



**FEDERAL UNIVERSITY OF LATIN AMERICAN  
INTEGRATION (UNILA)  
LATIN AMERICAN INSTITUTE OF ECONOMICS,  
SOCIETY AND POLITICS  
MASTER'S DEGREE PROGRAM IN  
INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS (PPGRI)**

**TWO TAILS OF NICARAGUA'S EXPERIENCE WITH GENDER INEQUALITY: THE  
NEOLIBERAL POLITICS OF MEASUREMENT AND EVALUATION ON THE  
GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX REPORTS (2006 – 2019)**

**BRENDA MOREIRA MARQUES**

**MASTER'S DISSERTATION**

**2022**

Foz do Iguaçu  
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NICARAGUA'S GLOBAL PERFORMANCE FOR GENDER EQUALITY (2006 – 2019)**

**BRENDA MOREIRA MARQUES**

Dissertation presented to the Master's program in International Relations (PPGRI) at the Federal University of Latin American Integration (UNILA), as a partial requirement for elaborating the research thesis in International Relations.

Research Advisor: Prof. PhD. Ana Carolina Teixeira Delgado

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## ABSTRACT

The current work is focused on the politics behind the production and use of one of the most relevant global ranking and indicators of gender in history: Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI). GGGI is a multi-country indicator ranking with the most significant databases focused on “gender disparities” globally. Also, the Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019) grants Nicaragua a unique status: not only one of the best performers in gender parity in the world but as the first country from the global south on track to achieve full gender parity in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. According to the index, Nicaragua has eliminated 80% of the inequalities between the sexes. It is a world leader in gender parity, with fast-speed improvements over 13 years. Conversely, several sources question the positive status of Nicaragua’s “gender paradise” promoted at GGI’s, since at domestic, there have been a weakening of gender anti-violence laws, systematic persecution of women’s movements and the emergence of “anti-gender and anti-democratic politics” in Ortega’s presidential administration. As a result, this dissertation aims to provide a critical assessment of how *the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index help to foster an informal regime of governance of gender in world politics, based on the case study of Nicaragua’s global leadership in gender equality portrayed the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) in contrast to the experiences of anti-gender politics and violence exercised at the local level*, from 2006 to 2019. Our theoretical framework draws on the nexus among Foucauldian-inspired debates of power-knowledge, governance studies from global indicators’ literature and gender studies on neoliberal framing and governmentality. Therefore, this dissertation concludes that the GGI’s forms of measurement and quantification govern and normalizes standards for the global governance of gender in countries through framings of neoliberal governmentality and the governing functions of numbers. As such, Nicaragua’s national identity in gender issues is created, altered, and rewarded as a world leader and top performer, depoliticizing the meaning of gender equality by its newly reinforced connection with governments, markets and national competitiveness. The patriarchal national project of gender observed at the domestic level in Nicaragua is not recognized by the GGI’s forms of measurement and analysis, given that the national gender project in Nicaragua is aligned with practices of self-government that render the GGI’s forms of neoliberal governmentality *of gender* operational. Granted, the GGI measures global disparities in gender and ranks countries, but its form of measurement and interpretation not only masks gender-based violence as something structural and therefore who acquires systemic change, it is particularly unable to capture rates of gender inequality in non-eurocentered contexts. Instead, it conflates different national projects of gender among countries, which is problematic, as Nicaragua’s government makes use of the national branding of world leader in gender equity established by the GGI to delegitimize alternate gendered mobilizations for social change at the domestic level.

**Key-words:** Global Gender Gap Index, Nicaragua, Gender Politics

## RESUMO

O presente trabalho está focado nas dimensões políticas por trás da produção e uso de um dos mais relevantes rankings e indicadores globais de disparidade de gênero da história: Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI). O GGGI é um ranking de subindicadores que avalia, mensura e ranqueia a posição global de vários países sobre “disparidades de gênero”. Além disso, os Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019) conferem à Nicarágua um status único: não apenas a descrevem como tendo um dos melhores desempenhos em paridade de gênero no mundo, mas como o primeiro país do sul global e da América Latina e Caribe a caminho de alcançar a plena paridade de gênero no mundo. Segundo o índice, a Nicarágua eliminou 80% das desigualdades entre os sexos. É líder mundial em paridade de gênero, com melhorias rápidas ao longo de 13 anos. Por outro lado, várias fontes questionam o status positivo do “paraíso de gênero” da Nicarágua promovido nos GGI's, uma vez que no âmbito doméstico houve um enfraquecimento das leis antiviolação de gênero, além de perseguição sistemática aos movimentos de mulheres e o surgimento de projetos políticos anti-democráticos e hostis à justiça social para mulheres na gestão presidencial de Ortega. Como resultado, esta dissertação visa fornecer uma avaliação crítica sobre como as funções políticas desempenhadas pelo Global Gender Gap Index ajudam a fomentar um regime informal de governança de gênero na política mundial, com base no estudo de caso da liderança global da Nicarágua em igualdade de gênero retratou o Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) em contraste com as experiências de política antigênero e violência exercidas em nível local, de 2006 a 2019, com base em estudos da literatura de indicadores globais e estudos de gênero sobre enquadramento neoliberal e governamentalidade. Portanto, esta dissertação conclui que as formas de medição e quantificação do GGI governam e normalizam padrões para a governança global de gênero nos países por meio de enquadramentos da governamentalidade neoliberal e das funções políticas de governo dos números do GGI. Como tal, a identidade nacional da Nicarágua em questões de gênero é criada, alterada e recompensada como líder mundial e de alto desempenho, despolitizando o significado da igualdade de gênero por sua conexão recém-reforçada com governos, mercados e competitividade nacional. O projeto nacional patriarcal de gênero observado em nível doméstico na Nicarágua não é reconhecido pelas formas de medição e análise do GGI, uma vez que o projeto nacional de gênero na Nicarágua está alinhado com práticas de autogoverno que tornam as formas de governamentalidade neoliberal do GGI de gênero operacional. É certo que o GGI mede as disparidades globais de gênero e classifica os países, mas sua forma de mensuração e interpretação mascara a violência de gênero como algo estrutural e, portanto, omite que tal fenômeno exige mudanças sistêmicas. No mais, o GGI é particularmente incapaz de capturar taxas de desigualdade de gênero em países provenientes de contextos do Sul Global. Em vez disso, mensura e iguala diferentes projetos nacionais de gênero entre os países, o que é problemático, pois o governo da Nicarágua faz uso da marca nacional de líder mundial em equidade de gênero estabelecida pelo GGI para deslegitimar mobilizações de gênero alternativas em nível doméstico.

Palavra-chave: Índice de disparidade global de gênero; Nicarágua; Política de gênero

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## **LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS**

GEI - Gender equity index  
GEM – Gender Empowerment Measure  
GGI - GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX  
GII - GENDER INEQUALITY INDEX  
GPI - GENDER PARITY SCORE INDEX  
IPE – International Political Economy  
IR – International Relations  
MDGs - Millennium Development Goals  
UN - UNITED NATIONS  
UNDP - United Nations Development Program  
UNSD - United Nations Statistics Division  
WEW - WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM



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*Counting and classification can be powerful parts of the process of creating knowledge. But they're also tools of power in themselves. [...] An intersectional feminist approach to counting insists that we examine and, if necessary, rethink the assumptions and beliefs behind our classification infrastructure, as well as consistently probe who is doing the counting and whose interests are served. Counting and measuring do not always have to be tools of oppression. We can also use them to hold power accountable, to reclaim overlooked histories, and to build collectivity and solidarity (D'IGNAZIO and KLEIN, 2020, p. 122-23).*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

This section is an introduction to the dissertation, whose main goal is to discuss how *the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index help to foster an informal regime of governance of gender in world politics, based on the case study of Nicaragua's global leadership in gender equality portrayed the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), in contrast to the experiences of anti-gender politics and violence exercised at the local level*, from 2006 to 2019. I begin this chapter by exploring quantified knowledge as a social component of world affairs, followed by exposing the main research gaps identified throughout our work, while at the same time, I present our case study. Therefore, here I also provide context on the close relationship between data production from global indicators of gender – namely the Global Gender Gap Index, power and forms of government reflected by the evaluations of Nicaragua's state of gender affairs, connecting this broader context to the domestic affairs considered “anti-gender politics” by scholars and feminist activists in the country. Ultimately, this section includes a description of the purpose of the thesis, chapters, and methods from a qualitative view. In other words, our data collection relies on a bibliography, document research, observation, and qualitative codification. Documents from three different sources were selected through the method of triangulation of data by levels, and qualitative analysis is conducted through the theoretical dialogue of poststructural feminist perspectives of political economy and Foucaultian-inspired interpretations of global indicators as sites of knowledge-power.

The production and use of data are an undeniable asset to structuring the social fabric of modern life, whose presence can be noticed across fields of knowledge, news, governments, corporations, and communities. While the action of quantifying, categorizing, measuring, and analyzing social reality through statistical and non-statistical methodologies has been a practice employed over the centuries by nation-states and other social actors, in the past, it was often linked to the governments' demands in decision-making processes and political strategies to public agendas (MELITA et al., 2018). Other than that, quantified knowledge is merged with social life in numerous forms, including calculus, census, statistical models, performance indicators, measurements, rankings, mappings, algorithms, and finances, to name a few. In this spirit, we define quantification as the employment of numbers to describe and measure social phenomena (INTERNATIONAL ENCYCLOPEDIA OF THE SOCIAL SCIENCES, 2008). In other words, quantification translates social experiences into numerical

assessments, usually dependent on standardized forms, which implies turning social phenomena into comparable units of analysis (MERRY, 2015).

In the domain of global affairs, for example, quantification and global monitoring of social phenomena within countries' performance is a widely used tool by different kinds of international organizations and actors, namely states, research institutes or statistical divisions inside international organizations and NGOs, which makes the production of global indicators an instrumental technology to the realm of international politics (MERRY, 2016). Some of the knowledge resultant from data production and work shares links with issues of surveillance and technology, policing-security practices, public policy debates and census, biased analysis, personal engagements through social media and research scientific studies (D'IGNAZIO and KLEIN, 2020). Because of this extensive use in modern life and its implications, quantification receives attention as an object of study in social and applied sciences.

Since the 1970s, diverse debates on quantified knowledge have taken place within social sciences, usually following at least one of three scopes of social studies of quantification: (1) examination of a single (often-new) quantified phenomenon; (2) comparison of quantification projects (often bound to a single field or domain), and (3) the mapping and evaluation of impact over a specific case study of quantification (BERMAN and HIRSCHMAN, 2017, p. 18). Among the main theoretical developments, it is possible to recognize the pioneering work of the French school of Desrosières, the American and German schools on studies of quantification in philosophy and scientific epistemology, works of the field of critical accounting studies, and social theory, Foucaultian approaches, new institutionalism, actor-network theory and political economy, not to mention contributions from the sociology of science and technology (MENNIKEN and ESPELAND, 2019).

In the case of International Relations' agenda on quantified subjects and quantification studies, there has been a combination of sociology of science and technology, sociology of quantification and political economy with Foucauldian-oriented discussions. Most works have explored quantified knowledge and quantified processes as regulatory tools in transnational governance, exposing their impact on foreign policy and political function as technologies of power acquired by international actors, such as its capabilities of creating state-branding and agenda-setting in world affairs. Second, most IR productions about quantified subjects refer to the subfields of soft international law, global governance, international accountability and, in some

instances, governmentality studies. Many investigate technologies of quantification within agendas of international security and peace, liberal democracy, international cooperation, economic development, international human rights, and good governance. Broadly, works about technologies of quantification in global affairs share a common understanding that international actors' use of global indicators displays a new dimension of power in world politics (DAVID et al<sup>1</sup>, 2012; SIQUEIRA, 2017), where they call for attention to the politics behind indexes over international security contexts, including bias over categories of measurement and data collection. Following the same line of thought, Merry (2015; 2011) books, "The quiet power of indicators: measuring governance, corruption and the rule of law" and "The seductions of quantification: Measuring human rights" demonstrate a poststructuralist commitment to the analysis of global indicators from United Nations, NGO's and private actors from the U.S.A, as sources shaped by cultural assumptions of such producers.

Less common are works focused on other thematic issues to which quantified technologies have been increasingly employed beyond mainstream areas and contexts from the global north, including gender equality and gender-based violence. One of the neglected debates is the unequal power differentials behind the data production and interpretation worldwide (D'IGNAZIO AND KLEIN, 2020), especially when discussing this phenomenon beyond the epistemic view from the cases portrayed in the global north imbricated with the features of "human rights' studies". According to Celis et al. (2013), the subfield of Gender and International Politics still lacks robust analysis on how gender inequality is reproduced through institutions (understood here as rules, norms, and practices) and policies and how institutions and policies are gendered by nature. The authors describe a need for more research about "the role that discourses and ideas about gender and sexuality play in constituting political actors and structures in the global economy' through the exposure to this research gap, we might be able to "develop theoretical accounts of politics that better link structure, action, and ideas" (CHAPPELL and WAYLEN, 2013, p. 16), which can help us understanding international dynamics in more innovative ways. Following Celis et al. (2013)'s considerations, we have shifted the traditional focus of the anglo-American field in IR and Gender Studies over issues of "high politics", and, with this dissertation, we intend beyond state-centric, intergovernmental subjects as well as challenge eurocentered debates of gender politics. For that, we have privileged the choice of a subject of study

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<sup>1</sup> See "Governance by Indicators: Global Power through classification and rankings" (2012).

of a global indicator of gender, accompanied by a single case study on underinvestigated experiences of international politics of gender. This dissertation addresses the gap in gendered discussions on the politics of quantified knowledge in world politics as an instrumental aspect of IR. At the same time, we argue that the field of Women's and Gender Studies could benefit from the interdisciplinary addressing of global indicators of gender through a country's case study.

Moreover, the recent development of feminist science studies on data production and feminist debates about neoliberalism, disciplinary power and depoliticization of "gender issues" in international and financial institutions demonstrate two different branches of theorization in Women's and Gender Studies yet to be explored throughout together. In this dissertation, we consider that both theoretical lines could be employed together as tools to analyze specific cases that intersect quantified knowledge, neoliberalism and gender debates in International Relations. Since the global indicator we investigate is associated with international discussions of gender equality, we understand it as being more intensely subjected to gendered dimensions, impacts and political framings in its language and employment. Because of that, it is imperative to develop further research on this topic with a renewed body of literature that delivers fruitful dialogue in three axes of debate. First, we make use of the theoretical background of the social studies of quantification about the political and cultural aspects embedded in quantified tools; for that, we take into account Foucaultian-oriented approaches of International Relations about disciplinary power and knowledge in world politics; and, finally, we use women's and gender perspectives on data production, gendered power and feminist perspectives on neoliberalised and marketized global governance through governmentality of gender.

As for this dissertation, we investigate *political functions played by the quantification tools employed by international institutions and countries, many of which may carry political implications and shape new types of relationships and standards of behaviour in world affairs*. Here, our attention lies on a quantified measurement associated with the spectrum of international debates on gender equality, with multi-country measurement and a robust interpretation database. Using national or multi-country indicators to cover and rank dimensions of inclusion, diversity and inequality can provide a complex picture of a country's performance and reputation, thus assisting international actors in recognizing challenges and crafting more effective policies for equality (NG et al., 2021). To Ng et al. (2021)'s Handbook on Diversity and

Inclusion Indices, a compendium of the most critical diversity and inclusion indices related to gender issues, covers the following indicators: Gender Inequality Index (UN); Gender Equity Index (Social Watch); Gender-Equality Index (European Institute for Gender Equality); Women's Economic Opportunity Index (Economist Intelligence Unit); Global Gender Gap Index (World Economic Forum); Gender Parity Score Report (McKinsey); Gender Diversity Index (Women on Boards) and Gender Diversity Index.

Out of 8 indices of gender mapped above, only three of them produce data across regions and within countries up until today: Gender Inequality Index (GII), developed in 2010 to complement the Human Development Index (HDI) by United Nations; Gender Parity Score Report (GPS), created in 2012 by McKinsey & Company; and Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), developed in 2006 by the World Economic Forum. Apart from Gender Inequality Index (GII), which is related to United Nations' Human Development Index by calculating "the loss in potential human development due to disparity between female and male achievements" (UNDP, 2021, sp), Gender Parity Score (GPS) and Global Gender Gap Index (GGI) are the leading indicators providing cross-countries measurements of gender. Even though both GPS and GGI's production uses a multi-country approach and comes from private actors, GGI's production seems much more stable and broader as a subject of study than the GPS. First, the GGI have covered more countries' performances and rankings than GPS. While GGI began with 106 and nowadays evaluates over 140 countries with reports annually, GPS had only three official reports with 95 assessed countries (2015; 2016; 2018) and several Gender Parity Score Reports for regional or continental analysis (Asian, African, European) instead of reports with an intercontinental reach.

The GGI's good reputation with public opinion, international media and policymakers international stakeholders is much more pronounced than GII and GPS. Its use can perceive as a source of information within international coverages<sup>2</sup>, including the "Top 10 most visited English-language online news websites in the world"<sup>3</sup>. Numerous news publications' commenting on Global Gender Gap Index Reports or quoting its data were easily tracked during our research<sup>4</sup>. Besides that, the Global Gender Gap Index Reports are used as a source in various international,

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<sup>2</sup> Reuters (2021); Al Jazeera (2021)

<sup>3</sup> BBC; CNN; New York Times; Daily Mail UK; The Guardian; Fox News; Finance Yahoo; Washington Post; CNBC and Express UK (PRESSGAZETTE, 2021, sp).

<sup>4</sup> BBC (2021; 2019a; 2019b 2018a; 2018b; 2018c; 2016; 2015a; 2015b); CNN (2021; 2020a; 2020b; 2019a); New York Times (2021a; 2021b; 2021c); Washington Post (2021; 2019; 2017; 2013); NBC (2019a; 2019b);



intergovernmental, and policy documents<sup>5</sup>. So, we argue that GGI's features: broad multi-country covering, stable data production by annual reports, and more substantial recognition by international actors assert it as a reasonable choice to develop debates of gendered data production in IR, with its manifested politics in global processes. Contrary to GPS, funded by McKinsey & Company, GGI's output reflects a much more complex scenario of data production, as it is financed by the only international organization for cooperation and governance between private-public sectors in the world – World Economic Forum. Its members are the 1000<sup>th</sup> most profitable companies globally and international policymakers, with a formal purpose for the development of global corporate governance.

Far from being a random subject of study, scholars of Gender and International Relations investigate the discursive aspects of global policy debates that pose gender equality strategies as “beneficial” to international businesses, the global economy and the increasing foreign aid investment. Many scholars study the ongoing development of several international initiatives carried by the World Bank, European Union, United Nations, multinationals<sup>6</sup> and World Economic Forum as new branches of debates for IR and Feminist Studies about corporate governance, neoliberalism and gender framings (PRÜGL, 2015; PRÜGL and TRUE, 2015; TRUE, 2019; GRIFFIN, 2010). As a result, the role of the World Economic Forum as a specialized institution in producing a cross-country ranking of gender gaps and parity demonstrates a vital scenario of world affairs and gendered processes. Studying it opens *the doors to understanding that cross-country indicators can shape international debates, standards, and international policies for gender equality* (TANSKA et al., 2020; GRIFFIN, 2013; TRUE, 2018), if not local at times.

According to Tanska et al. (2020), the publishing of the Global Gender Gap Index Reports by the World Economic Forum has caused many political implications for countries and their political images abroad. For one thing, in 2018, “the US was shamed for ranking 49th in the world” in printed papers and news; “Japan was shamed in the media for ranking the worst among G7 countries”; while at the same time, “Forbes pursued with coverage of top-ranked countries, naming a few policies that were deemed relevant for achieving high levels of gender equality [...]”, not to mention that “[...] in the European Union, the publication of rankings in gender wage equality [...]

