted as useful. The FSLN invites investors to “join the fight against poverty”, so differentiating this scheme of investment from that of previous governments, which are represented as endeavors to enrich the rich: savage capitalism.

The inequality of inequalities: Representing the party as an incarnation of the people, the FSLN's politics does not solely rest on an inclusive agenda. With a political frontier installed between "the people" or "the poor" and their "enemies", society is following a logic of equivalence, shaped by antagonistically opposed interests. But class does not constitute an unambiguous foundation for mobilization. In the name of national sovereignty, the FSLN calls for "reconciliation and unity" with an array of class-transgressing groups. With an element of a logic of difference, class divisions are in this sense dissolved. "The people" becomes a more viable political subject than the working class.

A will to powerlessness: Also the rhetoric of the FSLN is imbued with a will to powerlessness. The government is represented as a reflection rather than an enforcement of the popular will ("The People as President!"). Allegedly corresponding to the needs of the poor, the most legitimate political subject because they are suffering the most under current conditions, its agenda is justified by reference to Christian conceptions of equality and love (the Pope has condemned the savagery of capitalism). In this regard, moral claims about the right and the good unravel oppositional stands rather than political arguments.

In the rhetoric of the two political projects, transformative claims – modernization or the second stage of the revolution – are extended into the future but are decidedly undermined by lingering deferral. Paving the way for neoliberal transformations, the rhetoric of globalization and progress also contains contradictions that threaten to revoke the pedagogy. Homi K. Bhabha (1994: 339) raises the question of what happens to the sign of progress when in postcolonial contexts it is something that is recurrently heard of but rarely seen (or when it is always seen from a distance). This quandary has its counterpart within the articulations of the FSLN where a socialist future operates as an often dimly perceived mirage. The FSLN's policy documents state that the hegemonic position of neoliberalism has made it difficult to even visualize change beyond minor corrections of the neoliberal order, and a party official calculated the risk of the FSLN being dismissed as "fake revolutionaries" when the concept of revolution is preserved in a context where it is still deemed to be largely unrealizable.

In FTZ workers' accounts, declarations of transformation were often deciphered as a preservation of the status quo. Surely, transformative intentions must be regarded as necessary elements of claims to legitimacy in any political agenda, in politics as such. With the consolidation of a political class that refrains from challenging the dominant economic class and has significant ties and loyalties to foreign counterparts that often trump the commitment to the domestic public, workers portrayed promises as something that was obligatorily recycled at election time: "Maybe one day if a *maquila* worker becomes President!" (Carolina). Indeed, different class

positions are inscribed in the rhetoric of progress and rebellion. Obviously, “progress” is a reality for the upper classes, but the possibility of answering a call for rebellion (and of being recognized as a rebellious subject) is likewise contingent upon location in gendered and classed formations of production. Furthermore, the meaning of rebellion in FSLN rhetoric is not always apparent, especially when workers are called upon to rebel against their exploiters. In line with many workers’ accounts, this would necessitate a class position beyond reach. Clearly, rebelling in the FTZs, even if the rebellious act is sanctioned by national legislation as in the case of unionism, usually implies the risk of being locked out of the site of revolt.

If political intentions are disregarded (the party as a pale copy of itself), against the backdrop of the pervasiveness of neoliberalism and global/local economic interests in Nicaragua, it appears reasonable to suggest that the enforcement of the political pillar of the FSLN’s project (expressed in the Councils of Citizens’ Power) is less contentious than the enforcement of a economic pillar containing far-reaching redistributive ambitions. Similarly, focusing on cultural imperialism is arguably an “easier” position to adopt than pursuing a critique of economic imperialism. Not least the women’s movement, portrayed as using its alien ideals as a tool to destabilize the government, is condemned by the FSLN leadership as a threat to national values and a reflection of neocolonialism. In this regard, the alleged opposition to cultural imperialism allows for the constitution of an anti-imperialist stand that appears less contradictory to the overall political economy.