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<sup>5</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Nike, McKinsey & Company, Goldman Sachs, Ernst and Young, Accenture, Deloitte, Coca Cola, among others.

attracts coverage from the European Commission, national governments, and media alike" (idem, p. 2). Besides, there is sufficient evidence on the primer use of the Global Gender Gap Index Reports data to support the development of international cooperation programs for gender equality and the adoption of policy agendas for gender equality. The Global Gender Gap Index itself works as a corollary for the program Closing the Gender Gap Accelerators, a public-private model of international cooperation established to address gender gaps in countries evaluated by the GGI through national plans of action, which now take place in nine countries representatives from three regions, including Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Panama, Jordan, Kazakhstan and Egypt (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2021, sp). International organizations have used GGI's data in their reports, policymaking debates and discourses: International Trade Union Confederation (2008); USAID (2021) at its "Gender Equality and Women's Empowerment" program; International Monetary Fund's projects to tackle gender inequality as well as its gender budget policies (2019); Santander (2021); International Labour Organization's evaluations to narrow the gender pay gap (2019) and the project's in Pakistan (2011), Amnesty's campaigns for gender equality (2019); Islamic Development Bank in its "Country Gender Profile" (2018); UN's Women (2018) and OECD's Report Promoting Gender Equality in Eurasia (2019).

The Global Gender Gap Index aims to promote global awareness of gender challenges and opportunities worldwide. The global ranking was also developed to be mobilized "as a basis for drawing effective strategies in the reduction of gender inequality" (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2019, s/p). Since its first edition in 2006, the Global Gender Gap Index has worked as a global indicator of gender that gathers one of the largest databases exclusively focused on "gender disparities" across the globe, certainly the largest one outside the United Nations and its counterparts. In addition to its notable data gathering and unusual producer - World Economic Forum, this index monitors, interprets and ranks the performance of countries in terms only of their gender gaps supposedly despite their economic or socio-political position according to four main areas or subindexes: Political Empowerment, Health and Survival, Opportunity and Economic Empowerment and Educational Attainment, each of them providing a separate analysis for a country's behaviour in gender issues worldwide. According to World Economic Forum (2020, p. 5), "the Global Gender Gap Index benchmarks the evolution of gender-based gaps among four key dimensions [...], tracks progress towards closing these gaps over time", which it allows the index to act as "[...] a tool for

cross-country comparison and to prioritize the most effective policies needed to close gender gaps”, considering that “it provides country rankings” at the global level, across regions and income groups.

The Global Gender Gap Index Reports launches data rankings annually, following the same data production and evaluation methodology. Its structure can be divided into three thematic parts: (a) Key Findings, including the main trends captured over the year on the countries’ progress towards gender parity, their average progress across its four dimensions or subindexes, and the projection of future trends for gender equality; (b) Measuring the global gender gap, which presents its methodology, conceptual framework, results and analysis, progress over time, performance by region and country and conclusions; and, lastly, (c) Country profiles, which explore individual countries’ performance accessed by the Global Gender Gap Index Data (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2017). On the average progress on gender equality worldwide, the Index assesses the current distance to close the gaps to parity levels of 68% globally. However, there were significant improvements in 89 of the 144 countries covered and analyzed, and projections on closing the global gender gap are set to take place in 108 years across the 106 countries regularly monitored since 2006 (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2018, p. 7).

At the current rates, the index states that the main challenge of closing gaps around the globe, the region with the highest level of gender parity is Western Europe (75.8%), followed by North America (72.5%) and Latin America (70.8%) in third place. Beyond those, Eastern Europe and Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific, Sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia and the Middle East and North Africa are pointed out as having 70.7%, 68.3%, 66.3%, 65.8% and 60.2%, respectively (idem, p. 8). On the subject of its ranking and countries accessed, the Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019) find among its Top 10 best performers (“most gender-equal countries in the world”) Nordic and European countries, including Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland. Outside the global north and European countries’ ranking positions, the index also features countries from other regions as case models: New Zealand, Philippines, Latvia, South Africa, Nicaragua, Rwanda, Lesotho and Namibia.

In the trends reported on the data published about the Global South from 2006 to 2019, the only non-European countries described as “best performers in gender equality” (Top 10) for more than five years in a row have been the Philippines – from 2006 to 2019, Nicaragua, beginning as 62nd position in the overall ranking in 2006

and later becoming part of the Top 10 from 2012 to 2019; and Rwanda, featuring on the Index for the first time in 2014 to 2019 (INTERNATIONAL MONETARY FUND, 2019, sp). Even though the GGI synopsis' of the patterns of gender inequality at a global level has consistently demonstrated the leadership of Nordic countries, European countries and Philippines, Nicaragua and Rwanda, the three of them being the only low to lower-middle-income countries with stable position of Top 10 performers over the years. The 2018 and 2019's Reports showed an unprecedented projection: Iceland, the best performer in the world; France and Nicaragua were said to be "on track to become the first three countries to eliminate their gender gap, based on current rates of progress", with gender parity achieved by 2050. Thus, 2019's report projection of full equality granted Nicaragua a unique status as not only one of the best performers in gender parity but as the first country from the global south on track to achieve full gender parity in contemporary's history. According to the index, Nicaragua has eliminated 80% of the inequalities between the sexes. Nicaragua's good trajectory positions the country as the first and only country from Latin America and Caribbean groups to be featured as a world leader in gender equality. This high-achieving status was central to our choice of Nicaragua as a single case study about the politics behind this data production in the International Politics of Gender.

#### 1.1. "GENDER PARADISE WORLDWIDE VS ANTI-GENDER POLITICS AT DOMESTIC LEVEL": NICARAGUA AS A CASE STUDY FOR THE GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX'S POLITICAL FUNCTIONS

Nicaragua's score went through fast-speed improvement over the 13 years of data and performance covered by the report. In 2006, the country carried an initial score of 0.6566 out of 1<sup>7</sup>, featuring the 62<sup>nd</sup> position worldwide. In contrast, in the subindex "Economic Participation and Opportunity ranking", the country was evaluated with a score of 0.4626 out of 1, featuring in 101st global position among 115 countries (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2006, p. 9-10). At the subindex "Educational attainment ranking", Nicaragua was evaluated with a score of 0.9935, featuring in 40th worldwide position; similarly, at the subindex "Health and Survival, it was ranked in 50th position, with a score of 0.9785; and at the subindex "Political Empowerment", Nicaragua achieved the 25th global position through a score of 0.1918 out of 1 (idem, p. 11). Nevertheless, in 2012 a significant evolution of its global performance was reported, with a jump in its global position and performance. GGI has put Nicaragua as one of the

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<sup>7</sup> 1 meaning full gender parity.

"Top 10" countries' to have closed its gender gap. From the year 2014 to the year 2019, for example, the Index portrays Nicaragua in the "Top 5 best-placed countries" in the sub-index of Health and Survival and Political Empowerment (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2006; 2012; 2014; 2019). More specifically, Global Gender Gap Index (2015, p. 22; 2018; 2020) ascribes Nicaragua as the "highest ranked country in the world", having achieved gender parity in at least two sub-indices of Education Attainment. Health and Survival, with a promising performance in the Global Gender Gap's Political Empowerment sub-index, since Nicaragua's political system displays more women in ministerial positions than men, is considered one of the best political placements in the world (Top 5). Apart from its peers and best performers from the Global North, we see in Nicaragua's case a critical research opportunity to develop and apply debates on how gender politics can take place in regions other than the global and epistemic centres of International Relations. This change in empirical landscape improves regional discussions in Latin and Central America and the understanding of global indicators of gender's self-imposed constraints, political influences and implications for the country's portrayal of performance and reputation in inequality issues at the international level.

Other than that, our choice of the single case of Nicaragua shows commitment to the development of current research on single-countries studies' performances in gender equality based on global indicators. Works such as Chen and He (2020)<sup>8</sup>, Koeler (2011)<sup>9</sup>, Choe et al. (2016)<sup>10</sup>, Barns and Preston (2010) show the potential of single and multi-case studies through different analyses of one or more country's performance in the Global Gender Gap Index, as sources to debate structural implications of data production and gender equality, its limitations in several sectors and its political framings. Current research contests the extent and capacity of GGI "to provide an adequate understanding of women's labour market participation and economic attainment" (BARNES and PRESTON, 2010, p. 1), as well as gender-based violence and country's world leadership (BENERÍA and PERMANYER, 2010). And even though global indicators of gender are related to the measurement of either gender equality, parity or inequality, for some feminist studies, such indices usually hide or flatten "gender dynamics" or "gender regimes" at the global level. Significant values and criteria may privilege correlations or inputs with the inequality references from the

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<sup>8</sup> About China's comparative performance at the GGI across regions.

<sup>9</sup> Lesoto's global performance at the GGI as case for debating trends of gender, labour and migration.

<sup>10</sup> "Gender gap matters in maternal mortality in low and lower-middle-income countries: A study of the global Gender Gap Index".

Global North, not considering the gendered institutions and gendered political-economic structures that influence or impact outputs from the Global South's performance, as well as its predictions and trends for inequality over the years (BOSE, 2015).

Also, we take Nicaragua's case study as a point of departure to critically analyze the Global Gender Gap Index's political function within a Global South's reference. Women's and Gender Studies scholars highlight Nicaragua as the "most significant case of second-wave feminism" held in Central America and possibly outside the global north (HEUMANN, 2014; KAMPWIRTH, 2006). This historical interpretation alone shows Nicaragua's privileged position as a subject for debates on gender in Latin and Central American politics. A branch of studies covers the roles of women's movements in Revolutionary Nicaragua and post-Sandinista revolution in organizational, childcare and combat environments, which meant changing male-female relations and expectations of behaviour (HEATON, 2017; CUPPLES, 2016; WEBBER, 2002; CAPPELLI, 2017). Besides the active participation of Nicaraguan women in the Nicaraguan Sandinista National Liberation Front<sup>11</sup>, women were essential for the country's political unification under the FSLN government. During a post-revolution setting, older women forged a maternal gateway. "Women's disparate worry and grief" was explored by FSLN's government into a concrete political force; whereas for younger women of age, female comrades' experiences of moral authority in the environment of guerrilla warfare at the Sandinista Project facilitated support to the government (HEATON, 2017, p. 4-5).

The country poses a unique geopolitical status in Latin and Central America. Its revolutionary legacy from sandinism fostered a favourable environment for Nicaraguan's women entrance into public and political lives. As a result, the country dealt with the emergence of new political agendas intensely "gendered": the development of women's movements and feminist mobilizations during and after the sandinist revolution and women's movements' advocacy for social reforms. Kampwirth's (2002; 2004; 2006; 2008; 2009; 2010, 2011) literature has captured a "gender record" of the pink tide or leftist politics of gender in Latin America through the case of Nicaragua. Central to her arguments are the following questions: "To what extent has the second-wave feminist movement in Nicaragua been integrated into the pink tide? To what extent do pink tide presidents govern in a feminist way?" (2011, p. 2). Kampwirth presents Nicaragua as an understudied case from Gender and Latin American Studies. Hence, a

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11 Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional (FSLN).

social analysis of Nicaragua's gender state bears the potential to inform on the ambivalences between "leftwing" governments' actions on feminist agendas and women's movements.

In this sense, it should be noted that a gender account of Nicaragua's historical experience outlines three factors: "the end of the cold war, the limits of neoliberalism and the emergence of new social movements – interact with country-specific histories to explain outcomes". More than that, the regional context of Nicaragua gives us insight into how Ortega's government may impact women's and minoritized groups while at the same time offering a case of study to uncover "the divisions within the Nicaraguan left have complicated and even undermined Nicaraguan democracy" (KAMPWIRTH, 2011, p. 2-3). Following the richness of Kampwirth's studies, Neumann (2014; 2016) also gives us a lot to consider in the current debates on Gender Politics in Nicaragua. The author develops discussions about gender violence laws and the gendered state in Nicaragua as a "pro-family" institution. Through this set of literature, Neumann analyzes through the feminist lens the weakening of women's rights in the country (anti-gender politics), Nicaragua's president's alliance with conservative religious groups, and Ortega's ambivalent relationship with women's concerns and social movements. The political environments described above about Nicaragua demonstrate a much more complex scenario than GGI's description and evaluation of Nicaragua as one of the "most gender-equal countries" in the world during Ortega's government as Nicaragua's president was democratically elected in 2007 and continued in power under controversial circumstances. Despite what those interesting trends reveal about Nicaragua as a case study of gender and Latin American Politics, there is little attention to studies of Nicaragua's political images as a "gender paradise" in contrast to its emergent "anti-gender and anti-democratic politics" in Ortega's administration.

Also, it is worth mentioning that Nicaragua's leadership position against gender gaps has had an impact, at least in the political rhetoric of Ortega's administration in multilateral instances and at the domestic level. Ortega's administration has been using the rankings to assert specific agendas of gender and reassure both a regional leadership and geopolitical position. In her speech, Nicaragua's vice-president, Rosario Murillo, comments:

Compañeros, compañeras, gran noticia también, vamos, estamos, nos reportó nuestro embajador Ricardo Alvarado desde los países

nórdicos, **5to lugar Nicaragua en equidad de género en el mundo, quinto lugar.** Dios nos bendice, Dios escucha, Dios nos guía, Dios nos ilumina. **Primero está Islandia, después Noruega, después Finlandia, después Suecia, después Nicaragua, nuestra Nicaragua de Luz, de Vida, de Verdad, de Equidad.** Nueva Zelanda, luego Irlanda, luego España, luego Ruanda y luego Alemania. Son los primeros 10 lugares y nosotros, este paisito pequeño, este paisito lleno de coraje, este país inmenso en espíritu en el quinto lugar por encima de tantos otros países poderosos, potentes [...] Por ejemplo dice, los Estados Unidos 53, lugar 53. Nosotros estamos en los cinco primeros lugares en el mundo, por eso siempre decimos: **no somos un país pobre, somos un país empobrecido por la rapiña de las potencias y luego por los vendepatrias** que también quieren seguir rapiñando como rapiñaron en los 16 años, seguir saqueando el país, seguir arrebatando derechos al pueblo humilde, al pueblo trabajador. **No somos un país pobre sino empobrecido por los ánimos y los apetitos insaciables del imperio y de los imperialistas o serviles o sicarios de los imperialistas aquí localmente.** Somos un pueblo grande, rico en espíritu, esto lo prueba. **Vamos adelante con muchos éxitos de la justicia, porque eso es justicia, la equidad de género es justicia!”** (EL 19 DIGITAL, 2019).

*Authors such as Piper (2018), An investigation into the reported closing of the Nicaraguan gender gap and Herreta et al (2019), Gender Segregation and Income Differences in Nicaragua, problematize methodological aspects, conceptual definitions and narratives about Nicaragua’s world leadership in gender equality according to the index. Because of that, I argue that Nicaragua’s case gives us insights into the political functions of GGI’s behind the processes of data production both in world politics and gender politics. Therefore, this dissertation aims to address the following research question: Based on the case study of Nicaragua’s global leadership in gender equality portrayed, the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI), in contrast to the experiences of anti-gender politics and violence exercised at the local level: what are the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index and how do the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index help to foster an informal regime of governance of gender equality in world politics?*

Our primary research objective in the field of IR is two-fold: we aim to foster innovative contributions to the understanding of “quantified knowledge” as a social phenomenon in world affairs by further exploring theoretical linkages between the body of knowledge in the field of IR, Foucauldian perspectives and the gender and



feminist body of knowledge in Science Studies, concerning the political and gendered dimensions present on the production and use of global indicators as data tools in international dynamics; besides that, we aim to provide a critical assessment on how *the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index help to foster an informal regime of governance of gender in world politics, based on the case study of Nicaragua's global leadership in gender equality portrayed the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) in contrast to the experiences of anti-gender politics and violence exercised at the local level*, from 2006 to 2019. Our specific objectives are the following: (a) to identify and analyze the representation of Nicaragua's national and global performance according to the "Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019)", taking into account how the four dimensions of the index are evaluated (Economic Participation; Health and Survival; Political Empowerment and Education attainment); (b) examine knowledge, gendered and governance-effects produced by the Global Gender Gap Index with respect to Nicaragua's case; (c) contrast Nicaragua's world leadership with contextual data from alternative sources (human rights' reports and academic literature about gender issues in the country) about the country's politics of gender, using the same range of time (2006 – 2019); and, finally, (d) inquiry about the limitations in the social practices of data production (inputs) and measurement of gender disparities (outputs) by the Global Gender Gap Index on Nicaragua's representation over the years, as in looking the gendered contexts that are privileged or under-considered by this particular dataset and how their de-prioritizing connects with broader discussions on the informal governance of gender in world politics.

As for the hypotheses, we understand that the Global Gender Gap Index acts as a policy tool to shape informal governance of gender in world politics, producing knowledge about gender equality worldwide and political evaluations. That said, Nicaragua's assessment by the index shows the articulate forms the global gender gap index participates as a political device of neoliberal technology from an assembly of power relations of normalization, disciplinarian, government and biopolitics. The index's political functions pose it as a technology of neoliberal governmentality of gender, which is operationalized by social processes such as "gendered" subjectification, objectification, de-politicization, and arena-shifting of its "measured objects", Nicaragua included. Moreover, the index produces measurements of Nicaragua's performance through neoliberalizing social macro readings or "gender neoliberalization" of the specific scenarios it analyzes.

The labelling of Nicaragua as a world leader in gender equality by the index, as opposed to its problematic experience of anti-gender politics at the local level, allows us to infer that the ranking creates ways of changing, rewarding and disciplinarize subjective identities of international actors through notions of competitiveness and competence in gender issues worldwide, especially in the categories of the sub-index of Political Empowerment and Education. If we understand that labels are constituted by social processes operationalized by the index with material implications, from the perspective of data feminism and intersectionality, the index's shapes the informal governance of gender in world affairs by acting as a technology of neoliberal governmentality of gender. The emphasis on war, peace, and cooperation studies for hegemonic countries set the tone for long-lasting traditions in the field. That said, the first motivation for our dissertation lies in our commitment to transform the positivism and geographical privileging of the Global North as an "epistemic centre" in its mainstream agenda. By focusing on the global gender gap index through a case study of Nicaragua, IR's mainstream agenda and geographical emphasis are challenged. The culture of global indicators reflects specific regional dynamics that are yet to be explored by research.

Conversely, such themes also call for a better representation of women's theorists from the global south in the field. After all, the under-representation of women's theorists from the global south undeniably restricts recognising gendered challenges in peripheric regions, such as Latin America and the Caribbean. By correlating feminist IR debates and Foucaultian discussions on the political dimensions of knowledge-producing on global gender issues in the 21st century, we establish an innovative conversation between frameworks for international relations. From the theoretical point of view, it is also considered as an essential contribution of this project its purpose to dialogue the feminist and gender approaches with approaches of the literature of the RI on the role of global indicators in governance studies since it connects the object of study within a global economic agenda. This aspect bears potential for renewing such discussions and revisiting possible limitations of the concepts adopted by both pieces of literature, notably feminist studies of science and feminist studies on international political economy about financial institutions, framings of gender and the global indicators. The mutual dialogue between that literature expands our understanding of how global indicators are integrated into projects of government and governance of gender in world politics since it discusses its

instrumentalization and the conditions in which such instruments shape international standards and actors' relationships.

## 1.2 METHODOLOGY

In this section, we present our research methodology. The primary focus of this research is to examine, through a poststructural feminist political economy and Foucaultian theoretical lens, Nicaragua's performance in the Global Gender Gap Index Reports, considering the index as a potential tool of knowledge and power in world affairs, capable of informing new macro-realities and neoliberal readings of gender disparities. Based on Creswell and Creswell (2018, p. 5), we consider that an overall plan to conduct research must take into account four components: epistemological worldviews<sup>12</sup>; research approaches to a methodological strategy<sup>13</sup>; research methods – including data collection, techniques, forms of analysis and interpretation - and theoretical tools are chosen. On that note, this dissertation is epistemologically oriented towards a transformative worldview. A transformative epistemological worldview includes critical theorists, such as Marxists, feminists, and postcolonial intellectuals (and others). The perspective holds that research inquiry is intrinsically linked with politics, stating that a political research agenda of research is needed to identify and confront social inequalities resulting from asymmetric power relationships, placing new strategies to construct a pluralistic picture of social issues (CRESWELL and CRESWELL, 2018, p. 9-10). Our epistemological and ontological focus derives from a poststructural feminist theory.

According to Tickner (2006), four methodological perspectives are linked to feminist research in the field of International Relations. Those are “a deep concern with which research questions get asked and in less biased and more universal than conventional research; the centrality of questions of reflexivity and the subjectivity of the researcher; and a commitment to knowledge as emancipation” (idem). Her simple affirmation that feminist research asks feminist questions has profound implications. It argues that feminist research produces a specific type of knowledge and analysis

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<sup>12</sup> From Creswell and Creswell (2018), epistemological worldviews represent a broad set of assumptions that guide academic inquiry and provide a broad orientation of a research and researcher's position in a study. Epistemological worldviews can be divided into four major groups (postpositivist, constructivist, transformative and pragmatist).