In the rhetoric of both political parties, the worker has to be transformed in order to make possible social transformations in accordance with the proposed agenda. Although the PLC stresses that the burden of economic integration should be shared equally, it is primarily women, the poor and workers who are to adapt themselves: they must be appropriately educated, be more flexible, take pride in FTZ work, accumulate their value and be entrepreneurial. As manifested in workers’ representations, these standard neoliberal conceptions of subjectivity and citizenship are partly at odds with the discipline of the zones. Though a strong demand for adjustment is indeed placed on workers, a continuous accumulation of the self is generally not part of the position that they are encouraged to inhabit. The segmentation of the labor market is thereby cemented. As Verónica expressed it in one of the interviews: “they deprive us of the notion of becoming a little better.” In FSLN rhetoric, the workers must realize the importance of organizing as small-scale producers in economic associations in line with the model of a “popular economy”. Thus, in the delineation of its economic subject, the FSLN does not extensively attend to the worker who has a direct relation to transnational capital. It engages with subjects who are displaced by globalization – the urban poor in the informal sector and small-scale rural producers. Speaking to the installation of two parallel

agendas – one vocal and transformative in its focus on small-scale production and local markets, and one more quiet and continuous in its emphasis on transnational capital – workers in “preferred” and “tolerated” sectors are offered divergent degrees of recognition. For FTZ workers who are not part of the preferred political-economic agenda of the FSLN but rather reminders of “lost causes” in a largely unyielding, exploitative global economy, their location in societal change is arguably vague. Put differently, in FSLN rhetoric the *structural position* of the worker in transnational production is not extensively matched by a political construction of a *subject position* linked to transformative potentials that FTZ workers can identify with.

The Global Production of Free Trade Zones

The two political projects have opted for divergent approaches to Nicaragua’s location in global production and the ways that it is materialized in the FTZs. Framed as manifestations of hope or as inopportune necessities, in the rhetoric of both projects the FTZs are arguably inscribed in ways that illuminate them from a particular angle, while leaving other aspects in darkness. In interviews with workers, the gaps and “failures” of the competing national hegemonic struggles were persistently reflected. For those who are subjected to globalized production and the project of the nation through FTZ work, experiences of repressive disbelonging speak to a disposable pseudo-citizenship (cf. Cherniavsky 2006: 48). To recall Bhabha’s (1994) discussion of the nation as an effect of performative and pedagogical narratives, in a context dominated by transnational capital, the contending versions of an advancing “we” put forth in the rhetoric of the two governments offered threads of belonging that FTZ workers often deemed unattainable. Partly, I think, this can be related to the contradictory structure of zones.

In the following, I suggest that the phenomenon of FTZs may be read in relation to Michel Foucault’s (1986) discussion on *utopias* and *heterotopias* in order to theorize them as spatial manifestations of a distinct ideology and global order of production. While utopias refer to society in an ideal form but have no real place, heterotopias – literally meaning “other places” – are actual places, existing in the foundation of society as a kind of staged utopia. Heterotopias, Foucault writes, are “outside of all places”, because even if they have an exact locality, they differ from all the locations that they reflect. Operating on premises that are distinct from the rest of society, at the same time heterotopias make society possible in a particular form. They thereby have a determined function in relation to the surrounding social order, for example by shielding those deviating from the norm, as in the case of the prison or the mental hospital. Another feature of heterotopias is that they

juxtapose in one single place several spaces that in themselves are irreconcilable or foreign to each other, pieces of distinct places that come together in a micro-cosmos (for example, the zoological garden).

Further, heterotopias are typically linked to time, whether in the sense of bringing all times together as in the museum, enabling a notion of eternity, or in the sense of the temporality that frames a yearly festival. These two types of temporal heterotopia, the accumulation of times and the festival, come together in the vacation spot in a “primitive” setting, Foucault contends, where the momentary visitor, as it were, “rediscovers” human history. Yet another characteristic of heterotopias is that they operate as a system of openings and closures that make them isolated and penetrable at the same time. As heterotopias are often not places of public access, in some cases entry is coerced (as with prisons), while in other cases entry is premised upon permission or some kind of transitory ritual. Finally, heterotopias have a relation to all remaining space. This relation has two extremes. One is that heterotopias can create an illusion that reveals all other spaces as even more illusory (such as the brothel, which may decenter conceptions of “disinterested” sexuality). The other is that heterotopias can assume the form of a real space, which, unlike the rest of society, is perfect and organized. This would be a heterotopia “not of illusion, but of compensation” (Foucault 1986: 27).

In transferring this analysis to the context of the FTZs, I would like to make a few points. As a demarcated production enclave that is located in a national setting and guaranteed by transnational regulations in combination with national legislation that differs from the regulations of the surrounding society, the space of the FTZ is both central and peripheral. The space that is branded in terms of national hope is at the same time de-nationalized. In its regulatory framework, the zone is a non-place, removed from its national context: offshore, free trade and tax-free – a space where place is nullified. It is precisely the outsideness that makes the FTZ attractive to foreign investment and outsourced production: cost-efficient and partly hidden from the gaze of consumers and the like. For workers, this implies being concealed from the potentially protective watch of an outside observer, as reflected in David’s recount of when President Bolaños did not bother to enter the factory where the workers awaited him with their new face masks on: “then he would have noticed, he would have seen how the system works.”

In a very concrete sense, the FTZs represent a merger between different localities that are disconnected and interrelated through patterns of investment, production and consumption. The visions of development and modernization are attached to something beyond the national – to the presumptive investor who may always be better off elsewhere, meaning that all spaces that make an equivalent offer are ever-present. This is part of the discipline of the FTZs, increasing the disposability of workers whose

reproduction is of little importance when someone, somewhere (distant or close) can always take their place or work for less. A multiplicity of space is also encapsulated in the products, which are not meant to *be* in the locality of their production. With the price tag of the retailer fastened, the entire volume is sent off to export, or rather removed from the non-space. From the perspective of retailers and brands, the notion of non-space is then preferably translated into a consumer illusion, as identifiable connections to sweatshops in foreign countries may hamper business.

The FTZs can be understood as an infrastructure for both mobility and confinement. Access in general is highly restricted and superintended; those who do enter are subjected to the internal regulations of the zones, which starkly differ depending on their position in the nexus of production and consumption. Explicitly promoting the transfer of capital and products, the arrangement of the zones invites investors from all over the world to carve out a profitable existence within its frame. Likewise, workers are encouraged to enter the FTZ where they come to function as “captive labor forces” (Harvey 2005: 168–169), which workers in their interviews described as the sensation of being in a prison or a tunnel. This is the other side of the coin of capital mobility.

Further, the FTZ is a site where different conceptions of time and modernity are played out. The PLC rhetoric is torn between the imperative of depicting the FTZs as vehicles for modernization and at the same time premising the hope of modernity upon Nicaragua’s subordinated, not yet modern, position within the global division of labor. From the FSLN’s perspective, the FTZs are reminders of the “old” structures of domination that are now to be replaced – though the government also participates in the reinforcement of these very structures. A standard measure to enhance the creation of employment opportunities, the fact that FTZs in accordance with WTO regulations are granted only to states with a low per capita GNP may provide them with a guise of a redeeming temporality. While essential to flexible production, they appear as exceptions that modernization will make obsolete (the temporality of the festival, though preferably not to be repeated). Seen from the angle of the investor, the FTZ mirrors Foucault’s elaboration on the two temporalities that come together in the “primitive” vacation spot. The tropes of discovery and pioneering reveal an aspiration to momentarily take a few steps back on the road toward industrialization in order to find untapped resources of labor at prices of times long gone.