<sup>13</sup> According to Barragán (2006), a methodological strategy is a plan or preestablished path to accomplish a research objective. As for this project, we began our methodological strategy by the acknowledgement of the subject of study – the narrative of Nicaragua's performance within the political dimensions and limitations of the Global Gender Gap Index as a technology of govern – and the ontological and epistemological aspects in which the subject is considered.

oriented towards co-liberation and improving women's lives in the face of oppressive conditions, which is aligned with our research purpose. I consider those profoundly pertinent to the investigation because this research makes feminist sense of the International Politics that surround the global indicators' production and use, with an analysis committed to addressing gendered contexts and women's struggles and making itself helpful in envisioning feminist equitable issues in data production at the international arena. Using the criteria of Tickner (2006) and D'Ignazio and Klein (2020), a project can be considered feminist in different dimensions:

By its (critical) interactions against power: in content, in/on form, in/on the process. While this may sound challenging to distinguish, each of those criteria is clarified here: As will become clear, a project may be feminist in content, in that it challenges power by choice of subject matter; in form, in that it challenges power by shifting the aesthetic and/or sensory registers of data communication; and/or in process, in that it challenges power by building participatory, inclusive processes of knowledge production. What unites this broad scope of data-based work is a commitment to action and a desire to remake the world (idem, p. 18).

By considering the basic features of the research design presented in Barragán (2006), Triviños (1987, p. 128-130), I claim that my dissertation relies on a qualitative methodology. This interpretative and reflexive side becomes visible with our attention to the information produced by the Global Gender Gap Index, based on the view that those meanings used for quantification and measurement of countries' levels of gender parity are socially constructed. More centrally, a qualitative methodology implies that our investigation is deeply guided by subjectivity and contextual flexibility rather than numerical criteria and fixed variables. Finally, we also use qualitative sources to gather different descriptions and inferences through abstractions and induction. Nevertheless, we fathom the importance of exploring the narratives produced by the Index with a qualitative facet since the indicator itself has been expressively examined over quantitative considerations (see MASTRACCI, 2017; MONICA, 2012; TOPUZ, 2021; TANSKA et al., 2020; CHEN and HE, 2020; KOLER, 2011; CHOE et al., 2016; BARNS and PRESTON, 2010). Therefore, incorporating a qualitative dimension in this research responds to the innovative spirit of exposing subjectivity and politics on global indicators' power/knowledge dynamics. We choose to conduct our investigation through the qualitative approach of Case Study Research. Case study research is a

type of design in qualitative research in which the investigator aims to understand and explain a case representative of a contemporary bounded system over time through detailed, in-depth data collection (CRESWELL and POTH, 2018, 2018, p. 99). For Yin (2002), the approach of case studies is preferable in the face of explicative types of research that “deal with operational links that need to be tracked over time, rather than being viewed as mere repetitions or incidences”. This condition also applies to our investigation; after all, our goal is to examine the narrative of Nicaragua’s performance in gender issues over time (2006 – 2019) according to the global gender gap index and the alternative narratives provided by other sources. As an explicative case study with qualitative features, our investigation follows its corresponding qualitative observation, data collection, and examination techniques. Scholars like Barragán (2006, p. 109) suggest that a qualitative investigation passes through four stages: data collection, description, organization and analysis.

The first stage of our qualitative research – our data collection – was pursued with a strategy known as “triangulation of data by levels”. As Mendicoa (2003, p.122; p. 74 - 75) shows, triangulation is an excellent qualitative strategy that aggregates to one investigation of different sources (thus points of view) of the works and data to be collected later analyzed. While Mendicoa explains at least three possible strategies of triangulations (of data, theory, methodology and researchers), we apply to this investigation a triangulation of data by levels, so we can better assess not only the data provided by the Global Gender Gap Index about Nicaragua but other sources as well. Within the “triangulation of data”, we intend to collect information from three types of sources, with a focus on a specific range of time, from 2006 to 2019, the period where the Global Gender Gap Index, one of our subjects of investigation, measures Nicaragua’s performance, a dimension we aim at examining. Hence, the three types of sources through which we collected data for this investigation are the Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019); primary bibliography, consisting of reports from civil society about human rights violations and gender-based issues in Nicaragua; and lastly, secondary bibliography, consisting of academic works with analysis about gendered issues in the country. At the Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019) level, despite being defined as one source, the information gathered goes through quantitative and qualitative forms of data collection, which are explained below.

At first, the quantitative data collected during this investigation includes the different metrics provided by the index, such as the following: (a) numerical score

that describes the overall country's performance (0 – 1), its correspondent position in the overall ranking of gender parity worldwide; secondly, we collected the numerical score that describes the country's performance on each subindex (0 – 1), as well as the country's position at each subindexes' ranking. After collecting data through the strategy of triangulation, we shift to the description and analysis phase. During it, we will conduct observation and documental analysis in our qualitative methodology, offering attention to organising our data collected through the "codification" process. Through this process, we navigate our documents (raw data) by labelling terms and representative words ("codes") across the texts. This helps us summarize the files' main ideas or interesting concepts and review the data through significant codification categories (MENDICOA, 2003, p. 123). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018) and Creswell and Poth (2018, p. 184), data management and analysis involve multiple steps: (a) select and organize data files; (b) read through the texts, taking personal notes while reading to form initial codes; (c) identifying and develop categories of codification (expected codes; surprising codes; codes of conceptual interest); (d) apply codes and describe the context of the case study; (e) use the categorical aggregation of codes to define significant themes, processes or patterns; (f) relating categories to the analytical literature; (g) produce contextual understandings and develop your interpretation and theoretical interventions based on research findings and literature.

When it comes to selecting and organising data files, we first establish three sources of data with a focus on a time range of 2006 to 2019: (1) Global Gender Gap Index Reports; (2) Technical reports on gender equality and human rights violations and gender issues in Nicaragua produced by organizations from civil society; (3) bibliographical productions about gendered issues in Nicaragua. Furthermore, we have defined specific codes for each of the three types of sources during documental observation. To observe and examine the Global Gender Gap Index Reports, we focus on the following "expected codes": (a) Nicaragua's overall performance in the ranking; (b) Nicaragua's performance by subindex (Political Empowerment, Education Attainment, Health and survival; Economic Participation and Opportunity). Whereas to observe and examine the other two sources of documents (reports and academic work), we use categories of codification to establish the type of gender issue explored in the document, geographical context and social group to which the data refers. Although it may seem simple, this codification is helpful to organize and systematize the first reading of those texts and later define the most common type of gender-based issue

and contexts present in the documents about Nicaragua.

In addition to the adoption of documental observation and documental analysis, our research deploys a cross-disciplinary theoretical perspective to examine the data collected and, consequently, the political and cultural dimensions of the narratives within Nicaragua's performance in gender disparities informed by the Global Gender Gap Index Reports concerning other sources. Part of the theoretical perspectives derives from Foucaultian and quantification studies in IR, aligned with the framework knowledge/power, on the theoretical models that focus on global indicators and rankings as tools of knowledge and governance in world affairs. For this reason, we emphasize the use of three books: "The Seductions of Quantification: Measuring Human Rights, Gender Violence and Sex Trafficking", Sally Merry (2016); "Ranking the world: grading states as a tool of global governance", Cooley and Snyder (2015) (org); "Governance by Indicators: Global Power through Quantification and Rankings", Davis et al. (2012) (Org). The following works of Elizabeth Prügl, Jacqui True and Juanita Elias: "Neoliberalising Feminism" (2015); "Equality Means Business? Governing Gender through Transnational Public-Private Partnerships" (2014); "The global governance of gender" (2015); "Davos woman to the rescue of global capital" (2013).

### 1.2.1 Chapters' description

The dissertation itself is structured into five chapters, as follows: (2) Theoretical chapter: fostering dialogues between foucaultian-inspired concepts and feminist approaches to the study of global indicators in governance; (3) Nicaragua's global and local "experiences" in gender equality according to the global gender gap index and beyond (2006 – 2019); (4) "Conflicting narratives about gender equality in nicaragua": analyzing the governing functions of the global gender gap index at play and beyond", and (5) Conclusion. In chapter one, we explore our theoretical framework, attempting to build a conversation among Foucauldian literature on International Relations and/or Global Indicators and a branch of literature of poststructural feminist studies of political economy on neoliberalism, governance and financial institutions. The chapter explores quantification as a social and political practice, where we present basic definitions from the scholarship of global Indicators and rankings in world politics, fundamental concepts of Foucaultian and gender studies applied to the understanding of global indicators in IR, with emphasis on feminist studies on neoliberal framings of gender, financial institutions and governmentality. Hence, the theoretical framework

chapter explores how these two branches may provide a theoretical ground to better analyze the politics of data production and evaluation at the GGI's portrayal of Nicaraguan performance in gender equality.

On the one hand, the third chapter introduces the Global Gender Gap Index Reports main' features, from its origin, methodology, monitoring, and global tendencies where Nicaragua is situated and evaluated. On the other hand, the third chapter also offers an overview of Nicaragua's domestic affairs of anti-gender politics, aiming to contrast local narratives with the ones of Nicaragua as a world leader in gender equality provided by the Global Gender Gap Index Reports. During its description of data collection about Nicaragua, the chapter aims to describe Nicaragua's global performance in gender equality according to the Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019), focusing on its overall performance and ranking and its individualized performance within the four dimensions measured by the GGI's: Political Empowerment; Educational Attainment; Health and Survival and Economic Participation and Opportunity; whereas during its second part we explore the gender Politics in Nicaragua beyond GGI's reporting, briefly going from its revolutionary period, post and contemporary politics of gender under Ortega's government. In this chapter, I argue that Ortega's government instrumentalizes women's rights and gendered affairs by developing a national gender project marked by patriarchal policies. Furthermore, in our 4th chapter, we address our analysis of the neoliberal politics of measurement and evaluation of GGI's into Nicaragua's profile, focusing on a Foucauldian and feminist reading of this case of data production in world politics. We contrast the political representation of Nicaragua as a world leader (against gender disparity), and the GGI's criteria of evaluation and classifications of excellence in gender equality with the political narratives about Nicaragua fostered at the domestic level through movements of civil society, NGOs, and human rights organizations. This chapter highlights how the political functions within the framings of gender, forms of government of gender and evaluations provided by the GGI about Nicaragua over the years represent forms of neoliberal governmentality of gender in world affairs as its limitations as a global indicator. Finally, in final chapter of conclusion, we revisit the discussion conducted throughout this dissertation and provide an overview of the main reflections provoked during the research analysis.





## 2. FOSTERING DIALOGUES BETWEEN FOUCAULTIAN-INSPIRED CONCEPTS AND FEMINIST POLITICAL ECONOMY TO THE STUDY OF GLOBAL INDICATORS

In this chapter, I present the (double-)theoretical framework for this dissertation: Foucaultian-inspired concepts and gender studies (aligned with lens from the poststructural feminist political economy). I began by presenting the commonalities between the two approaches for the field of international relations and the study of global indicators. Second, from Foucaultian-inspired literature<sup>14</sup>, I focus on the concepts of technologies of power<sup>15</sup>, normalization and neoliberal governmentality. Moreover, I name the discursive processes considered pivotal to how global rankings can exert governing and authoritative functions over international actors: objectification, subjectification, depoliticization and legitimation. Third, I put those two perspectives into dialogue with feminist poststructuralist discussions of governmentality and neo-liberalization of gender in financial institutions. I justify this double-theoretical approach by arguing that current Foucaultian-inspired perspectives on quantification studies *alone* do not offer sufficient tools for theorizing gendered politics and gendered subjects related to the portrayal of Nicaragua's gender equality by the Global Gender Gap Index Reports. Because the concepts of global indicators (and governance indicators), technologies of power, normalization and governance as neoliberal governmentality are pivotal to this study, definitions are in order at the outset.

### 2.1 FOUCAULTIAN CONCEPTS AND FEMINIST STUDIES OF POLITICAL ECONOMY: AN OVERVIEW

More than a transposition of the concept of gender to illuminate International Politics, these are approaches that share a project of transformation and social justice and an analytical structure based on three central premises: (i) the recognition that the construction social is inherent to relationships, institutions, events and international meanings; (ii) the recognition that such relationships and gender itself vary across history, that is, they adapt to the power structures, economic systems,

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<sup>14</sup> Drawing on Foucaultian-inspired works in IR, our dissertation rescues some concepts of Michael Foucault's work on the power-knowledge complex and its adaptations to the study of global indicators and rankings in international relations, as explored by the books of Merry (2015), Davis et al. (2015) and Erkillä and Piirone (2013); as well as feminist literature of International Relations about gender-relations and government of gender in financial institutions, represented by the works of Prügl (2015); True (2015); True and Prügl (2013); Peterson and Runyan (2012).

<sup>15</sup> Sovereign, government, biopower and discipline.

norms and political projects and (iii) thirdly, there is the recognition that there are other ways of thinking about power in the IR discipline, not only from forces (capacities), persuasion (soft power) or disciplinary forces but from the concept of the power of gendered structures (Whitworth, 1994). Therefore, we understand that our dissertation requires a Foucauldian toolbox to discuss the Global Gender Gap Index and Gender and Feminist lens of International Relations and quantification studies.

Conversely, we adopt the Gender and Feminist Perspectives as our theoretical alignment to explore gendered subjects in the area. However, what do we mean by “Gender and Feminist Perspectives”? Through this term, we refer to the body of literature that assumes gender, gendered relations, institutions and structures as categories of analysis in international relations, as described above. Shortly we will digress more on those specific approaches as we align with poststructural feminist perspectives from the international political economy. Fortunately, it is undeniable that Foucault significantly influenced feminist studies (DEVEAUX, 1994). So, there is a broad literature on gender and feminist scholarship that extends the works of Michael Foucault on themes such as power, sexuality and subjectivities in Social Sciences (SAWICKI, 1991; MCNAY, 1992; MCLAREN, 2002; TAYLOR, 2018; KING, 2002; MCLEOM and DURHEIM, 2002), which enable us to push forward a theoretical dialogue during our dissertation. That said, three waves of Foucauldian-feminist theorizations can be identified: “literature that appropriates Foucault's analysis of the effects of power on bodies”; “analyses that take their cue from Foucault's later development of interweaving power relations [...] viewed as inherently contested”; and finally, “postmodern feminist writings on sexual and gender identity informed by Foucault's assertion [...] to a modern regime of power and a proliferation of subjectifying discourses on sexuality” (DEVEAUX, 1994, p. 223), so I argue that the feminist approaches I will present in this chapter are aligned with analyzing the effects of gender framings in regimes of neoliberal power concerning the global gender gap index.

Even though Foucaultian concepts can be theoretically helpful for feminist research projects, some feminist theorists share reservations about Foucault's account of power, labelling it as an inappropriate theory of power for women and uncovering gendered power relations. For them, his theoretical assumptions leave no space for agency, resistance and the *práxis* of liberatory goals of feminism as a social movement (EPSTEIN, 1995; BODRIBB, 1992). In our case, we recognize that Foucaultian insights can provide useful tools and draw common ground with feminist

theories. For instance, both approaches share four fundamental convergences in their theoretical constructions: “both identify the body as a site of power, both view power as local, both emphasize discourse, and both criticize Western humanism privileging of the masculine and its proclamation of universals” (MACLAREN, 2002, p. 2).

We can articulate two of the main differences from Foucaultian-perspectives applied to IR and Feminist Studies as being related to the purpose of knowledge production and the commitment to establishing normative strategies to challenge gendered power in world politics. In this sense, Foucaultian perspectives rely heavily on understanding knowledge production as being tied to disciplinary and regulatory purposes. Even though it recognizes the resistance-facet in the knowledge-power complex, those approaches advocate the capillarity of power undermines the possibility of emancipatory and agency mechanisms beyond the micro-physics of those relationships. In contrast, feminist approaches rely on assumptions that support or put “knowledge-production” at service for transformative politics in and outside this sphere towards ending structural and patriarchal oppression of gender, race, and ethnicity. Because of that, our theoretical framework adds to the traditional terrain of Foucault as a thinker in quantification studies; by reflecting upon Feminist-Foucauldian studies in International Political Economy (EPI) about financial institutions, gender framings as government and neoliberal subjectivities of gender.

Like foucaultian approaches, feminist epistemologists and philosophers of science claim that dominant practices of knowledge production may create scientific interpretations where women’s activities, experiences, *interests and gendered power relations are either invisible or taken for granted, unquestioned and considered value-free*. In other cases, *traditional systems of knowledge may reproduce social (dominant) understandings that reinforce inequalities and support the maintenance of gendered hierarchies* (ANDERSON, 2000). Faced with this interdisciplinary encounter between Foucauldian and feminist studies, we discuss the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index in fostering informal governance of gender as a signal to transform what Wyer et al.’s (2014) call the absence of analytical dialogue between feminist science theorists and feminist scholars in other disciplines, including International Relations.

In many respects, *feminist studies complement Foucauldian considerations on quantification studies*. Both approaches share a consensus about the intrinsicality between knowledge-power and social life. At the same time, both are

critical to modern sciences' claims on universality, neutrality, and scientific authority. Additionally, feminist science studies problematize the cartesian rationale of knowledge in modern sciences, pointing out its rootedness in western white-male-standpoints, experiences, and *the exclusion of women's productions* (Minnich 2004; Flax 1987). More than that, the *white-male centrism of science and its symbolic violence may reproduce the perpetuation of the binary sex and an unequal gender system, where the privileging of hegemonic masculinities is considered an obstacle to the liberatory potential of scientific research*. According to this perspective, datasets are surrounded by imagined objectivity, which means that data-driven systems hold the idea of offering value-free information when they are marked by cultural assumptions, political interests, and discriminatory practices.

## 2.2. GLOBAL INDICATORS IN THE GLOBAL GOVERNANCE OF GENDER: BASIC DEFINITIONS

In International Relations, the rise of an indicator culture<sup>16</sup> or audit culture<sup>17</sup> has widespread the use of quantitative measures as part of governance and *policymaking*. *Indicators and other forms of numerical knowledge are produced by international organizations and used to measure, rank and rate countries on issues such as their democracy levels, economic competitiveness, corruption and gender equality* (SHORE and WRIGHT, 2015). As a case in point, from the point of view of western history, quantified knowledge had controversial roles in shaping modern politics and establishing colonial dominance of European countries in many contexts of the Global South; quantified knowledge and statistical data were instrumental for states to support and better strategize the ways power could be exercised (BUTAH et al., 2018).

Nevertheless, by the end of the 1990s, the new political arenas influenced by multilateralism, global governance and cooperation led to the incorporation of indicators and other forms of quantified knowledge as a part of the structure of international agencies of development and financial institutions, as new international actors came to play into the domain of world affairs – such as

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<sup>16</sup> “It is part of the repertoire of institutional actors seeking to persuade publics and influence governance decisions. “Indicator culture,” in this sense, includes a body of technocratic expertise that places a high value on numerical data as a form of knowledge and as a basis for decision making” (MERRY, 2015, p. 9).

<sup>17</sup> “Audit culture is the process by which the principles and techniques of accountancy and financial management are applied to the governance of people and organisations – and, more importantly, the social and cultural consequences of that translation” (WRIGHT and SHORE, 2015, p. 24)

Intergovernmental organizations, NGOs, financial institutions, audit companies, rankers, and credit rating agencies (SHORE and WRIGHT, 2015). Their initial focus was evaluating countries' compliance with international law and conventions (MERRY, 2011; MERRY and WOOD, 2015). Hence, the movement of global demand for indicators to understand local contexts has developed a global industry of global measurements, aiming to address accountability and justify decisions in foreign policy and international cooperation towards new governance and action political agendas. Because global indicators work as examples of quantified knowledge whose presence has been consistent in international affairs and whose centrality still needs to be further understood with its political implications, we are faced with the following question: what is the exact definition of a global indicator?

In this dissertation, I employ Davis's (2012) definition of global indicators:

An indicator is a named collection of rank-ordered data that purports to represent the past or projected performance of different units. The data are generated through a process that simplifies raw data about a complex social phenomenon. In this simplified and processed form, the data are capable of being used to compare particular units of analysis (such as countries or institutions or corporations) synchronically or over time and evaluate their performance by reference to one or more standards (*idem*, p. 4).