In a context marked by uneven development and low levels of industrialization, the FTZs turn Nicaragua into an export country, arguably with “artificial” means. The export statistics unconventionally include the FTZs’ contribution. All prerequisites for production are brought to the site from abroad, except the labor and the physical buildings, indicating that the export-led development model revolves rather around the export of cheap labor than around the export of manufactured goods. Particularly in PLC

rhetoric, the FTZs compensate for the ills and missed opportunities of the past, creating a well-enclosed ideal production site. Thus, the FTZ emerges as a highly regulated economic oasis in a sea of irregularity and informality. The two spaces, the perfected compensation and the messy space of the remains, clash outside the FTZ Las Mercedes. Along the connecting road between the highway and the gates to the zone a street market has emerged, adding to the chaos of buses, taxis and ambulant street vendors. The din of the traffic and the market contrast sharply with the silence on the other side of the fence, where shady trees, arranged flowers and rows of factory buildings give the appearance of ideal order and calm, at least from the outside. The inside of the factories, in contrast, is a mixture of order and mess; cramped spaces, workers, machinery and stacks of textiles everywhere in conjunction with meticulous registration and regulation of movements and time use. In addition to this compensatory space, conceivably the other function of heterotopic space that Foucault refers to, namely, the exposure of the remaining space as even more illusory, is applicable to the FTZs as well. Staged as an expression or condensation of free trade, their highly regulated and restraining characteristics may taint the utopia of a free market as such. Indeed, as in all market transactions, the FTZs are dependent upon a political structure and as such they mirror, not the retreat of the state from the operation of a free market, but rather the concurrent processes of deregulation and re-regulation of political power in the global economy.

To the extent that FTZs can be read as political-economic utopias, ideological projects manifested in the architectural organization of space that offers investors perfected conditions of production (albeit at the bottom of the not so lucrative subcontract hierarchy), in PLC rhetoric they are also represented as a utopian possibility of modernization: FTZs as zones of hope and the incarnations of the government's commitment to the progress of its citizens. In FSLN rhetoric, the FTZs figure rather as an expression of dystopia; manifestations of uneven development and "modern slavery" under neoliberalism. But perhaps the heterotopic organization of FTZs and their contradictory and complementary relation to time and space, allowing them to appear both as symbols of integration and as exceptions, create a certain leeway in the political rhetoric, making discrepancies easier to cope with. Simultaneously, the FTZs underpin and obscure capitalist relations that flourish in the differences within the division of labor and the flexibility of workers, whose demands for a livable wage are caught in the evasive structure of the zone.

Female Emancipation through the Negation of Class

In previous chapters, I argued that the female FTZ worker plays an ambiguous role in discourses of economic globalization. However, she is a figure that the two political projects under study appropriate in different ways: her emancipation is, with various degrees of explicitness, turned into a justification of the political agenda. The massive incorporation of women into global production has also given rise to scholarly debates on how the connection between gender and work can be analytically comprehended, in simplified terms centering on exploitation versus emancipation. Manifested in these debates are the indefinite positions of capitalism and the category of work within feminist theory, where on the one hand paid labor and a recasting of the public–private divide have been conceptualized as key to women’s liberation and on the other hand labor relations have been interpreted as an amalgamation of patriarchal, racialized and capitalist structures of domination. In the following, I examine how female emancipation in the Third World might come to provide rationalizations of current expressions of the global divisions of labor, in theory as well in the practice of development politics and in national political agendas.

Arguing that the conditions of women and the poor have significantly improved in the wake of capitalism’s spread, Deirdre McCloskey (2000: 29) refers to a joke by the Marx Brothers. During the Great Depression, Groucho’s communist friend asks him for a job. He replies: “Harry, no, I couldn’t do that. I wouldn’t want to make you a wage slave!” The same logic, McCloskey asserts, informs many critical accounts of women’s work in the Third World. If women who glue shoes together in Nike’s outsourced factories were to be asked, they would surely confirm that they would like to keep their jobs. They would be as little helped as Harry was by “our” misguided concern. The World Bank reasons in a similar way: although trade liberalization brings about a decline in “good” jobs, for women who are employed in expanding export production sectors it is still to be perceived as an improvement (see the quotation at the beginning of Chapter 2).