The type of quantified technology of Global Indicators can be summarized by the Global Gender Gap Index, since the global ranking also combines “multiple sources of data, even multiple kinds of data, converted into a single score or rank”, with a higher demand for interpretative work (MERRY, 2015, p. 15). The measurements produced by successful indicators often are associated with an aura of objectivity, grounded on the trust of numbers, not to mention the controversial assumption that statistical or quantified knowledge generates more accurate assessments of a social context than qualitative data and analysis (MERRY, 2015). Indeed, many treat indicators and statistical work as outside the realm of politics and the exercise of power (DAVIS et al., 2012). By framing the work of numerical assessments as political interpretations of its creators, it becomes possible to understand the political functions of these technologies based on the different ways they interact and shape the social world. The supposed “superior” accuracy, objectivity, and apolitical dimension of

numerical assessments are questionable<sup>18</sup>.

Even though the development of measurement systems does not define an end in itself, we argue that behind this performance-based culture lies different political purposes chased by the producers of measurement systems, whose productions may directly impact the social practices and contexts. Traditional studies highlight the many managerial purposes of using performance-based systems, such as promoting a specific reading of best practices within social phenomena, controlling behaviour, discussing efficiency, and measuring an actor's competence and achievements (BEHN, 2003). In other words, measures are by nature artefacts with reactive implications for how actors imagine and rationalize social life. As a composite of numbers and units that hold together multiple cognitive meanings about the social world, measures might transform how people think and act by creating new shared understandings about subjects. This means that *numbers for commensuration are the root of disciplinary power* (LAMONT and MOLNAR, 2002). By evoking numbers as social practices, we consider its ability to define what behaviour is deemed appropriate and how we should behave to fit institutions' standards. According to Merry's (2015) work, political and cultural dimensions shape global indicators' functioning, making them intrinsically political devices that reflect social practices. To uncover the "politics of indicators", she maintains that global indicators represent "the assumptions, motivations, and concerns of those who carry them out" and the heavy interpretative work that gives political meaning to the numerical assessments. In terms of interpretative work on making global indicators, she describes the politics within 'choosing approaches for measurement', 'construction of categories', 'selection of data sources', 'labels used for the phenomenon measured', 'what things are counted and how'. (p. 20-21).

Though indicators have been used throughout history, states' rating and ranking is a relatively new phenomenon associated with governance practice in the international context (Löwenheim, 2008, p. 256). In this dissertation, *I define governance in feminist terms as a "gendered system of rules, regulatory norms and mechanisms" that international actors develop through the law, normative practices, discourses and policies* (WAY and RAI, 2008). In addition, based on the literature on

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<sup>18</sup> For more, see: Melita et al (2018); Butah et al (2015); Merry and Wood (2015); Merry (2015); Erkkilä and Piirone (2018); Shore and Wright (2015); Demortain (2019); Davis et al (2018).

feminist political economy, *I understand 'gender' 'as a governing code that pervades language and hence systemically shapes how we think, what we presume to 'know' and value things, and how such knowledge claims are legitimated'. Because of its pervasive meaning as a governing code of social life, in which masculine forms are privileged (valorised) over feminine constructs (devalorised) within the global economy, gender has practical implications for how groups within populations are treated and understood, countries, and the creation of specific governance mechanisms (for example international development policies) in international relations (PETERSON, 2008, p. 501).* As shown in the following topic about feminist theories about governance and governmentality, I contend that 'all governance projects are intrinsically ideological, as combined efforts in a sector-specific area involve actors pursuing political interests and agendas with political contents' (DAVIS et al, 2018). Moreover, as we aim to analyze a regime of quantification focusing on gender issues worldwide, the properties of governance of gender promoted by the global gender gap index should be understood within its implicit and explicit ideological content. Therefore, the political role of indexes produced by international and private actors such as the World Economic Forum, for example, will be explored in understanding the political modes of global and local governance over global topics – in this case, gender equality.

### 2.3. POWER-KNOWLEDGE, TECHNOLOGIES OF POWER AND DISCIPLINARY PRACTICES

Having presented the basic definitions of global indicators, gender and governance, I move further by exploring the notions of power relevant to this work. In this dissertation, I employ Foucault's power/knowledge lens as a point of departure in discussions about the political functions of global indicators in world affairs. In Foucault's analytics of power, power is interwoven with all social relations, both at the micro and macro-level, based on an assembly of *force relations*. Foucault's concept of power is relevant because it reminds us that "power relations are not outside but rather "immanent in" other kinds (economic, knowledge, sexual) of relationships (1990a, 94)" and certainly are not "an institution [or] a structure, nor an individual capacity" (LYNCH, 2011).

As we explore the political functions of the global gender gap index in its controversial representation of Nicaragua over the years, the Foucauldian view of power-knowledge give space for us to include the many gendered power relations in the production of the global gender gap in the countries measured by the index. His idea of



power is particularly relevant to this dissertation. One can argue that it enables the recognition of gendered relationships or gendered portrayals in world politics as sources to understand how power is exercised in myriad ways in social interactions in IR. When discussing the microphysics of power, we uncover fundamental aspects of which subjectivities are partly constituted through power relations. Those can represent shared understandings based on larger strategies of social systems (LYNCH, 2011, p. 23-14). That said, we understand power as “a network of relations, constantly in tension, in activity” (FOUCAULT, 1977, pp. 26-27), whose capillarity allows it to be exercised across networks in social life rather than just at individuals (FOUCAULT, 1980, p. 98). His intake is interesting for this dissertation given its ability to theorize the circulation of power beyond the States as the main subjects of it in IR. By considering power in terms of networks of relations that ‘invest the body, sexuality, family, kinship, knowledge, technology’ (FOUCAULT, p. 122), it becomes possible to analyze the political functions of the Global Gender Gap Index in the network of relations this index is structured around.

Foucault’s concepts clarify the political functions the Global Gender Gap Index wielded when portraying Nicaragua’s case. *From the Foucauldian perspectives, the nexus between knowledge and power is pivotal to shaping relations in contemporary society. Many of his books are considered historical genealogical examples of how power, knowledge and discipline are linked through time. In Discipline and Punish, for example, Foucault considers how ‘institutions and new forms of knowledge created new forms of constraint and social control shift through changes in the object of discipline and the goals of punishment’ (HEWETT, 2004, p. 17). For Foucault, different forms of power rely on two factors: (a) techniques or methods of application and (b) some authority by referring to scientific truths. Based on that, we understand that dominant and knowledgeable claims about world politics are dictated and shaped by power politics since new mechanisms of power become normalized by mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion in our everyday lives.*

On that note, in Foucault’s analysis of power-knowledge, we call attention to his take on the ‘technological take-off in the productivity of power’ ever since the end of the eighteenth century, arguing that new procedures that enable the continuous circulation of power in the most basic levels of social life were developed and should be throughout studied. The technologies that facilitate the exercise of power are, then, a core concept of how this dissertation explores the political functions of the

global gender gap index, which we intend to make visible through the analysis of the case of its representation of Nicaragua. In *Technologies of the self*, Foucault (1978, p. 18) explores the historical connections between power and knowledge produced across time, contending that the production and use of human knowledge have been instrumentalized to transform the conduct of individuals. To that end, he defines four main types of technologies: (1) technologies of production, (2) technologies of sign systems, (3) technologies of power, and (4) technologies of the self in which 'games of truth' are developed, understood as following:

As a context, we must understand that there are four major types of these "technologies," each a matrix of practical reason: (1) technologies of production, which permit us to produce, transform, or manipulate things; (2) technologies of sign systems, which permit us to use signs, meanings, symbols, or signification; (3) technologies of power, which determine the conduct of individuals and submit them to certain ends or domination, an objectivizing of the subject; (4) technologies of the self, which permit individuals to effect by their own means or with the help of others a certain number of operations on their own bodies and souls, thoughts, conduct, and way of being, so as to transform themselves in order to attain a certain state of happiness, purity, wisdom, perfection, or immortality (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 18).

Although all four types of technologies interact, Foucault sustains that the last two are specific types of technologies oriented towards the domination of individuals. For him, the point of contact between *the technologies of power* and *the technologies of the self* is called 'governmentality', a concept I will discuss in a few paragraphs (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 19). The concept of 'technology' is essential to power-knowledge discussions around the political functions of the global gender gap index. For Foucault, what unites all technologies of power to something other than mere discourses, it is potential to serve, just "like other technologies, a body of technical knowledge and practices, a raft of techniques, which once developed and understood can be applied to various situations", profoundly political for the way they intervene in social life (KELLY, 2009, p. 44 apud BLANCO, 2020, p. 54). To present its meaning, I consider 'technology of power' in a sense developed by other authors than Foucault, who nevertheless advanced the concept to the international affairs of contemporary times. Nichola's Rose understands technologies of power as "an assembly of forms of knowledge with a variety of mechanical devices and an assortment of little techniques

oriented to produce certain practical outcomes” (BLANCO, 2020, p. 54). Based on Blanco (2020), we define at least four types of technologies of power: sovereign, government, biopower and discipline. For Foucault, *government or to govern acquires a new meaning and refers to “the conduct of a conduct”, namely “the ways in which myriad institutions and actors, including state ones, seek to direct the conduct of individuals” following specific kinds of logics to produce practical outcomes* (GORDON, 1991, pp. 2–3).

Specifically, according to Foucault (1982, p. 223-224), power in contemporary forms of government can be exercised in the following ways:

To (a) the creation of differentiations, which allow governors to act upon the actions of the governed (e.g., the normal, the pathological, etc.); (b) the types of objectives pursued by those seeking to govern (e.g., to create self-responsible citizens); (c) the means of bringing power relations into being (e.g., threat, discourse, economics, etc.); (d) the kinds of institutions used (e.g., legal structures, family, etc.); and (e) the kinds of rationalities bringing power relations into play (e.g., scientific knowledge, familial love, etc.) (idem).

To define modalities of power applied to larger groups, populations and individuals, Foucault establishes the concept of disciplinary power and disciplinary mechanisms. Disciplinary power targets bodies and aims to render individuals as objects, docile, useful, and ultimately controllable. In Foucault’s interpretation, a technology of power – biopolitics – was rendered operational partly due to the use of statistical techniques at the national level in the form of demography. As the government and disciplinary practices become directed at the control of populations (human-species) rather than individuals as separate units based on demographic measures such as birth rates, morbidity, and different biological disabilities, from the effects of the environment, Foucault argued that ‘biopolitics would extract this knowledge and set the field of intervention for its power’, defined as a technology of power whose goal and subject is the control of life, with regulation not over individual bodies but over human masses and global phenomena (FOUCAULT, 1999, p. 292, p. 302-303).

*Through the production of specific individualities, disciplinary power controls and orders those individuals’ subjectivities as a totality to create efficiency, making use of techniques: hierarchical observation, normalizing judgement, surveillance, and examination* (HOFFMAN, 2011, p. 30). Nevertheless, less attention has been given to governmental technologies used in contemporary politics. Baez

addresses government technologies that take place within the ‘informational society’ based on the employment of statistics, database and accountability. In saying this, his interpretation is committed to providing insights into the social, political and economic structures arising from government technologies, which aligns with my broader argument during this chapter. To Baez’s interdisciplinary approach, technologies of government can be discerned based on the investigation of ‘texts’, defined as all artefacts

The exercise of disciplinary power is connected to “normalizing judgment”. In other words, those refer to the social practices of judging and pushing “bad subjects” who do not perform according to the “standard norm”. Because of that, the normalizing gaze of disciplinary power is supported by the formation of a realm of disciplinary knowledge, which produces an epistemic foundation for examination according to multiple processes of objectification, including but not limited to measurements, gaps, and scores (FOUCAULT, 1979). Technologies of power can be micro or macro-political and way too often are used for what Foucault (2007) calls the “normalization process”. According to Blanco (2020), the normalization process aims to intervene and transform abnormal elements into normal elements; this process is intensely mediated by two double mechanisms: discipline and biopower, where the last one represents a macropolitical form of power related to the management and control of conditions that may affect populations and group’s lives.

In our perspective, Foucault’s concept of “normalization” is at the root of how power operates in the data production of gender at the GGI. More than identifying power structures, through the Foucaultian understanding of “normalization” and feminist perspectives, we can access the broader articulation of political functions of the global gender gap index in developing forms of governance of gender at the global level. In practice, the Foucaultian toolbox advances the myriad ways power relations can be identified and thus transformed in data production. Looking at the case of global rankings of universities worldwide, Erkkila and Pirrone demonstrate how the process of normalization can be rendered operational to the study of global rankings as social phenomena in international affairs and public policy. In summary, the phenomena of ‘normalization’ become operational within global indicators and rankings based on four discursive processes: objectification, depoliticization, subjectification and legitimation.

The authors argue that the evaluative aspect of global rankings determines what is being measured and what is considered normal, average, excellent

or expected. The deviant cases are often judged against the specific norm supported by the theoretical background of the ranking, implicitly exposing policy-relevant assumptions over alternative ones. In contrast, in subjectification processes instrumentalized by global rankings, new identification processes (for the units measured and ranked) are created for the social actors measured. By articulating two mechanisms, evaluation and atomization, the units measured are assigned collective identities within a specific “vocabulary of excellence” according to how they are expected to act on a particular issue (ERKILLA and PIIRONE, 2018). For rankings to work as both social practices, devices and policy instruments that govern actors and individuals, they share an instrumental condition characterized through the ongoingness of four processes applied upon social actors: objectification, (de)politicization, subjectification and legitimation (ERKKILÄ and PIIRONE, 2018), figure below:

**Fig. 4. Social processes within global indicators as policy instruments to govern international actors:**

Type of process	Definition according to Erkkikä and Piirone (2018)
Objectification	“Objectification is a process where ambiguous—often subjective—ideas and concepts are turned into well-defined and collectively shared knowledge products” (idem, p. 25).
(De)politicization or arena shifting	A “movement towards closing a horizon”—as datasets may fix the parameters of the phenomena, they seek to depict [...] issues in naturalizing certain interpretations of reality at the expense of alternative visions (PALONEN, 2007, p. 41 apud ERKKIKÄ and PIIRONE, 2018, p. 29).
Subjectification	“Subjectification is a process where classifications, often obtained through measurements, are linked to personal or collective identities. Subjectification also comes to shape those identities according to prevailing political imaginaries, leading currently to the atomization of subjects—states, institutions and individuals—that are increasingly seen to compete in global economy” (idem, p. 31).
Legitimation	“Being recognized as an individual or organization possessing or having the capability of producing such knowledge lends an element of authority to such actors (Scholte 2005, 259). Authority based on scientific bases of legitimation can, following Gieryn (1999, 1), be termed “epistemic authority” (idem, p. 34)

Source: Adapted from Erkillä and Piirone (2018, p. 25-34).

These four subjective effects of indicators and global rankings (objectification, depoliticization, subjectification and legitimation) are fundamental in producing new meanings to actors whose performance is measured. In other words, rankings can work as apparatus to create governable subjectivities to global capitalism. In this sense, it is possible to discern that through Erkillä and Piironen's four subjective

processes - objectification, (de)politicization, subjectification and legitimation – global rankings and indicators generate specific knowledge effects, working as policy instruments in many settings of formal and informal governance at international relations and public policy. Global indicators and rankings' interpretative work promote governance by acting as policy instruments with knowledge effects. As Cooley (2015) explains: "rankings might reconfigure political relationships at both the transnational and domestic levels", and in some cases, they may "impact the recipient's social status on an issue, with their global hierarchical standing on a ranking against a peer state, rival or regional grouping" being the cause for the state's mobilization (idem, p. 6).

### 2.3.1. 'Governmentality' applied to the feminist study of global indicators of gender

Foucault's views on government and governmentality allow us to explore the types and features of rationalities that lay behind hegemonic and social affiliations of gender. As McLaren (2002, p. 173) suggests, Foucault's understanding of power in dialogue with feminist views can make sense of how categories of social identity perform a dual function of inclusion and exclusion. For instance, through processes such as "normalization" the category of "woman" can be both a source of inclusion and the reification of exclusionary norms and identities to nondominant members to the boundaries of this subjective construction. That said, details on the functioning and shaping of technologies of power can be informed by the employment of knowledge-devices - datasets of gender like the Global Gender Gap Index.

Foucault's concept of governmentality refers to the political rationalities or mentalities underneath the practice of governing, with many theoretical implications for governmentality studies in International Relations. First, governmentality studies offer tools for us to articulate the connections between practices of knowledge and government practices at the global level. It shows the crystallization of power in the exercise of government in the international sphere, as discursive frameworks shape and give meaning to the conduct of behaviours (HOFFMAN and BLANCO, 2021, p. 36). Hence, Foucault's debates on knowledge-power and governmentality create common ground to understand the reciprocal constitution of power techniques and forms of knowledge. The technologies of power are indissociable of the political rationalities that produced them or in which they were produced (LEMKE, 2001). Considering those cartographies of power, discipline and authority in quantified subjects, Foucaultian-

scholarship in quantification studies has connected numerical knowledge to liberal and neoliberal “governmentality” (DIAS-BONE and DIDIER, 2016; CAMARGO, 2016; ROSE, 1999), investigating the trinomial relationship of government among the State, population, and statistics (CAMARGO, 2021).

Moreover, *Foucault’s inspired hypothesis on neoliberal governmentality defines neoliberalism beyond laissez-faire, being specific rationality in which social life is organized around the market up to a point where power technologies render individual, and collective conducts the state of “subjects” by disciplining its subjectivities* (LORENZINI, 2018). Through governmentality studies, we can distinguish *the existence of neoliberal “governmentalizing techniques” in world affairs* (BAEZ, 2014), which enlarges the theoretical potential of governmentality applied to quantified knowledge (CAMARGO, 2021). In her view, poststructuralist scholarship of quantified knowledge is facing new research challenges in developing insights into global indicators and rankings. The role of indexes produced by private actors such as the World Economic Forum, for example, is yet to be explored in understanding modes of global and local governance in connection to governmentality studies.

To Desrosières (2011), *governmentality in quantification studies shows that indicators’ use on actors’ behaviour becomes part of the political rationality of neoliberalism*. In this way, *governmentality and the ideological project of neoliberalism in world affairs become intertwined by the technologies of power and discipline employed to govern and normalize social actors*. Camargo’s argument plays a pivotal role in our choice of theoretical approaches for our dissertation, joining a call to consider the Global Gender Gap Index and its relationship with gendered subjects, gendered language and its potential instrumentalization by the political project of neoliberal governmentality.

*However, what do we consider “govern based on numbers” in IR?* Basically, to the Foucauldian framework, *govern “means essentially to structure the area in which the possible actions and behaviours of the other can be performed”* (BLANCO, 2020, p. 33); so, we use the term “governance based on numbers” with a Foucauldian sense to define the arrangement of “discourses, devices, practices and infrastructures that facilitate the performance-oriented” behaviour of actors (HAMANN, 2020, p. 68). With the perspective of Erkkilä and Piirone (2018) on the governing functions of numbers (and indicators) as well as the framework of Merry (2015), Davis et al. (2015) and Cooley (2018), it becomes possible to ask questions about the so-

called “knowledge and governance effects” of global indicators. More precisely, for the usefulness of the indicators in global governance, we highlight that global indicators represent technologies of governance and knowledge, hence the term “governance indicators”. According to Andrew (2013, apud ROTBERG, 2018, p. 41), governance indicators conjure measurement on “specific fields of engagement in which governments perform on behalf of citizens”. For that, these very same governance indicators produce political readings of states’ performance they aim to evaluate and the social realities they intervene with quantification and measurement, not to mention they may cause effects on governance and knowledge. For instance, global indicators (or governance indicators), as Andrew 2013 calls are “technologies of power” in governance, considering how they act as mechanisms imbricated within governance projects.

Moreover, as we aim to analyze a regime of quantification focusing on gender issues worldwide, the properties of the government of gender promoted by the global gender gap index should be understood within its implicit and explicit ideological content. There is unspoken yet central gendered content in global governance. Way and Rai’s work defines governance as formed by a gendered system of rules, regulatory norms and mechanisms that international actors translate through the law, discourses and policies committed to the realignment of regimes of neoliberalism in the global economy. To Kelley and Simmons (2015), the social functions of global indicators as tools of knowledge and power “begin with their ability to frame issues” in numerous ways, through forms of political communication, coining a language and vocabulary for the issue measured, where the ultimate goal is to affect discourse, policy and legitimate social practices.