Likewise, in a critique of what she perceives as a tendency to focus on women workers as victims of capitalist expansion within Western feminist theorizing, Naila Kabeer (2000) contends that increased labor opportunities for Third World women have enabled them to negotiate patriarchal dominance, turning them into “weak winners” in the current global economic order. Analyzing a women’s movement that organizes FTZ workers in Nicaragua, Jennifer Bickham Mendez (2005: 220) writes that for women with few other alternatives *maquila* work often constitutes the “best survival strategy”. Calling for careful evaluations of measures taken on behalf of workers, Kabeer argues that the imposition of labor standards is a

way for the West to curb competition from low-wage countries. On a similar note, Bickham Mendez asserts that consumer actions such as boycotts may jeopardize both women's scarce sources of income and the achievements of less confrontational strategies to improve working conditions. In Chapter 5, I discussed how FTZ work was often materialized as an *impossibility* of choice in workers' accounts. Without alternative means of income, workers described how they were struggling to keep their jobs, at the expense of their health, sense of personhood and realization of other aspirations and needs, at the same time representing FTZ work as leading them nowhere. Also independent unions that were highly critical of their employers were prepared to direct their activism toward brands and consumers abroad in order to help the companies to stay in business. But do individual and collective unattainable "choices" to "accept" a particular position within the global division of labor amount to a general justification of the current order in the name of women workers? On what premises does such a depiction appear to rest?

Emancipatory claims often depart from an inter-household bargaining model: women's access to an independent income is envisioned to increase their influence. It follows that the key to liberation is to be found in the workplace, but the *site* of liberation is located elsewhere, for example, in an expanded platform for decision-making and recognition within the household and society at large. But, as I think that workers' representations of the conditions that subject them as appropriate to production should have made clear, that possible site is decidedly circumscribed by the organization of work in the FTZs, which tends to determine or dissolve other sets of relations, installing the discipline of the disposable yet all-encompassing category of the worker. Lacking in models of bargaining power is the understanding of labor relations as a location for the production of power and domination (Charusheela 2003: 290–293).

This, I would argue, is why the opposition between "exploitation" and "emancipation" as an entry point into the analysis of gender and work in the globalizing economy is misleading. As in McCloskey's argumentation, the notion of women's improved position is constructed upon underlying assumptions of their interests. She apparently answers the question about women's readiness to work in the FTZs at the same time as she raises it – the choice is limited to one between "a bad job" and "no job at all". The perception of alternative and choice, however, the notion that FTZ work indeed must be "better than...", provides an element of moral justification (see Charusheela 2000; Ross 2004: 323–325). The possibility of demanding a living wage, of entering into a self-interested exchange with capital in the labor market, is displaced by the increasing disposability of workers "in a world where the laborer's interest is so visibly – so spectacularly – beside the point" (Cherniavsky 2006: 38). The violence implicated in the negation of the option to refuse to work for a wage that is not enough to live on was

manifested in many of the interviews I conducted with workers, not least in the difficulty of both asking and answering questions about choices and desires concerning FTZ work within a terrain fundamentally marked by insufficient, untenable alternatives.

Moreover, from what positions are the judgments and delineations of acceptable or unacceptable working conditions made? In line with Ethel Brooks's (2002, see Chapter 5) argument, the "spectacular" has come to overshadow or normalize the "normal" manifestations of sweatshop work. From relatively secure positions in the global division of labor, academics and activists within the anti-sweatshop movement draw upon Third World workers' testimonies to criticize deviances such as child labor and physical violence while the standard organization of production appears to be simply beyond reach. While these endeavors direct attention to the ills of global production, paradoxically and unintentionally they may also contribute to what Spivak (1993: 86) elaborates as a sanctioned ignorance: the discursive production of non-knowledge of, or indifference to, the conditions of value production that marks privileged interpretations of global relations of production and consumption.

As indicated in Brooks's discussion, a critique of capitalism as a general system of accumulation is eschewed when the focus is on the spectacular. Framing it as an instance of history's cunning, Nancy Fraser (2009) argues that feminist theory has inadvertently come to be part of the legitimization of capitalism in its flexible, transnational, neoliberal version. She places the theory of Boltanski and Chiapello (2005) about the spirit of capitalism as upheld through an assimilation of the critique directed against it within the context of feminist thought. Thus, she argues that the feminist critique of androcentrist, state-organized capitalism (manifested, for example, in the "family wage" that presupposes a male breadwinner) now induces flexible capitalism with an element of moral authority; professional women's attempts to break through the glass ceiling as well as women's struggle to make ends meet through low-wage, temporary and dead-end jobs may all be read as signs of the dismantling of traditional structures of domination that increases opportunities for women. In the name of female liberation, paid work is further appraised, whereby neoliberal capitalism, in Fraser's (2009: 110) words, "turns a sow's ear into a silk purse by elaborating a new romance of female advancement and gender justice".

Similarly, the emphasis on female emancipation within development discourses can be related to Spivak's discussion about subalternity. If the concept of the subaltern was deployed to describe positions that were detached from the lines of upward social mobility and from the cultural production of colonial subjectivity (Spivak 1993), this has arguably been altered by the magnitude of the global economy. Referring to the "new subaltern", Spivak (2000b) points to a subalternity that is no longer cut off from the center. Rather, the subaltern is now of interest to the system, as

provider of knowledge that can be patented through agreements on trade-related aspects of intellectual property rights (TRIPS), as labor power or as a discursive reinforcement. When the supposed interests of the poorest women in the Third World are evoked as a justification of current development measures, a gendered “will” for globalization comes to underpin the current economic order. A proto-feminist agenda coincides with the demands of capitalism when women are brought into the nexus of accumulation as micro-borrowers or workers in export production. As in the television commercial discussed in Chapter 4, where the protagonist declared she was proud to work in the FTZ, women are turned into grateful receivers of transnational capital flows, through which they are also transformed into respectable subjects: responsible workers and caring mothers. Thereby, women are constituted as subjects that *can be developed*, their supposed embrace of the promises of globalization clearing the ground for the expansion of capital.

Thus, against the backdrop of the discussion so far I would argue that the subject who *can* be emancipated through FTZ work is one that is articulated through the *exclusion* of power relation in terms of class, race or geographic locality. The link between the expansion of markets and female liberation appears unequivocal in relation to the construction of a particular Third World femininity, *principally* constituted through, and subordinated by, gender relations. Though resulting in insecure, low-paid jobs and anti-union activities, the establishment of FTZs is depicted as being in line with women’s interests. This position is, however, difficult to sustain if the effects of racialized class formations are taken into account. When Third World women are limited to occupying binary positions, symbolically constructed in terms exclusion (linked to patriarchy) and inclusion (linked to the capitalist market economy), their subjectivity is negated as their interests are already defined and included. The premises of their incorporation into the global economy can also be read as the premises of their effacement.

In this way, I think, the relations between class, race and gender deconstruct the idea of female emancipation through integration into transnational production. If women’s “acceptance” of FTZ work or their fight to keep their jobs are taken as an unmediated reflection (in theory and politics) of their desires that are turned into a rationalization for current expressions of the global division of labor, it is at the same time a justification for maintained privileges, a discouragement to taking responsibility for unequal positions. The question of acceptance, entangled with the consequences of past and present relations of power and domination, must also be reversed, directed to those on the advantaged side of the division of labor who are decidedly implicated in its potential answers.