The term governmentality of gender applies when the gender equality agenda is connected in deep dimensions of the rationale of neoliberalism, to the point of subordinating and co-constituting the advancement of the global capitalist economy so that both financial organizations and their countries’ members act, at different levels and under other tensions, as “agents of neoliberal governmentality”, with an agenda of gender politics that often regulates, disciplines, depoliticizes and co-opts gendered notions and feminized subjectivities for different international actors (RUNYAN and PETERSON, 2012). Therefore, a specific “frame” of gender equality must be considered to analyze the framework underneath the visions of gender equality in the policy agenda and political strategies. The specific political framing of gender inequality becomes a



valuable aspect for understanding the politics within the measurements and assessments of the Global Gender Gap Index. For that reason, we consider the implicit or explicit interpretations of gender equality as a political frame within the Global Gender Gap Index Reports, the different representations of gender issues offered by it and the “policy solutions” through the theoretical lens of knowledge effects and governance effects of global indicators in the countries “measured”.

As an instrumental feature of global rankings, objectification (as of Erkkila and Pirrone) is an essential social process for the governing functions of rankings because it can set specific parameters for abstract ideas – including gender equality - claiming to address empirical realities. Its governing function as a technology of knowledge provides a commensurability status to “units”, actors and phenomena that are not the same, such as the particular ways to measure the “performance” of national states in gender equality levels, for example. Elias’ (2013) work suggests that neoliberal-compatible gender politics of the world economic forum explicitly connects a country’s level of gender equality to its economic competitiveness in the global market to achieve economic growth (ELIAS, 2013). When we consider that one governing function of rankings lies in the fact that “rankings provide prescriptions for action”, with a high descriptive and evaluative outcome in their measurement (Erkkila and Pirrone), we might come to conclusion that the global gender gap index hints to different processes of governing of gender. After all, general processes of objectification recognized by the literature imply authoritative or disciplinary power over “units” that are transformed into “competitors” in gender rankings (idem).

The governance of “gender issues” through devices present both formal and informal governance acquires a specific political outcome and sector-specific agenda in the contemporary global economy (WAYLEN and RAI, 2008). Through the government of gender, a feminist grammar assimilated the liberal and market economic agendas of action to generate new manifestations of formal and informal governance and, consequently, new ways of exercising and producing capitalist<sup>19</sup> power on a global scale (TRUE, 2015). It becomes evident that “gender equality is beginning to be coined as the solution to several global governance issues, including sustainable economic

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<sup>19</sup> We understand capitalism as of having a neoliberal tendency, in which both capitalism and globalization should be addressed as part of processes of a sociocultural and political-economic nature, which operate from hierarchies of class, ethnicity/race, gender/sexuality - capable of locating this co-constituted version of capitalism and racism on a global scale (PETERSON, 2018).

development, financial stability" (idem, 2015, p. 3). The use of gendered notions in market-based governance associated with neoliberal ideologies enables us to recognize that "new types of power are being created to govern gender in the global political economy" (PRÜGL, 2011 apud TRUE, 2015, p. 330). One example of this attempt to harmonize policy agendas and generation of informal governance of gender is present at the level of the World Economic Forum, one of the current major players in producing and diffusing knowledge and policy models with activities of benchmarking, agenda-setting and strategic projects of global ranking (idem).

More specifically, authors such as True (2015) and Prügl (2015) identify the occurrence of an ideological neoliberalisation of feminist ideas into economic and governance projects at the level of generating new rationalities and technologies of neoliberal governmentality. Gender equality has become co-terminal to the project of neoliberalism, where agents of governmentality are deployed to manage, discipline and depoliticize populations (PETERSON and RUNYAN, 2012). In the anatomy of neoliberal globalization, processes such as liberalization, deregulation, privatization, stabilization, and specialization are constituent features that often result in precarious living conditions for women and marginalized groups. We contend that the global gender gap index might offer us information to discuss how depoliticisation processes have been instrumentalized to govern gender at the global level. Depoliticization occurs where the political horizon of the phenomena measured is set, and the governing function of global rankings is on creating specific realities in terms of representation, formulation of imaginaries and identities, a process followed by the exclusion of other specific realities as politically relevant. In this process, it is common issues being viewed through the economistic lens of governance, as many of those technologies are instruments for politicizing issues accordingly to the demands of the global economy (PALONEN, 2007).

Prügl suggests that there are three mechanisms in which the "language of feminism" has been "neoliberalized" and de-politicized by technologies of power in financial institutions (PRÜGL, 2015). The three different facets of neo-liberalization of feminism are (a) the co-option of feminism into neoliberal economic projects, (b) the integration of feminism into neoliberal ideology, and (c) the interweaving of feminist ideas in rationalities and technologies of neoliberal governmentality (PRÜGL, 2015, p. 619). The appropriation of feminist ideas through neoliberal rationalities in governance projects of international institutions describes an ideology where the accountability for

reform resides in the “objects” themselves. Within a neoliberalizing transnational project of gender equality, the solution for gender inequality at the global level does not lie in collective mobilization and transformation of structural sources of oppression (PRÜGL, 2015; TRUE, 2015). But instead, “through training in giving women access to resources; and in the promotion of individual aspirations and corporate identities” (PRÜGL, 2015), neoliberalism advances as a power project that produces individuals “who are responsible for the norms of gender equality embedded in the market” (idem, p. 620). Runyan and Peterson (2012) suggest that gender becomes yet another neoliberal technique to “liberate” women for these actors in marketized relationships. No wonder the gender governance agenda in financial institutions finds among its main arguments and *modus operandi* the centrality of women's participation as a labor force in the world economy. However, such agendas ignore other precarious contexts in the international division of labor: reproductive work, domestic work, sex work, and immigrant and informal work. Those ignored contexts are deeply racialized and reflect the reality of a large parcel of the world's population. For that reason, Runyan and Peterson interpret that those agendas emphasize the placement of (white) women's participation in the labor market from the global north. Leadership positions the center of its governance project for gender equality.

Moreover, when global rankings treat actors as self-governing units solely responsible for their behaviour (ERKILLÄ and PIIRONE, 2018), the process of subjectification implies the production of new political and governable subjectivities by rankings, dimensions deeply associated with the capitalist demands and imperatives of a neoliberal regime of power, neo-liberalization and neoliberal governmentality (WELSH, 2020). Subjectification individualizes separate but commensurable units according to their comparative performance to produce and promote performance management in capitalist terms by a legitimate producer of quantified knowledge – in this case, the world economic forum. This apparent “blindness” or silence of the gender governance agenda of international organizations is a symptomatic feature of the neoliberal forms of governmentality of gender equality (RUNYAN and PETERSON, 2012) or “neo-liberalization of feminism” (PRÜGL, 2015). For both feminist interpretations, the category “women” is treated in a monolithic way, whose insertion in the labour market is explained in terms of the triad of feminist neoliberalization technologies around the ideals of “individual freedom”, “empowerment” and “responsibility” of women for its subordinate condition. This reflection allows us to enter

the perspective of Cornwall et al. (2008) on the appropriation of "Women's Empowerment" in the neoliberal project of economic development, in which development is "presented as the process that gives women a well-deserved chance to improve their circumstances, making them able to benefit their families, communities and nations" (idem, p. 3).

With the process of disciplinarization derived from the discourse of neoliberalization of the gender, "Empowerment" takes on the meaning of a category of individual responsibility, which acts as a technology for legitimizing macroeconomic policies and interests and the neoliberal project, instead of an emancipatory category derived from feminist ideas and collective action. Furthermore, the governmentality of "Women's Empowerment" constitutes a discursive function that allows the production of feminized identities useful to the neoliberal project (Cornwall), as it is through the "Women's Empowerment" policies, part of the global gender agenda of international institutions and policy advising granted to countries, in which "women" are framed as an abstract and isolated category of contribution to the world economy, acquire a utilitarian meaning. In my literature review, I have identified four primary identities to which 'gender in a feminist lens' is reduced at the service of the neoliberal project. They are the following a) Production of the ideal "Economic Woman" (PETERSON and RUNYAN, 2014); b) Production of "Good Woman" in the neoliberal framework (CORNWALL et al., 2018); c) Production of feminized identities of entrepreneurship and financial-banking leadership; d) Production of productive-citizen identities in a neoliberal economy (PRÜGL, 2015). Far from being fixed and simplistic categories, they are forms of governmentality that reflect the disciplining of women's citizen behaviours and characteristics. Furthermore, the redefinition and disciplining of "gender" by governance projects convert the social agenda into a new discursive dimension of exercising power in the neoliberal order (Prugl), with a regulatory character pressed upon member countries or governed countries. Complementarily, the association between achieving gender equality through the identity transformation of the global market (from "women" to "economic women" / "productive citizens" / "good woman" / "entrepreneurial woman") is present in the agenda of financial institutions.

### **3. NICARAGUA'S GLOBAL AND LOCAL "EXPERIENCES" IN GENDER EQUALITY ACCORDING TO THE GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX REPORTS AND BEYOND (2006 – 2019)**

This section is divided into three parts. The first part explores a brief introduction to the World Economic Forum behaviour as a relevant player in world affairs; after all, it is the institution responsible for developing the index. Moreover, the history and features of the World Economic Forum might reveal critical aspects of the cultural and political contexts in which the index has been developed, offering valuable contextualization on its methodological aspects and use of global indicators in international institutions. This second section presents the index's main features, concepts, and methodological aspects and how the interpretative work represents global trends with the complexity of gender disparities measured. The third and last part provides an overview of Nicaragua's history and gender politics across time through the GGI and beyond.

#### **3.1 WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM: HISTORY AND APPROXIMATION WITH "GENDERED AGENDA" AT GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX**

Before moving forward on the description of the Global Gender Gap Index and its relation of measurement with Nicaragua's disparities of gender, it is critical to highlight the significance of the World Economic Forum as the international institution behind the index's methodology, and funding, production and reporting. The organization was developed in 1971 in Switzerland, working as an international platform for the corporate community in Europe to engage with international cooperation and elaborate on strategic models of management and market development (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2010). Since its first event held in Davos, the organization has been invested in the concept of multistakeholder participation. Hence, "top managers of corporations" were expected "to interact with all their stakeholders [...]" (idem, p. 7), including a range of actors including policymakers, enterprise owners, suppliers, civil society and others to discuss corporate and public interests. Unlike other international financial organizations, the World Economic Forum is an institution that promotes corporate governance on global issues in defence of what the institution calls "stakeholder capitalism".

According to the organization, stakeholder capitalism is an economic project whose breadth makes it the solution to address the advances of globalization

4.0 and the global challenges of the 21st century (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2019). The model of “stakeholder capitalism” promoted by the World Economic Forum is described through its three main areas of action: (1) promoting international awareness and cooperation; (2) shaping mentalities and agendas; (3) leveraging collective action from combined leadership among business, state and civil society leaders (idem). Fougner (2008) assigns the World Economic Forum a vital role in agenda-setting and benchmarking. Therefore, the impact of the World Economic Forum's activities on promoting public-private international cooperation practices and formulating new agendas and corporate interaction with state leaders is evident. The organization moves more than USD 300 million annually with budgetary revenue only from its primary initiatives. It creates spaces where alliances, programs, and the exchange of information between committed international actors have forged corporate governance and stakeholders in direct capital investments (idem). These features permeate the institution's approach to the Global Gender Gap since the Index's Global Reports body generates integrated narratives of performance, status creation, competitiveness, and formulation of countries' gender identities.

To this end, the gender-related political agenda with the organization of the World Economic Forum dates back to the beginning of the 21st century. GGI is derived from the confluence of two scenarios: the Women Leaders Program initiative of 2001 and the Competitiveness Program, from which the first report on gender issues in the FEM, *Women's Empowerment: Measuring the Global Gender Gap* in 2005, would give rise to GGI in the quantification methodology used from 2006 to today (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2020b). To this organization, a nation's competitiveness is directly associated with how “the female talent is educated and used” to promote its development (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2014), so that gender issues are addressed as “business, and national competitiveness matters” through four primary forms of framing “gender equality” in its agenda-setting. According to Elias (2013), the four framings of gender at the WEF are the following:

[...] linking of gender equality to competitiveness; the representation of women as driving global economic recovery; the representation of women and girls as a good investment; and a diversity management frame that serves to legitimate rich Davos women as standard-bearers for (all) women's causes (idem, pp. 158-159).

Part of the literature signals that within international financial institutions - such as the World Economic Forum – prevails a trend in consolidating the structure of

global social governance arranged by the neoliberal discourse of globalization. In those contexts, gender equality becomes "an essential part of the neoliberal rationale of economic governance" (TRUE, 2014; PRÜGL and TRUE, 2015). Because of that, states - in an attempt to attract foreign investments and an excellent international image - seek to adapt to the adoption of several affirmative actions committed to regulating the financial performance purchase. In this sense, the World Economic Forum is a financial institution relevant to understanding how social issues are "capitalized" on its global corporate governance agenda (PRÜGL, 2015; TRUE, 2015; ELIAS, 2013). Similar to other financial and international organizations, this institution has adhered to the use of global indicators in its studies, monitoring reports, methodological technologies that have served to legitimize international agendas and initiatives in various fields, quoting the area of search for gender equality through the social indicator of the Global Ranking System on Gender Equality or Global Gender Gap.

### 3.1.1 Contextualizing methodological aspects on measurements conducted by the global gender gap index

The proliferation of statistics and quantification as international instruments of measurement and ranking can be traced back to the demand and supply for managerial and governance projects. The global industry of auditing technologies, such as the indicators and performance rankings, is at the heart of new relations between countries, markets and transnational organizations towards what some authors call the "new world order of audit" (SHORE and WRIGHT, 2015). Although the "culture boom of global indicators" took place from the 1980s onwards (DAVIES et al., 2018), when it comes to social issues of gender, those modern techniques of accountancy, performance measurement, and auditing of gender occurred at a different pace and relatively late in comparison to other areas. Many global indexes have been deployed to track spatial, temporal, and performance variations of gender equality, gender-based violence, and women's empowerment worldwide.

Along these lines, it is not surprising that the genealogy of the three global indicators produced in transnational contexts of governance gained traction at the end of the 20th century: GDI and its reformed version GEM, MDGs and Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) (POWELL, 2006). At the transnational level, the development of the Gender-related Development Index (GDI) and Gender Empowerment Measure (GEM) of the UNDP agency of the United Nations in 1995 was considered critical to

establishing a tradition of global monitoring. During the 2000s, much attention was paid to the gender indicators derived from the Millennium Development Goals, produced by the United Nations and the Global Gender Gap Index, developed by the World Economic Forum. The GGI differs from other indicators (Gender Development Index, Gender Empowerment Measure and Gender Inequality Index) in various aspects, from its production source to its data range. This indicator is funded, produced, and launched outside the United Nations Statistics Division (UNSD) scope. The Global Gender Gap or index of the global ranking system on gender equality is defined as a framework to examine the magnitude of gender disparities at the worldwide level by “providing a tool for cross-country comparison and prioritize the most effective policies needed to close gender gaps” (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2021, p. 5). Hence, the index seeks to promote global awareness of the gendered challenges and opportunities created within different countries, serving “as a basis for designing effective strategies to reduce gender inequality” (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2019, s/p). Within the index, the gender gaps are quantified through a dual mechanism: benchmarking across country comparisons and launching country profiles to provide an overview of their gendered environment (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2006, p. 3). The benchmarking process aims to “identify existing strengths and weaknesses” among countries, forming guides for policies from the nations best positioned at the index.

The index combines numerous socioeconomic, policy and cultural variables; hence, it is centred on the premise that gender inequality is the interaction and evaluation of those variables (UNCTAD, 2019). The index aims to measure “whether the gap between women and men in the chosen variables has declined”. It further evaluates it as decreasing the gender gap and increasing gender equality for a country’s performance (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2007). To this end, three elements are essential for the construction of the Global Gender Gap methodology: the Index measures gaps in access to resources and opportunities; it captures gaps through outputs; and finally, it ranks countries based on their proximity to achieving gender equality and not women’s empowerment (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2018). The Global Gender Gap Index works as a global ranking and a composite indicator concerning its characteristics. As a composite indicator, the index implies a multi-dimensional measurement of gender gaps and gender inequality by using an annual overall score (0 – 1), where 1 translates a state of parity between sexes, through a specific rationale for defining gender inequality.



The evolution of gender-based gaps is calculated among four dimensions or four sub-indexes (Economic participation and Opportunity, Educational Attainment, Health and Survival, and Political Empowerment), each sub-index is assigned a weight of 0.25 out of 1, and all of them track progress towards closing the gaps over time (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2021, p. 5). The four main dimensions (sub-indexes) are measured from 14 indicators, calculated as "reasons" between men's and women's data positions. That gives rise to a process of assigning weights of each dimension according to standard deviation; from this point on, the Global Gender Gap assumes values between 0 (inequality) and 1 (equality) (MELO, 2010, p. 2). Each sub-index builds its measurement of the gap between men and women in a given sector from the compilation of the so-called "database", which uses a form of data collection and interpretation that can be deconstructed into the categories in the worksheet above. The sub-index of Economic Participation and Opportunity analyzes the gap between men and women in participation, remuneration and advancement in access to economic opportunities (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2006). Hence, this sub-index makes use of four criteria: the participation gap, which considers the labour force participation rates; the remuneration gap, which comprises a ratio of estimated female-to-male earned income and the advancement gap, captured by the ratio of women to men among leadership roles and the ratio of women to men among professional workers (PEREZNIETO and MARCUS, 2015).

**Fig. 1 Economic and Participation Subindex' criteria and source of data collection:**

Subindex	Indicator	Source (for 2018 index)
<b>Economic participation and opportunity</b> [weight in GGGI score: 0.25]	Female labour force participation over male [weight in subindex score: 0.199]	International Labour Organization, ILOSTAT database, 2017 or latest available data
	Number of female legislators, senior officials, and managers over male [0.149]	
	Number of female professional and technical workers over male [0.121]	
	Wage for comparable work of women over men [0.210]	WEF Executive Opinion Survey (EOS), 2017-2018
	Estimated female earned income over male [0.221]	WEF calculations based on the UNDP methodology (refer to Human Development Report 2007/2008)

Source: Zahidi et al. (2018, pp. 5–6 apud WORSDALE and WRIGHT, 2020).

The Education sub-index aims to capture the gap between men and women in access to education at different levels, based on measurements of the ratios disaggregated by sex for enrollment in primary, secondary, and tertiary education and female-to-male literacy rate (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2018).

**Fig. 2 Educational Attainment Subindex' criteria and source of data collection:**

<b>Educational attainment</b> [0.25]	Female literacy rate over male [0.191]	United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization Institute for Statistics, <i>Education indicators</i> , database, 2017 or latest available data
	Female primary-level education enrolment over male [0.459]	
	Female secondary enrolment over male [0.230]	
	Female tertiary enrolment over male [0.121]	

Source: Zahidi et al. (2018, pp. 5–6 apud WORSDALE and WRIGHT, 2020).

The health and survival subindex seek to assess the differences between women's and men's health, including two variables: the calculation of the sex ratio at birth to capture the phenomenon of “missing women”; and the variable of healthy life expectancy of men and women.

**Fig. 3 Health and Survival Subindex' criteria and source of data collection:**

<b>Health and survival</b> [0.25]	Female healthy life expectancy over male [0.307]	United Nations Population Division, <i>World Population Prospects</i> , 2017 or latest available data
	Sex ratio at birth (female over male) [0.693]	World Health Organization, <i>Global Health Observatory</i> database, 2016 or latest available data

Source: Zahidi et al. (2018, pp. 5–6 apud WORSDALE and WRIGHT, 2020).

On the other hand, the subindex of political empowerment seeks to measure the difference between men and women at the country's political decision-making level (idem).

**Fig. 4 Political Empowerment Subindex' criteria and source of data collection:**

<b>Political empowerment</b> [0.25]	Number of women in parliament over men [0.310]	Inter-Parliamentary Union, <i>Women in National Parliaments</i> , reflecting elections/appointments up to October 2018
	Number of women at ministerial level over men [0.247]	Inter-Parliamentary Union, <i>Women in Politics: 2017</i> , reflecting appointments up to January 2017
	Number of years of female head of state in the last fifty years over number of years of male head of state [0.443]	WEF calculations, reflecting situation as of 30 June 2018

Source: Zahidi et al. (2018, pp. 5–6 apud WORSDALE and WRIGHT, 2020).