Beyond the unequivocal equating of transnational capital with progress on the one hand and the dismissing of the (female) FTZ worker as an object of exploitation on the other, what are the conditions for articulating an emancipatory imaginary where she might be discerned as a subject *for* history? Writing about perceptions of the female FTZ worker, Sonali Perera (2008) points to the noticeable difficulty of containing her as an agent of social change within various contexts, aesthetic, theoretical and political. Working-class literature, Perera argues, continues to linger principally on the symbols of metropolitan masculinity despite the centrality of women's labor in globalized patterns of production. In Western feminism, she is often excluded since she "represents, disturbingly, the containment of the wage bargaining power of struggling women closer to home" (Perera 2008: 3). Likewise, in trade unionist trajectories she is typically not counted to the revolutionary sphere. While the proletariat in line with Marx and Engels occupies a clear position as the agent of social transformation, for the female factory worker there is no discernable script.

At the same time, there is arguably a demand for signs of women's resistance as a verification of various political and academic ventures. In a context where a revolution in its second stage, a transnational anti-sweatshop movement and social scientists are looking for, *must* see, evidence of resistance among the subordinated that they represent, a "no" to the exacting question about desires to form a union is not necessarily less rebellious than a "yes". Put differently, the (Western) demand for a resisting Third World subject and "quick fixes", like selective consumers boycotts, can be read as an appealing simplification, creating illusions of immediate remedies. Though some of the workers I interviewed expressed their determination to organize, for others the leeway of resistance was limited to working more slowly during the last hour of the day. To allocate to FTZ workers the obligation of opposition or to place hope in consumer actions without structural transformations is arguably to diminish the violence implicated in global modes of production.

In this project I have explored how transnational capital flows are envisioned as part of a problem or part of a future solution. Within development politics, in national political agendas and in theoretical claims, the disenfranchised emerge in relation to capital as the heroic self-employed, the modernized female factory worker and as tokens of endurance or resistance. The three empirical chapters encompass different ("macro"/"micro") aspects of these visualizations. On the one hand, the conceptualization of the Nicaraguan FTZs in PLC rhetoric as coinciding with the common good leave no room for structural inequalities, nationally or globally. In FSLN rhetoric, on the other hand, inequalities are articulated and the question of (cultural) imperialism is raised, but much of its critique is directed toward presumably anti-national values, reflected in its position on abortion and its antagonistic relation to parts of the feminist movement.

In workers' accounts, representations of visibility oscillate between being consistently seen and evaluated, not being distinguished enough to be recognized as a (particular) worker, and a disregard of social relations and personhood within the gaze of capital. But the accounts also contain visualizations of foundations for collective identifications and alliance. Here, I have argued for the necessity of considering the FTZs in Nicaragua as interconnected political, economic and cultural effects that take place not only "there" and "now" but also "here" and in conjunction with lingering effects of past and present structures of privilege and exploitation. Otherwise, visions of capital become unwarrantably partial.

To look for a rationalization among those to whom the system is conceivably most "absurd" may be indicative of a certain degree of anxiety generated by enormous global and local economic differences. Arguably, an analysis of the accumulation and distribution of value in a material and cultural sense may open up for interruptive visualizations, reclaiming the "names" of those on whose behalves current circuits of production attain a justifiable contour.

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Enrique Bolaños

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May 1, 2003: Día Internacional del Trabajo.

August 15, 2003: VI Aniversario del Día Nacional de la Seguridad, Higiene y Salud de los Trabajadores.

August 29, 2003: Inauguración de Planta Istmo Textil.

September 12, 2003: Presentación del Plan Nacional de Desarrollo.

December 12, 2003: Acto Colocación primera piedra fabrica Popular Nica Textil.

March 11, 2004: Inauguración Zona Franca Sociedad JIGSA.

May 1, 2004: Día Internacional de los Trabajadores.

July 22, 2004: Cena de Gala Industrial Textil.

September 10, 2004: Foro de Inversionistas INCAE-INTUR-PRONICARAGUA.

December 9, 2004: Mensaje a la Nación.

March 6, 2005: Encuentro de Mujeres María Elena Cuadra.

May 1, 2005: Celebración del Día Internacional de los Trabajadores.

July 14, 2005: Firma de Compacto entre el Gobierno de Nicaragua y la Corporación Reto del Milenio.