**Fig. 5 Sources of data collection in the GGI:**

Type of sub-index	Sources of data collection
Economic participation and Opportunity	International Labour Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT, Modelled Estimates; World Economic Forum, Executive Opinion Survey (EOS) 2018–2019 or latest available;
Educational Attainment	UNESCO, UIS Education Statistics Data portal. 2017 or most recent available; when not available, data is sourced from United Nations Development Programme, Human Development Reports 2009, most recent year available between 1997 and 2007;
Health and Survival	United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, World Population Prospects: The 2019 Revision, Estimates for 2015–2020; World Health Organization (WHO), Global Health Observatory database, 2016 or most recent year available
Political Empowerment	Inter-Parliamentary Union, situation as of 1 September 2019; World Economic Forum calculations, taking into account the period 11 July 1970–1 July 2019

Source: Adapted from World Economic Forum (2019, p. 45-46).

Another pattern observed through the GGI's reports consists of its main sources of data collection. For the subindex Economic Participation and Opportunity, the data is said to be collected from modelled estimates provided by the International Labor Organization (ILO) and the Executive Opinion Survey related to the members of the World Economic Forum. Following a similar pattern, the subindex of Political Empowerment uses data from one international organization – Inter-Parliamentary Union and World Economic Forum's calculations. On the other hand, for the Educational Attainment and Health and Survival sub-indexes, most of its data collection relies on Reports and sources from UN's agencies. For the first, UNESCO – UIS Education Statistics and Human Development Reports from UNDP are the primary sources, while for Health and Survival some of the sources include the Department of

Economic and Social Affairs from the UN, World Health Organization and Global Health Observatory database.

### 3.1.2 Benchmarking and tracking gender gaps worldwide according to the global gender gap index reports (2006 – 2019): global trends and rankings

The Global Gender Gap Index has monitored and reported on gender trends in 153 countries around the globe, suggesting that since its inception, no country has been able to fully achieve gender parity, with 80% of gender parity being the closest-ever achieved by the “Top 10 best performances of countries” (FORUM ECONÔMICO MUNDIAL, 2019). Through its analysis, the index argues for the strong correlation between a country’s gender gap and its economic performance and openly encourages countries to improve their performances by setting new agendas for the inclusion of female labour participation into action through public-private cooperation as a critical strategy to close gender gaps across different dimensions. Most importantly, “the report highlights the message to policy-makers that countries that want to remain competitive and inclusive will need to make gender equality a critical part of their nation’s human capital development” (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2020, p. 33). Global Gender Gap Report (2020b) estimates that the global gender gap between sexes accounts for an overall percentage of 31% nowadays. This means that 69% of full parity was reached by the global average of countries evaluated. In terms of years, the global gender gap will be “closed” in 99.5 years, with the area of Economic Participation and Opportunity being one of the biggest bottlenecks in inequality between sexes, as it evolves at a slower pace than other sectors measured, on an overall forecast of reaching gender parity in approximately 257 years.

According to GGI’s evaluation, “all the top five countries have closed at least 80% of their gaps”. About the experiences classified in the “Top 10 best performances of countries” by the ranking of the index for 2019, the report assigns Iceland the title of the best performer in gender equality in the world, with a score: of 0.877 out of 1, positioned in first place for the 11th edition in a row. Norway, then, ranks second (score: 0.842 out of 1), followed by Finland in third place (score: 0.832 out of 1), Sweden in fourth (score: 0.820 out of 1), Nicaragua in fifth (score: 0.804 out of 1), New Zealand in sixth (score: 0.799 out of 1), Ireland in seventh (score: 0.798 of 1), Spain in eighth (0.795 of 1), Rwanda in ninth (Score: 0.791) and Germany (0.787) (idem, p. 9).

**Fig. 6 - Mapping of the overall GGI'S ranking across time (2006 – 2019)**

	2006	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011		
1 <sup>st</sup>	Sweden	Sweden	Norway	Iceland	Iceland	Iceland		
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Norway	Norway	Finland	Finland	Norway	Norway		
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Finland	Finland	Sweden	Norway	Finland	Finland	<b>Nicaragua's position</b>	
4 <sup>th</sup>	Iceland	Iceland	Iceland	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	2006	62 <sup>nd</sup>
5 <sup>th</sup>	Germany	NZ	NZ	NZ	NZ	Ireland	2007	90 <sup>th</sup>
6 <sup>th</sup>	Philippines	Philippines	Philippines	South Africa	Ireland	NZ	2008	71 <sup>st</sup>
7 <sup>th</sup>	NZ	Germany	Denmark	Denmark	Denmark	Denmark	2009	49 <sup>th</sup>
8 <sup>th</sup>	Denmark	Denmark	Ireland	Ireland	Lesoto	Philippines	2010	30 <sup>th</sup>
9 <sup>th</sup>	UK	Ireland	Netherlands	Philippines	Philippines	Lesoto	2011	27 <sup>th</sup>
10 <sup>th</sup>	Ireland	Spain	Latvia	Lesoto	Switzerland	Switzerland	2015	12 <sup>th</sup>
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
1 <sup>st</sup>	Iceland	Iceland	Iceland	Iceland	Iceland	Iceland	Iceland	Iceland
2 <sup>nd</sup>	Finland	Finland	Finland	Norway	Finland	Norway	Norway	Norway
3 <sup>rd</sup>	Norway	Norway	Norway	Finland	Norway	Finland	Finland	Finland
4 <sup>th</sup>	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	Sweden	Rwanda	Sweden	Sweden
5 <sup>th</sup>	Ireland	Philippines	Denmark	Ireland	Rwanda	Sweden	<b>Nicaragua</b>	<b>Nicaragua</b>
6 <sup>th</sup>	NZ	Ireland	<b>Nicaragua</b>	Rwanda	Ireland	<b>Nicaragua</b>	Rwanda	NZ
7 <sup>th</sup>	Denmark	NZ	Rwanda	Philippines	Philippines	Slovenia	NZ	Ireland
8 <sup>th</sup>	Philippines	Denmark	Ireland	Switzerland	Slovenia	Ireland	Philippines	Spain
9 <sup>th</sup>	<b>Nicaragua</b>	Switzerland	Philippines	Slovenia	NZ	NZ	Ireland	Rwanda
10 <sup>th</sup>	Switzerland	<b>Nicaragua</b>	Belgium	NZ	<b>Nicaragua</b>	Philippines	Namibia	Germany

Source: Elaborated by the author based on Global Gender Gap Reports (2006 – 2019).

The report assigns Iceland the title of the world's best performer in gender equality. Unsurprisingly, according to the figure above, Iceland has been accompanied by Nordic countries in the “Top 10” since the GGI’s first report in 2019, including Sweden, Norway, Finland and Denmark. Also, there seems to be a predominance of European Countries as best performers, such as Germany, Ireland, and more occasionally, UK, Spain, Netherlands, Switzerland and Belgium. However, the index also consistently features non-European performers countries which have taken the spotlight: the Philippines, New Zealand, and Nicaragua after 2012, followed by Rwanda in 2015. Those trends seem encouraging as an overall ranking features countries from different regions. Still, the trends measured by sub-indexes are variable within an individual country’s performance, showing the different and sectorial challenges those countries may face in gender issues.

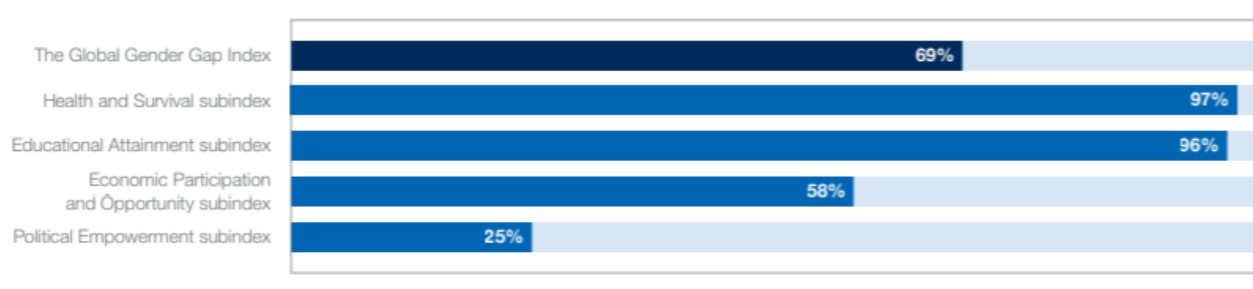
In the trends measured by the sub-indexes (economic participation and opportunity; education; health and survival; and political empowerment), global gender gaps vary and shape different scenarios. The minor gender gaps measured in the performance of the regions are education, with a global average of 0.957 (0-1) and health and survival, with an overall mean of 0.958 (0-1). According to this trend on Education Attainment and Health and Survival sub-indexes, 96.1% and 97% of the

global gender gap have already been closed. The advanced stage of Education Attainment worldwide reveals that at least thirty-five countries have already achieved full parity. Regarding the GGI's ranking, twenty-six countries<sup>20</sup> occupy the first position of the best performer in Education Attainment. Among them are countries representative of all regions, including our subject of study – Nicaragua. Nevertheless, eight countries did not reach the average on closing their gender gaps at this index: Togo (77.8%); Angola (75.9%); Mali (75.7%); Benin (73.3%); Yemen (71.7%); Guinea (68.0%); Congo, Democratic Rep. (65.8%); Chad (58.9%) (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2020, p. 10-12).

In addition, the wider gender gaps are present within the indexes of Economic Participation and Opportunity (0.582) and Political Empowerment (0.241), “where only 24.7% of the gap has been closed to date, and on Economic Participation and Opportunity, where 58.8%” (idem, p. 10).

**Fig. 7 – The stage of global gender gap worldwide**

Percentage of the gender gap closed to date, 2020



Source: Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2020, p. 10).

In the case of Political Empowerment, the index points out that Iceland represents a successful case, where the presence of women across its political apparatus is four times higher than the global average. Besides that, Iceland's position of 70% of Political Empowerment is followed by Norway, Nicaragua, Rwanda, and Finland. Moreover, Iceland's closed gaps contrast with 32 countries where women are underrepresented across parliaments and ministries and Papua New Guinea and Vanuatu, where women do not occupy political positions. In its analysis by region, the Index predicts that Western Europe's global gender gaps will close in 54 years (2019 overall score: 0.767), 71.5 years for South Asia (2019 overall score: 0.661), 95 years for

<sup>20</sup> Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Belgium, Botswana, Canada, Colombia, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Honduras, Israel, Jamaica, Latvia, Lesotho, Luxembourg, Maldives, Malta, Netherlands, New Zealand, Nicaragua, Russian Federation, Slovak Republic.

Sub-Saharan Africa (overall score in 2019: 0.680), 107 years for Eastern Europe and Central Asia (overall score in 2019: 0.715), 140 years for the Middle East and North Africa (overall score in 2019: 0.611), 151 years for North America (2019 score: 0.729), 163 years for the Pacific and part of Asia (2019 score: 0.685) (idem, p. 22).

**Fig. 8 - Performance by region on the Global Gender Gap Index and sub-indexes:**

	Overall Index	Subindexes			
		Economic Participation and Opportunity	Educational Attainment	Health and Survival	Political Empowerment
Western Europe	0.767	0.693	0.993	0.972	0.409
North America	0.729	0.756	1.000	0.975	0.184
Latin American and the Caribbean	0.721	0.642	0.996	0.979	0.269
Eastern Europe and Central Asia	0.715	0.732	0.998	0.979	0.150
East Asia and the Pacific	0.685	0.663	0.976	0.943	0.159
Sub-Saharan Africa	0.680	0.666	0.872	0.972	0.211
South Asia	0.661	0.365	0.943	0.947	0.387
Middle East and North Africa	0.611	0.425	0.950	0.969	0.102
<b>Global average</b>	<b>0.685</b>	<b>0.582</b>	<b>0.957</b>	<b>0.958</b>	<b>0.241</b>

Source: Global Gender Gap Report (2020b, p. 22).

Moreover, the report emphasizes the case of Latin America and the Caribbean (general score in 2019: 0.721) as the second most promising trend on the planet, with estimates of closing gender gaps in 59 years, as a result of the accelerated speed of performance in some countries in the region” (FÓRUM ECONOMICO MUNDIAL, 2020b, p. 6). It is inevitable not to consider the centrality of its top 5 best performers: Nicaragua (0.804); Costa Rica (0.782); Colombia (0.758); Trinidad and Tobago (0.756), and Mexico (0.754), as shown in the fig above. More than a continental leader, GGI describes Nicaragua’s case’s importance in its leadership in gender parity, as the country has closed 80.4% of its gender gaps and ranks 5<sup>th</sup> globally.

Much was said about the methodological stands on the index and its projected trends for gender equality across the globe. Nevertheless, as we navigate contextualizing GGI’s glimpses of countries’ global and national performances in gender equality, we move closer to the most significant trends and scenarios evaluated by the index concerning Nicaragua. In the earlier paragraphs, GGI’s reports have shown Nicaragua’s privileged position as one of the best performers globally, alongside countries such as Iceland, Finland, Sweden, and New Zealand. However, the series of reports published by WEF demonstrate that Nicaragua’s current leadership is a part of a

much bigger trajectory within the ranking and its domestic socio-political contexts.

### 3.2. “ANTI-GENDER COUNTRY” vs “MOST-GENDER EQUAL COUNTRY”: NICARAGUA’S PERCEIVED LOCAL AND GLOBAL “EXPERIENCE” OF GENDER EQUALITY

In this topic, I intend to explore Nicaragua’s perceived local and global experiences of gender equality. Those two experiences seem to clash when put in the same context and inform rather opposite national gender projects in Nicaragua. At the local level and based on the literature, Nicaragua is considered an “anti-gender country”, with one of the harsher politics of gender in the world. Meanwhile, at the global level, the Global Gender Gap Index provide us with an entirely different narrative of gender equality, one that distinguishes Nicaragua as a world leader in gender equality, whose performance has been measured and ranked during the whole period of Ortega’s administration. During its first part, I provide an overview of Nicaragua’s history and some of its most remarkable events in gender politics across time during the Somoza Era, Sandinista Revolution and Postsandinista revolution, hoping to contextualize historical trends of “gender politics” in the country that could help us understand the Ortega’s government attitudes towards gender equality and women’s rights nowadays.

To address Nicaragua’s local experience with gender equality, I access the features of the “gender project” pursuit by Ortega’s administration in Nicaragua: from his first mandate to the pre- covid 19 pandemic (2006 – 2019), given that this is the same period covered by the Global Gender Gap Index. Those features include: (i) women’s social and economic status, (ii) women’s reproductive rights, health, and survival against gender-based violence, and (iii) women’s political empowerment. Finally, to clarify where Nicaragua stands in its global performance, I discuss the assessments of Nicaragua’s global leadership in gender equity as it has been presented by the Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019), aiming to expose its most significant achievements, shortcuts and political challenges identified by the index. The main criteria for gender equality measured within countries by the GGI are related to four domains of social life: (i) economic participation and opportunity between sexes; (ii) health and survival; (iii) political empowerment and (iv) educational attainment.

#### 3.2.1 An overview of Nicaragua’s history and gender politics across time



To understand the contemporary politics of gender in Nicaragua in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, one must look back at some of the historical components that transformed Nicaragua into a special case for analyzing gender inequality locally and measured at the global level. In developing an accurate picture of Nicaragua's gender politics, we follow Ray and Korteweg's (1999, p. 53) classical piece to emphasize the historical, specific and local political forces<sup>21</sup> as creators of the "political opportunity structure" for the change of gender politics and women's status and agency in a certain region. Because of that, our focus here will be mainly on exposing the documented effects of "national gender projects" in Nicaragua regarding the regulation of gender roles and gender inequity, the arrival of controversial gender laws through conservative means and the precarious status of Nicaraguan women and feminist NGOs who do not support Ortega's administration.

Thus, to understand Nicaragua's gender politics practised by Ortega's government (2006 – nowadays), I call attention to the changes and broader legislative reforms that regulate gender relations or, more specifically, target women's rights under his government (2006 – nowadays). Nevertheless, those legal reforms cannot be understood as a "gender project" isolated from the political legacies of the Somocista era, Sandinista Revolution and postsandinista period within women's movements (Neumann, 2014). Because the term 'gender politics' is somewhat vague, or rather less useful for a comparative understanding of the collective gender politics pursuit by the Nicaraguan state, I claim that the concept of gender projects<sup>22</sup> (as of Connell, 2002) is particularly helpful to define the "gender politics" of states in comparative-informed studies, as shown by Ferree's book (2012).

Gender politics in political institutions can be understood in terms of collective gender projects (Connell, 2002). Gender projects exist when social actors demonstrate 'conscious or unconscious commitment to particular organizations of gender relations' and become political when those gender projects act to 'changing or preserving a specific gender order or regime', which means that states might carry

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<sup>21</sup> The authors classify changes in regime types (democratization, anti-colonial and nationalist struggles, socialist, and religious/fundamentalist movements) and state crises as potential preconditions to raise, radicalize and mobilize women's interests in the political realm and public sphere.

<sup>22</sup> The concept 'gender projects' serves us to advance two questions in gender studies: "How has the state influenced the emergence, growth, and decline of women's advocacy? To what extent and why have women's movements sought both to challenge the state and to work within it?" (Basu).

(specific) gender projects just as much as women's social movements. One of how states vary beyond regime-type is in their gender projects – which comprise their commitment to gender politics oriented towards change or maintenance of gender regimes. States – under their government's mandates - pursue varying national gender projects through their policies, changes in legislation and the creation (or equipment) of public institutions that sometimes regulate women's agency, gender relations, and gender identities up to the point of shaping women's collective agency and activism

Like most Latin American countries, Nicaragua's history is marked by the effects of European (Iberian) colonialism and modern dependent capitalism, typical of an externally oriented economy based on the trade of agricultural goods. With a population primarily stratified in income and social class, few privileged groups have benefited from the clash between its precarious economic model and the political exploitation from groups of interest, whether domestic or international. Though it has a small population, it has been the object of attention and direct intervention of hegemonic countries, especially the U.S., due to its strategic position on interoceanic routes for commerce (WALKER and WADE, 2017). Its history<sup>23</sup> can be divided into the (a) colonial period (1502 – 1583); (b) the initial Republican period (1821 – 1838), a period where Nicaragua faced its partial independence to full independence; (c) the republican period of armed confrontation between bourgeois groups (1953 – 1907), mainly conservative versus liberals; (d) neocolonial period (under the U.S. occupation, 1907 – 1933); (e) New republican period (1933 – 1936); (f) the Somoza era (1936 – 1979); (g) revolutionary period (1979 – 1990); (h) the neoliberal years (1990-2006). Nevertheless, in this dissertation, I will focus on the events from the Somoza era, sandinist revolution and postsandinist period to expose the gendered dynamics relevant to understanding contemporary Nicaragua.

By the 1920s, Nicaragua<sup>24</sup> was ruled by an autocratic conservative regime supported by the U.S. government, its marine military, and its military National Guard. During this period, popular guerrillas led by revolutionaries such as Augusto

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<sup>23</sup> Even though Nicaragua became an independent nation from colonial rules during the 19th century, the following century brought to the newly recognized country civil and domestic conflicts in close association with the U.S. interventions in the region, in what came to be known as the US-led "Banana Wars" in Central America (JOWETT, 2018, p. 4). Two characteristics of the period are the military influence of the U.S. (from 1912 to 1925 and from 1926 to 1933), under its first and second occupation on the ground and its alliance with land-owning oligarchies pro-US governments.

<sup>24</sup> The authoritarian regime faced the opposition of the Nicaraguan liberals and poorly equipped Nicaraguan liberal guerrillas.

César Sandino fought against the pro-American governments and U.S. forces. This context was instrumental in Nicaragua's history until nowadays because it described a subservient period for Nicaragua politics, given that the two most affluent political groups in the country - conservatives and liberals – accepted a peace treaty U.S.-sponsored, which marked its pro-American brand across different governs during the U.S. occupation (WALKER and WADE, 2017, p. 24 – 29). The conditions<sup>25</sup> fostered during this period led to the formation of the Somoza dictatorship and decades later shaped a revolutionary tradition in Nicaragua – Sandinista Revolution - that would overthrow the Somoza government<sup>26</sup> in the 1979s. The Somoza era<sup>27</sup> was widely recognized for its corruption and brutality against the population at the hands of the men from the National Guard, officially began in 1933 and went on until 1979 in Nicaragua (RENZI and KRUIJT, 1997, p. 18 – 20). Despite the ongoing process of modernization in the country, *there was a limited number of opportunities for women in employment, education, and civic activity.* Nicaraguan women's political and social status were understood to be subordinate to Nicaraguan men, with gender roles for Nicaraguan women defined around motherhood, domestic labour, and marriage. Before Somoza's regime, one could argue that no political projects in Nicaragua were committed to the incorporation of women in the public space beyond their participation in traditional

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<sup>25</sup> During the Somoza Era, at the domestic level, Nicaragua's population was subjected to extreme social stratification, with 5% of the population controlling 43% of the national wealth, poverty, violence in the hands of the armed men from the National Guard of Nicaragua, economic and political corruption from the Somoza Family and no less brutal the effects of the U.S. imperialism in the region. On that note, the local and structural problems faced by Nicaraguans included rates of 51% of illiteracy within the population above seven years of age; high levels of food and water insecurity, with only 51% of the population accessing potable water in urban areas e less than 5% in rural regions; high rates of child mortality, with estimates that 120 children of each 1000 would die before one year of age; and lastly, the land concentration was extreme, given that 2% of companies owned 48% of the fertile lands in the country (RENZI and KRUIJT, 1997, p. 18 – 20).

<sup>26</sup> How did the Somoza dictatorship era diverge from other authoritarian regimes in Nicaragua? In Walker and Wade's interpretation, the Somoza era was a unique authoritarian regime in Latin American Politics due to its extensive duration (42.5 years) and dynastic character (p. 33), where the political power of the Somoza family was distributed over three members – who ought to govern Nicaragua with iron hands over the years.

<sup>27</sup> The founder, Anastasio Somoza García, was an educated man who entered politics into the Liberal Party, but nevertheless was always in good terms with the U.S. military forces and, years later, had strong ties with the formation of the National Gard. During the period where popular guerrillas fought against the pro-American governments and U.S. forces, His influence into the National Gard

gender roles (SAÉZ, 2007, p. 118). This condition would change to some extent during Somoza's regime and the Sandinista revolution. Though women's position in Nicaragua's society was marginalized, women's and the feminist Nicaraguan movements were active and diverse. Since the 18<sup>th</sup> century, Nicaraguan women's movements have shared similar goals to those elsewhere, focusing on liberal ideals of women's suffrage and education rights. During the Somoza Era of dictatorship, however, women's liberal goals of suffrage and education rights would be co-opted by the state, and feminist movements would be reduced to political outsiders and enemies of the regime. Catholic urban middle-class women and conservative anti-feminist women's movements (later known as Somocista women's movements) were encouraged to be part of public life by expressing their political loyalty to the Somocista state and liberal party so that women's advocacy occurred in the public machinery, where women's access to employment took place based on state clientelism. The Somocista gender project was conservative, religious, predominantly urban and, more importantly, classed based.

In the 1970s, the combination results of imperialism, the economic model of "modernization from above", state violence and exploitation during the Somocista dictatorship gave rise to "new" political actors within the Nicaragua society: guerrillas, unions, and *women* (HERNANDEZ, 2010, p. 161). However, FSLN was founded in the 1960s with rural roots and ideological alignments under anti-imperialist values, the growth of politico-military organizations such as guerrillas from decades before strengthening the military strategies of FSLN during the revolutionary period. During the revolution, the FLSN adopted a similar logic of political loyalty and undermining feminism under a different slogan. Kampwirth points out that the 'idealized Sandinista woman was a mother' and that young women were often seen as part of a 'nursing guerilla', the latter described as the intertwining of motherhood and revolutionary war: 'young woman with a rifle over her shoulder [...] while holding an infant' (2014, p. 4). Instead, it urged women to be part of the guerrilla and the revolution fight against the Somoza dictatorship. As a result, the Sandinista revolution created a political opportunity for women's agency from diverse classes and backgrounds to be expanded into public and political life, even though they were to be recognized mainly as "mothers, daughters and comrades" of the revolution.

**Fig. 9 Visual culture about sandinist women in Nicaragua**



Source: Orlando Valenzuela's *Miliciana de Waswalito* (1984) apud *Femininity in Propaganda* (2011); *Hispanicla* (2017, sp).

In 1969, FSLN's public discourses about women were keen on including gender issues, specifically those related to motherhood and women's political participation in public life, as part of the revolutionary struggle in Nicaragua, as can be noticed in the following excerpt:

[...] *Pay special attention to the mother and child, eliminate prostitution, put an end to the system of servitude that women suffer, especially abandoned mothers, establish equal 78 rights for children born out of wedlock, establish child-care centers, mandate a two-month maternity leave for working women, and raise women's political, cultural, and vocational levels through their participation in the revolutionary process*" (FSLN 1987, quoted in Saint-Germain and Chavez Metoyer 2008)

Differently from the gender project of the Somoza dictatorship that was focused on urban and middle-class somocista women, the FLSN was able to expand women's agency from different classes and both rural and urban settings into the public and political life of Nicaragua. As an example of that, it is the origin of the Women's Association for the National Problematic (AMPRONAC) in the 1970s as a development of the National March of Mourning women in 1944 – known as a famous protest of women against the repression and murder of undergraduate students by the Somoza dictatorship. This organization was formed by women (middle-class women and from other social strata) that 'demanded better conditions of life and equality' and would later fight with the FSLN against the Somoza dictatorship (Zuniga and Viquez, p. 234). When Sandinistas seized power in Nicaragua, the aftermath of the Nicaraguan revolution produced significant transformations in gender relations, specifically for women. Hellmund, for example, mentions that changes promoted by the FSLN could be named politics of "gender" (p. 50), including transformations in gender and family relations,

massive incorporation of Nicaraguan women into the primary and secondary education and labour markets and more broadly, women acquisition of legal rights in family and marriage law. According to Miskha (2019, p. 78), the FSLN promoted a party-specific quota of 30% of women in its candidate's lists, which 'set a precedent for women's representation and inclusion in the country. As for changes related to the achievement of parity in family law, Zuniga and Víquez (2014, p. 234) contend that during the 1980s, due to the strong pressure of Sandinista women, the FSLN approved the "Ley de Alimentos" – a solid reference for legal enforcement of the obligations for fathers to pay for *pension alimenticia*, including for children conceived outside civil marriage. In other words, during the postrevolutionary period in Nicaragua, changes for gender parity in family law, recognition of women's participation in unions and facilitation of therapeutic abortion was a period marked by a conflict of interests between feminists and the Nicaraguan state: women's movements remained at the margins. They were seen as potential enemies of nationalist ideals. Their goals gained traction under transnational feminist pressure and international law.

In issues about women's sexual and reproductive rights, though, the FLSN was explicitly against the decriminalization of abortion, one of the main goals of the feminist women's movements in the second wave in Nicaragua. Many leaders of the FSLN – including Daniel Ortega and Bayado Arce - believed the "revolution needed to replace the dead and that the revolutionary task of women was to give birth and give birth" (Zpuniga and Viquéz, 2014, p. 237). Due to extensive transnational women's activism, legislation against gender-based violence was first promulgated in 1996 (Law 230). Despite that, the FSLN did not remain in power for long. Hellmund (2013, p. 90) explains: 'many limitations and failures of the revolution were related to the war and counterrevolutionary campaign promoted by groups opposed to the regime and the US'. From 1990s to 2006, Nicaragua faced three presidents - Violeta Barrios de Chamorro, Arnoldo Alemán, and Enrique Bolaños – who 'sought to reverse many of the changes of the revolution including its gender policies, though policies that in broad terms can be characterized as neoliberal' (KAMPWIRTH, 2014, p. 9). There is a clear connection between anti-feminist politics of gender and the coalitional power of religious actors: the catholic church, evangelical churches, the state and the Ministries of the Family, Education, and Health, as it will be shown in the following topics.

### 3.2.2 The "national gender project" pursued by Ortega's administration

in Nicaragua: from his first mandate to the pre- covid 19 pandemic (2006 – 2019)

To Nicaragua's government, ever since 2007, 'gender equality and empowerment of women have been a fundamental axis in its policy of development and fight against poverty based on a National Policy of Gender'. (NICARAGUA'S REPORT TO THE UNITED NATIONS, 2019, p. 8), in the form of laws, public policies and campaigns to *mitigate the global gender gap between women and men*. In this sense, according to the government, one of the pieces of evidence of this achievement in matters of gender is *in the global recognition of Nicaragua's global leadership by the Global Gender Gap Index from the World Economic Forum and in the world ranking of women's political participation* from the United Nations (idem, p. 10). Because of this emphasis between the country's achievements in gender equity and a national project for women's empowerment within Ortega's administration, I will discuss the extent to which the recognition of Nicaragua as a "gender paradise" makes sense at the domestic level, while taking into consideration law reforms, campaigns, and political discourses from 2006 to 2019. To that end, I will first give an overview of the political agenda and main projects that distinguish Ortega's administration from previous governments in Nicaragua.

My description starts at the events from 2006 in Nicaragua. Daniel Ortega won the elections in November 2006 and took power in early 2007. Though he is an old figure in the Sandinista revolution, the nature of its government (as of 2007 until nowadays) has differed in many ways from its previous Sandinista political mandate in the country. At that time, the local and global forces related to Nicaragua were intrinsically distinct from the first time he was president: coming from a period of neoliberal politics, in 2006, most of the Nicaraguan population (61.9%) was living in poverty (CEPAL, 2013, p. 7). Therefore, Ortega's electoral platform seemed committed to social welfare policy, and it was, at least in discourse, anti-neoliberal. His slogan "*Pueblo, Presidente!*" spoke volumes about its intention to address politics for the "people" – or more communitarian-based - as part of its government style. For us to understand the extent of obstacles to the status of women's health and survival in the country, it is crucial to recognize that Ortega's administration (2007 – nowadays) led a "third historical turn" in health care policy: with a new declared 'commitment to universal health care'<sup>28</sup>. This new attitude of the FSLN's party towards health care policy

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<sup>28</sup> In previous governments, specifically during the 1990s and early 2000s, Nicaragua faced an neoliberal health care structuring aligned with policy solutions advised by the World Bank.

translated to the removal of differentiated services and user fees in ‘all health ministry clinics and hospitals’, addressing large campaigns to bring awareness about the free character of health services in the country (Kowalchuk, 2018, p. 744). During its second mandate, Nicaragua’s state-sponsored public health, education and development strategies are marked by sociopolitical ideals of neoliberal agencies and, in practice, describe a series of projects that address individual responsibility over one’s health and the conditions of Nicaragua’s urban and rural environment (LA PRENSA NICARAGUENSE, 2022). According to vice-president Murillo’s description, in the “Live Clean, Live Healthy, Live Beautiful, Live Well [...] each one of us, men and women, undertake together a series of simple, easy, daily Actions, incorporating them into the Realization of Shared and Complementary Responsibility for the Country that we dream, the Country, Society, Community, Family, and Individual that we want to re-create for the Good. For the Better.” (ROSARIO-MURILLO, 2013).

Though many law reforms and initiatives were launched to ‘mitigate inequity and poverty’, as of 2015, for example, global reports of the United Nations point out that half of all children and adolescents in Nicaragua were living in poverty, with one of the highest rates of child labor and school drop out in the world (THE GUARDIAN, 2015). In matters of children’s health and survival, Nicaragua was also understood to have one of the highest rates of child and adolescent abuse in the world, with girls and women making up to 80% of the cases reported in the country (INTERNATIONAL AMNESTY, 2014). To address most matters of food insecurity and poverty, some of the social assistance-based programs promoted during Ortega’s term were the following: *Hambre Cero* (Zero Hunger), *Plan Techo* (installation of zinc roofs that stand up to tropical rains), *Usura Cero* (a micro-credit programme), *Merienda Escolar* (meals for schoolchildren), *Bono Productivo* (credit granted for the most part for poor women in rural areas), *Bono Solidario* (solidarity bonus for low-income workers), and *Casas para el Pueblo* (Houses for the People) (TOISSAND, 2022).

Despite Ortega’s political platform pointing out policy solutions against neoliberalism and more social welfare-oriented, part of its loans was based on bilateral funding provided by Venezuela- in practice, its government maintained close relations with the International Monetary Fund and other multilateral institutions (INTERAMERICAN DEVELOPMENT BANK<sup>29</sup>, 2010, p. 2). The social programs, for

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<sup>29</sup> Since 2007, Nicaragua’s macroeconomic policy has been aligned with the International Monetary



example, are said to be ‘fully compatible with the policies supported by the IMF and World Bank’. Part of this might be related to the fact the IMF lent Nicaragua 120 million dollars between 2007 and 2011 under several economic conditionalities<sup>30</sup>. Moreover, Ortega’s election alone did not represent ‘a general leftist turn among Nicaragua’s electorate’ in comparison to other leftist leaders since the president was elected with only 38% of the votes; instead, his victory is attributed to ‘a new electoral rule combined with the schism of the right-wing anti-Sandinista block—the Nicaraguan Liberal Alliance (ALN) [...], and the Constitutionalist Liberal Party (PLC)’. (CHAMORRO, 2009, p. 3). By 2006, Daniel Ortega’s novel “political pragmatism” (under the slogan *El pueblo presidente*) is an attempt to promote a “refoundational” agenda for Nicaragua, one that relies on gendered constructions and, more specifically, women’s rights. Unsurprisingly, Ortega’s political campaign for its second mate has opted for a national slogan that described Nicaragua as a country of “Family, Christianity, and Solidarity” (HEUMANN, 2011). In Rosario Murillo’s words, current vice-president of Nicaragua and Ortega’s wife: “Seguimos cambiando Nicaragua, para que sea más cristiana, socialista y solidaria, *lo cual implica retomar nuestras raíces y las prácticas del cristianismo, socialismo, solidaridad*”. In this sense, the national slogan promoted by Ortega’s administration is representative of ‘symbolic politics’ that will materialize shifts in public policy in matters of gender. By committing to the idea of revolutionary Nicaragua oriented by the ideological values of Catholicism and anti-feminism, Ortega’s political and discursive turn towards pragmatism directly influenced the reduction of women’s rights.

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Fund’s (IMF’s) Poverty Reduction and Growth Facility (now Extended Credit Facility, or ECF). The country’s National Plan for Human Development (PNDH), presented in 2008, frames the government’s vision to reduce inequality and poverty through an orthodox macroeconomic policy and an ambitious program of social expenditure and public investment. The structural and financial targets required to accomplish the country’s development agenda are set out in the Economic and Financial Program (PEF) (IBD, 2010, p. 2).

**Fig. 10. Nicaragua’s political propaganda: Cristiana, socialista, solidaria!**

<sup>30</sup> For more information see International Monetary Fund (2010, p. 2).



Source: Voa News<sup>31</sup> (2016, sp).

Thus, for us to understand state's gender politics in terms of gender projects and how states' gender projects can influence the emergency, decline or growth of women's rights, I call attention to changes and broader reforms in legislation that regulate gender relations or more specifically target women's rights in the case of Nicaragua under Daniel Ortega's government (2006 – nowadays). Those legal reforms and political actions cannot be understood as a "gender project" isolated from the political legacies of the Somocista era, Sandinista Revolution and postsandinista period within women's movements (Neumann, 2014). To address and describe the current gender project at play in Nicaragua Ortega's administration, I follow Friedman's (2009) criteria to evaluate gender politics in Latin American countries in terms of (a) women's socioeconomic status, (b) feminist state-society relations, (c) women's representation in decision-making positions, (d) legislation on violence against women, (e) reproductive and sexual rights.

Based on Neumann (2014), I argued in 2006, there was a shift in the national gender project promoted by Daniel Ortega in Nicaragua that further constrained women's movements and rights by subordinating women's conditions to the family and the nation. In this topic, I will discuss the social context of Nicaragua's population to understand gender issues' developments over time. I define the "gender project" of Orteguism based on its ideological discourse about women's status, bodies, gender relations and public policies that directly undermined women's rights in the nationalist project. More specifically, I will connect those discourses to how the government has dealt with both women's movements and women's activists who are political opposition and how Ortega has framed and reformed formal legislation on gender equality and gender-based violence against women (reproductive and sexual) rights. Finally, I will devote the last part of this chapter to addressing other social movements' goals and the

<sup>31</sup> See: <https://www.voanews.com/a/nicaragua-first-couple-leading-polls/3583230.html>.

human rights agenda.

### 3.2.2.1 *Women's reproductive rights and health as a gender project in Ortega's government*

According to the Observatory for Gender Equality in Latin America and Caribe, when it comes to laws for the support of women's reproductive rights and health, Nicaragua has one of the most rigid legal frameworks against reproductive rights in the region, alongside Chile, Honduras, El Salvador, and Dominican Republic and, at the same time, one of the most conservative legislations at the global level: in Nicaraguan abortion is prohibited in all cases, including medical emergencies, fetus malformation, cases of rape and pedophilia (CEPAL, 2013). Far from a marginal issue, reproductive rights in Nicaragua is a central subject when envisioning children, adolescent and women's health: after all, Nicaragua has one of the highest rates of adolescent fertility in Latin America and the Caribbean, with one of every four births in Nicaragua occurring to a teen girl, half unintended (Rojas et al. 2016:1), where rural young girls are especially at risk. This situation has aggravated since the Nicaraguan government paused collecting information about adolescent fertility rates in 2012. On that same note, Nicaragua holds one of the world's highest rates of sexual violence against girls and children. A report released in 2014 found that 82% of victims of sexual abuse in the country were children: 3,065 aged 0-13 and 1,897 aged 14-17. (AL JAZERA, 2014).

**Fig. 11 Protests against the high rates of child-sexual abuse in Nicaragua**



Source: Al Jazeera (2014, sp).

Therefore, the precarious relationship between the Nicaraguan state within women's reproductive rights and health cannot be re-traced without considering the role of Ortega's administration in conservative laws regarding women's rights, and

secondly, the instrumentalization of reproductive and the prohibition of abortion rights acted as part of Nicaragua's politics and the political campaign promoted by Daniel Ortega and his political party to get him into power again. In 2006, a month before Ortega's election, therapeutic abortion –facilitated by the Nicaraguan state since 1870 - was criminalized, surprisingly 'thanks to the votes of the party of the revolution, the FSLN' (KAMPWIRTH, 2014, p. 11). The bill was signed 'in the presence of Catholic and Evangelical church leaders' and removed 'an article from the country's penal code that permitted abortion for therapeutic reasons' (REPLOGUE, 2007, sa). Not only were religious groups advocating against abortion and pro-family values, but the full prohibition of abortion became 'an electoral platform defended by two main candidates' campaigns - Daniel Ortega y Eduardo Montealegre (AMNESTY USA, 2006, p. 12).

**Fig. 12 Religious advertising against abortion rights in Nicaragua**



Source: El Mundo (2006), Prensa Latina (2006).