March 8, 2006: Celebración del día internacional de la mujer.

March 24, 2006: Celebración del CAFTA.

May 1, 2006: Día Internacional del Trabajo.

May 3, 2006: Inauguración de Contact Center en Régimen de Zona Franca.

August 23, 2006: Acto de Colocación de la primera piedra del Parque Industrial Textil “Jorge Bolaños Abaunza”.

September 22, 2006: Acto de clausura del III Congreso nacional y I Congreso Centroamericano y República Dominicana de mujeres empresarias.

October 11, 2006: La Nicaragua Posible.

Daniel Ortega

November 8, 2006: Palabras del Presidente electo, Daniel Ortega.

January 11, 2007: Acto de Adhesión de Nicaragua a la Alternativa Bolivariana de los Pueblos de América, ALBA.

January 24, 2007: La Inversión en la Lucha contra la Pobreza! Visita a Daniel de inversionistas norteamericanos de Cargill Internacional.

February 1, 2007: Trabajar para reducir la pobreza! Reunión de Daniel con la señora Pamela Cox, Vice Presidenta del Banco Mundial.

February 28, 2007: Encuentro del Presidente Daniel Ortega con delegación del Consejo de Empresarios de América Latina, CEAL.

May 1, 2007: Arriba los pobres del mundo!

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August 26, 2007: Mejor, cada día! Inauguración del Programa Hambre Cero en Matagalpa.

December 18, 2007: Sesión de Gabinete del Poder Ciudadano. Encuentro de Daniel con Gabinete de Gobierno en La Casa de los Pueblos.

January 3, 2008: Primera Sesión de Trabajo del 2008, Programa El Pueblo Presidente, Distrito VI, Barrio José D. Estrada.

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The magazine *El 19*, No 1–16

No 2: “La conexión ‘feminista’ y las guerras de baja intensidad”, Rosario Murillo, p. 18.

No 4: “Donantes deberían rearando el uso de fondos a otras necesidades. ‘No hay persecución a ONG’”, Benjamín Blanco, p. 4.

No 5: “El gran bisnes del aborto” (various authors), pp. 10–12.

No 5: “Estamos realizando prácticas de género”, Maricely Linarte, p. 15.

No 6: “Religiosos condenan financiamiento por aborto”, Juan José Lacayo, p. 14.

- No 6:* “Quienes son estas mujeres...? Abortistas, bisenras, politiqueras”, Marcelo Sarmineto, pp. 16–17.
- No 7:* “¡Por dignidad y derechos de mujer..!” Maricely Linarte, p. 8.
- No 7:* “Vampiros sedientos de sangre joven. Plan del Imperialismo para recrutar jóvenes evidencia falta de liderazgo de la derecha”, Danilo Lechado, p. 22.
- No 8:* “¡El show NO debe seguir!” (unsigned), p. 2.
- No 8:* “¡Qué vivan los estudiantes!” (unsigned), p. 15.
- No 9:* “Montenegro, agente de EMBUSA” (unsigned), p. 18.
- No 9:* “Mujeres pro aborto y trianguladores de CINCO en la Fiscalía. ¡Corruptos cercados y pueblo exige justicia!” (unsigned), Valeria Imhof and Juan José Lacayo, p. 19.
- No 9:* “El voto por la corrupción”, Marcelo Sarmiento, p. 22.
- No 9:* “¡Cuánto crimen sin perdón de Dios!” (unsigned), Rosario Murillo, p. 24.
- No 11:* “Mujer en la Revolución”, Rosario Murillo, pp. 9–11.
- No 12:* Otra esperanza para las mujeres: Comercio justo con alimentos”, Valeria Imhof, p. 18.
- No 12:* “Votar por la derecha es votar por el aborto”, Valeria Imhof, p. 32.
- No 14:* “Victoria contundente, del Pueblo Presidente!” (transcribed speech by Rosario Murillo among others), pp. 4–5.
- No 15:* “El poder de la juventud”, Danilo Lechado, p. 5.

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