Rosario Murillo, now vice-president of Nicaragua, wife of Daniel Ortega and campaign leader at that time, said in a public statement of the FLSN party (2006) the official position that the Nicaraguan state would adopt:

*El Frente, la Unidad Nicaragua Triunfa dice: "No al aborto, sí a la vida!" Nuestros candidatos, nuestros líderes, nuestros Alcaldes, nuestros Diputados...nuestra Bancada va a emitir un pronunciamiento el día de hoy. **Somos enfáticos: "No al aborto, sí a la vida! Sí a las creencias religiosas; sí a la fe; sí a la búsqueda de Dios, que es lo que nos fortalece todos los días para reemprender el camino** (MUJERES EM REDE, 2006, sa).*

Nicaragua's legislature voted to 'eliminate [...] therapeutic use of the procedure for victims of rape or incest or to save the health and life of the mother' (GETGEN, 2008, p. 58). Therefore, when an abortion ban outlawed women's access to

*therapeutical abortion*<sup>32</sup> in Nicaragua, that meant at least three things: any woman who was to experience pregnancy complications and risk medical conditions would not be able to access health care services for therapeutical abortion without risking being jailed; second, women's rates of mortality and precarity in access to essential health services would increase in the country, especially among the poorest groups; third, health care professionals would be under watch, forbidden to conduct basic procedures even in extreme cases, or, in case they attended women's in danger and performed the therapeutical abortion, they would be imprisoned and had its medical license revoked for five years in the country. *Despite the right to therapeutical abortion being first outlawed in 2006, right before the election - in 2007, during Ortega's government, the therapeutical abortion ban was further expanded with harsher penalties for women, girls who would seek medical care and any health care professionals that provide obstetrician procedures based on law 641 – that reformed the Penal Code* (NEUMANN, 2011). Numerous medical associations from Nicaragua<sup>33</sup> were explicitly against the legislation regarding the therapeutical abortion ban and harsher penalties for women, girls and health practitioners; for them, the criminalization of all forms of abortion could result in negative effects for women who seek treatment due to obstetric complications. In 2008, the International Amnesty conducted an international investigation about human rights abuse against women in matters of health survival and reproductive rights. Delegations from the organization visited the country in 2008 and were denied meetings with the Health Minister, Women's national commission, National Assembly and Institute for Nicaraguan women (INTERNATIONAL AMNESTY, 2009, p. 37). While interviewing Nicaraguan health practitioners in 2008, a Nicaraguan gynaecologist shared the following testimony about Ortega's new Penal Code about abortion penalization and incarceration for all who provide services and obstetric attention to patients under medical risk:

Yo siento una frustración muy grande [...] yo siento un atropello contra uno mismo como persona y como profesional [...]. **Ahora, lo peor del caso es que esto ha sido estimulado por un partido político en lo**

<sup>32</sup> For one to understand the implications of this bill, it is important to distinguish 'elective abortion' – voluntary termination of pregnancy, from '*therapeutical abortion*' – this second type of abortion, widely accepted by the medical community as a public health concern, *exemplifies the termination of pregnancy when there are medical complications that endanger women's health and survival*.

<sup>33</sup> La Sociedad Nicaragüense de Ginecología y Obstetricia; la Sociedad Nicaragüense de Medicina General; La Facultad de Medicina de las universidades de León y de Managua; La Asociación de Enfermeros/as de Nicaragua; Expertos en salud internacionales, incluida la Organización Panamericana de la Salud.

que yo he creído toda mi vida. No puedo entender por qué consideran necesario imponer sus puntos de vista sobre una emergencia obstétrica por sobre lo que yo considero el mejor tratamiento como médica experimentada y profesional.

Similarly, another doctor shared her concerns not only about incarceration but from the new legal problems of political repression brought by the law: “[...] Estoy preocupada de que *si hablo en contra de la ley, puedo ser acusada de apología de delito*. La verdad es que no sé hasta dónde podemos llegar en la lucha contra esta ley, o qué nos pasará en el futuro”. Meanwhile, some health professionals talk about the incoherence of the legal accusation of abortion: “Si alguien sufrió un aborto espontáneo, otra persona puede acusarla de que fue un aborto inducido y no hay forma real de demostrarlo”, others share concerns about the connections between the health of girls who are survivors of sexual violence and access to health care and obstetrician services: “¿Y de las niñas embarazadas producto de violación y que viven en la pobreza? No tienen más opción [legal] que parir.”

**Fig. 13. Amnesty International Campaign about Nicaragua’s full prohibition on reproductive rights**



Source: Amnesty International Campaign about Nicaragua (2008).

At the domestic level, there was strong advocacy of Nicaraguan women’s movements and international feminist networks against the abortion ban and its negative effects on girls and women. One of their highest achievements took place in 2010, when a transnational network of *women’s movements in Nicaragua reported the Nicaraguan state to the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights to protect the life of a Nicaraguan woman from the country’s Penal Code*: the CIHR granted precautionary



measures for the Nicaragua State to allow a pregnant woman who had cancer to receive proper medical treatment despite the treatment being risky for her pregnancy. At that time, the citizen –Amalia - was pregnant and diagnosed with cancer. Due to her fragile medical condition, she was advised to initiate sections of radiotherapy and chemotherapy. Still, she was nevertheless denied the service in Nicaraguan hospitals under the argument that the cancer treatment could cause her to have an abortion in the country. Because of Nicaragua's legal position against therapeutical abortion, hospitals and professionals refused to treat her for cancer *only to prevent a potential spontaneous abortion. The denial of medical assistance* deteriorated her health and left her vulnerable to the law enforcement of the Nicaraguan state (OAS, 2010).

### 3.2.2.2. Women's political (dis)empowerment during Ortega's administration: war against women's movements and feminist diaspora

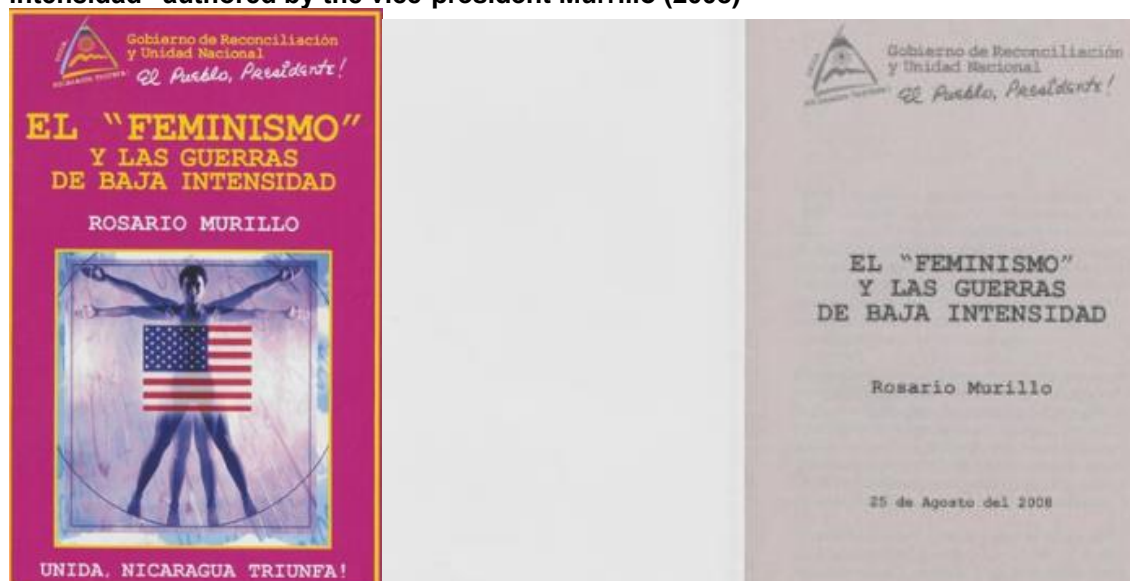
In 2006, when thinking about the extent of women's participation in Nicaragua politics 'Daniel Ortega promised that, if he were elected in 2006, half of his cabinet ministers would be women' (KAMPWIRTH, 2011, p. 18). Though numbers of women's formal participation in Nicaragua politics have significantly increased during his three presidential mandates, ever since 2007, one could argue there is stronger political repression of women's activists, women's movements and NGOs considered opposed to the government than in previous periods. Contrary to the direction of his promises, women's integration in non-electoral forms of politics is far from ideal. Since his first year as president, women's movements for human rights, feminists and activists would be framed as "imperialist enemies" of the Sandinista ideals and imprisoned years later, as shown in the following paragraphs. The relationship between Ortega's government and female activists can be described as "hostility". Ruptures between Daniel Ortega as a public figure, women's movements from the Sandinista party and feminists' activists date back to – at least – the 1990s: in 1998, Daniel Ortega's stepdaughter - Zoilámerica Murillo – accused him of rape and sexual abuse during her childhood. Zoilámerica Murrillo received majoritarian support from feminists, women's movements in the country and political leaders elsewhere in Latin America. Ortega's political immunity and the Nicaraguan judicial system dismissed her accusation, leading Zoilámerica Murrillo to report him in the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights formally. Furthermore, there are at least three other accusations of child abuse against the president (2006, 2007 and 2013) (EXPEDIENTE PÚBLICO, 2021, sa). Outside

Nicaragua, Ortega's image of a sexual perpetrator is widespread. Public protests from women have taken place not only in the streets of Nicaragua but in environments of foreign policy within the context of Paraguay, Honduras and El Salvador ministers of women's affairs:

*Ortega's accusers are not limited to Nicaragua's small feminist organizations.* The minister of women's affairs in Paraguay's new left-wing government, Gloria Rubin, whipped up a media storm in August by calling Ortega a "rapist" and protesting his invitation to President Fernando Lugo's inauguration — an event Ortega eventually skipped to avoid the heat. A week later in Honduras, Selma Estrada, minister of the National Institute of Women, resigned her government post in protest over the official invitation of Ortega to Tegucigalpa. And in El Salvador, feminist leaders are asking their government to declare Ortega persona non grata before he's scheduled to attend a presidential summit there at the end of the month.

More surprisingly, the Nicaraguan state has released an official position about "feminism and feminist social movements in the country": in 2008, for example, the government of Nicaragua released a small book written by vice-president Rosario Murillo titled *"The connection between feminism and low-intensity wars"*, where the vice-president frames all Nicaraguan feminist movements and activists as "imperialist" enemies from the Nicaragua revolutionary state, and argues that feminists should be "defeated" during Ortega's administration with "politics and faith".

**Fig. 14** Cover of the Nicaraguan government-sponsored book: "El feminismo y las guerras de baixa intensidad" authored by the vice-president Murrillo (2008)





Source: Princeton's Digital Archive of Latin American and Caribbean Ephemera (2008).

According to vice-president Rosario Murrillo's description in the book, "[...] *feminism serves to the model of neo-colonization, with a key role as a strategy to deteriorate revolutionary projects in Nicaragua*". Furthermore, she stresses: "[...] *This feminism is rendered to the boots of the empire*. It is in the hands of women who do not live as women, who do not know the feminine soul, individual or collective". Finally, in the vice-president's evaluation: "Nicaragua wants work and peace, and *because of that we [\*Ortega's government] will answer to this cultural occupation with politics. We will fight them with civilization, prayers, faith...*" (PRADO, 2010, p. 63). By committing the Nicaraguan public machinery of Ortega's government to the fight against the "cultural occupation of women's and feminist movements", Rosario Murrillo explicitly states women's political rights and feminist political agenda as targets of the national gender project in the country to "save Nicaragua from imperialism".

In 2008, the second year of Ortega's mandate, the Nicaraguan government (under the Ministry of the Interior) conducted legal proceedings against at least human rights and women's organizations of civil society: Communications Research Center (CINCO), Grupo Venancia de Matagalpa, and the Autonomous Women's Movement (MAM), accused of "money laundering and subversion of the "constitutional order", later instigating violence against staff from the Nicaraguan Center for Human Rights (CENIDH). The first two had their headquarters invaded for investigation, judicial search, and raising legal accusations against female activists and feminist NGOs. Furthermore, in November of that same year: 'the Managua police, on orders from Ortega, decided to block the passage of four hundred activists who intended to march on the traditional date of November 25", International Day for the Elimination of Violence against Women. Instead, the vice-president organized its procession in support of the FLSN government (RIBEIRO-GOMES, 2018, p. 24). Though only in 2018 the Nicaraguan government would demonstrate its most repressive state, declaring protests illegal in the country, in 2008, some of the first social movements and activists attacked during Ortega's administration were organizations for women's rights.

**Fig. 15. Online activism reporting women's arbitrary imprisonments in Nicaragua**



Source: Imn defensoras (2020).

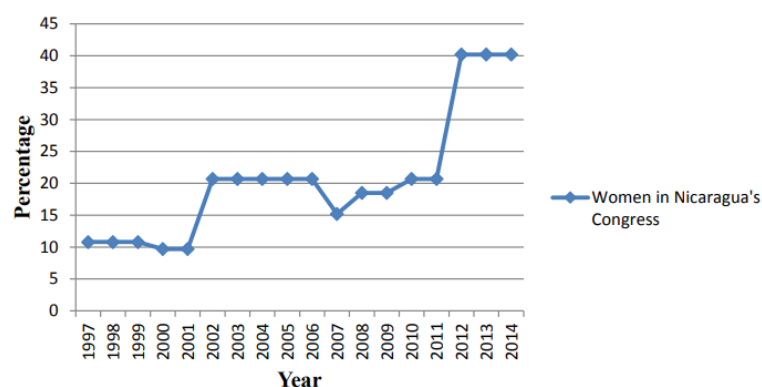
Dora Maria Telles<sup>34</sup> (2017 apud Ribeiro-Gomes, 2018), who is a former Sandinista guerrilla commander and leader of the Renewal Sandinista Movement comments that women's movements, NGOs focused on women's rights and feminist organizations have been targets of censorship, physical threatening, and persecution by the Nicaragua government:

Hasta 2007, el movimiento de mujeres y feminista disfrutaba de libertad de organización y movilización, había experimentado un crecimiento sostenido de organizaciones de mujeres en todo el país que se dedicaban a temas de salud, violencia, empoderamiento de mujeres, justicia, producción y economía, etcétera. **Desde la instalación de Ortega en el poder en 2007, el movimiento de mujeres ha sido perseguido, sus oficinas han sido allanadas por la policía, y desde Cancillería se han realizado gestiones para eliminar todo tipo de financiamiento y apoyo externo a los movimientos de mujeres. Ocho líderes del movimiento fueron acusadas penalmente y el proceso está aún abierto. Una radio de las mujeres de Jalapa, en el norte del país, fue robada e incautada por agentes policiales y del partido de Ortega, sin orden ni explicación alguna. Y así hay muchos casos [...]** Los movimientos de mujeres, a pesar de la adversidad de este régimen, continúan manteniendo su movilización [...] (emphasis mine).

In contrast to the political repression in Ortega's government towards women's movements and female activists observed at the local level, in matters of law, the National Assembly of Nicaragua passed and implemented laws for parity and women's political empowerment (Law 790) in the form of gender quotas of 50% (50 men, 50 women) during the year of 2012. But what are gender quotas, exactly? In this case, it describes the legislation for parity on ballots from each party, in which each party ought to have 50% male and 50% female candidates.

Percentage of Women in Nicaraguan Congress per Year

<sup>34</sup> In June of 2021, Dora Maria Telles was arbitrarily imprisoned accused of conspiracy by Ortega's government.

**Fig. 16. Women's representation in Nicaraguan congress**

Source: Inter Parliamentary Union (apud DIGMANN, 2015, p. 18)

Criminal investigations and arbitrary suspension of women's movements and human rights NGOs are just part of the political landscape in Nicaragua, given the explosion of protests marked by extrajudicial executions and repression that occurred in Nicaragua on 18th April 2018 and goes until current times. For Klein et al (2022), Ortega's government has committed a series of authoritarian violations during his government, such as the 'unconstitutional Ortega–Murillo's President–Vice President tandem, explicitly banned by the Constitution (Article 147) for reasons of consanguinity or affinity', 'the elimination of the legal status of some parties', unequal access to the media, 'with the President and close supporters owning seven radio and three TV stations and the exclusion of 28 opposition legislators from their seats' (p. 58). On that note, the formal attempt to regulate and criminalize social movements, protests and NGOs took place in 2018, as the National Assembly approved the Law on Money Laundering, Financing of Terrorism and Financing of the Proliferation of Weapons of Mass Destruction. After that, at least nine NGOs<sup>35</sup> had their legal status cancelled by the government in the year of 2018 (OAS, 2018, p. 1; CENTRO NICARAGUENSE DE DERECHOS HUMANOS, 2020), and 25 women's and indigenous movements had their legal status cancelled only in 2022 (FRANCE 24, 2022).

Though not gender-related, the public protests in Nicaragua began as a response to Ortega's reform in the social security law. They had further implications for women's activists and women's political rights to protest in the country. Records of assassinations and illegal arrest of protesters and activists against the Ortega's

<sup>35</sup> Centros de Información y Servicios de Asesoría y Salud (Cisas); Instituto de Estudios Estratégicos y Políticas Públicas (Ieepp); Centro Nicaragüense de los Derechos Humanos (Cenidh); Hagamos Democracia; Ipade; Popol Nah; Fundación del Río; Centro de Investigación de la Comunicación e Instituto de Liderazgo de las Segovias.

administration were marked by the presence of the Nicaraguan army and pro-Ortegaist paramilitary groups, a context in which several students protesting against the government at Polytechnic University in Managua were killed. During the uprising of the 2018 protests, the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights (IACHR) from the OAS released a report documenting the extent of repression, illegal, arbitrary arrests, violence towards protesters and *political harassment from the government against the Matagalpa Women's Collective (Colectivo de Mujeres de Matagalpa), the Venancia Group (Grupo Venancia) and Radio Vos*. The organization called on the state of Nicaragua to cease the criminalization of protests in the country. Not only were protesters and groups threatened, but the government attacked media organizations quite possibly to control the press coverage of protests. As an example, International Amnesty (2019) reported that in 2018 the Nicaraguan Telecommunications Institute (Instituto Nicaragüense de Telecomunicaciones, Telecor), the 100% News Channel, Channel 12, Channel 23 and Channel 51 were pulled off the air (p. 28).

Only in April 2018, 322 people were killed during the protests, and hundreds were detained under accusations of terrorism against the state, with court hearings held in private and concentrated in Managua (OAS PRESS RELEASE, 2018). For many imprisoned in the El Chipote detention centre, the OHCHR has found evidence that Nicaraguan men and women had suffered from sexual abuse, rape ("with rifles") by police guards and different forms of violence, not to mention threats of sexual abuse against detained activists are described as a daily practice (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2019).

**Fig. 17. Nicaraguan public protests against Ortega's government**





Source: New York Times (2018).

According to the UN Refugee agency, 62,000 citizens have fled Nicaragua following the months of the state killings of public protesters and imprisoning of activists. In OAS (2020) report, requests for Nicaraguan refugees in Costa Rica went from 87 (May) to 3377 in June 2019. For the refugee-seeking who OAS interviewed, the main reasons signalled to seek refuge in Costa Rica were to escape direct threats from the government (20% for men, 11% for women), escape threats over social media accounts (13% for men, 10% for women), financial debits (9% for men, 2% for women) and state repression (6% for men, 2% for women). Moreover, Nicaraguan citizens make up a refugee solicitant population considered above the global average in the context of Costa Rica. As for the features of those groups, refugee solicitants are mainly *(i) students who participated in the demonstrations and protests, (ii) human rights defenders and leaders of social and peasant movements (iii) people who supported those who participated in the protests through the provision of food, shelters security and medicines (iv) doctors; (v) journalists; and (vi) former soldiers and former police officers who refused to participate in repressive acts ordered by the Nicaraguan government.*

Currently, aside from the Nicaraguan refugee community present in Costa Rica, some authors report the occurrence of a Nicaraguan feminist diaspora in Spain<sup>36</sup>, characterized by Nicaraguan women living under political asylum in Spain due to the criminalization of women's movements and due to their participation, as part of feminist movements, in the protests of 2018. First of its kind, the Red Feminista por Nicaragua (Feminist network for Nicaragua) is one of the first transnational networks of activism for exiled female Nicaraguan leaders. Though there are reports of transnational networks of political exiled such as the Red de Estudiantes Nicaragüenses Exiliados en España and the platform SOS Nicaragua, the Red Feminista por Nicaragua was

<sup>36</sup> 5483 nicaragüenses have requested asylum to Spain only in 2019.

created to denounce the political repression of the Nicaraguan state under Ortega's administration to European countries. Moreover, it criticises the violent practices of Ortega's government against feminist and women activists to advocate for the liberation of women who are political prisoners in the country and violations of human rights.

### 3.2.2.3 Legislation for parity in women's economic participation and protection against gender-based violence in Ortega's government

At the global level, like most countries in the western world, Nicaragua has ratified most of the international legislation for women's rights, including the CEDAW – Convention about the Elimination of all forms of discrimination against women (1995), considered an international landmark in the United Nations system of gender governance. Nevertheless, according to a UN Women report (2014, p. 16), one of the drawbacks in the country's history with gender policies is the fact that Nicaragua has refused to ratify the international legislation C.103, C. 183 and C. 156: the international agreement on maternity protection and the international agreement on all workers with family responsibilities.

Overall, the national legal-regulatory framework on equality for women in Nicaragua is defined by (a) the Political constitution of Nicaragua (1987) and legal reforms of 2014; (b) in 2008, Law nº 648 (Law for the Equality of rights and opportunities), since it incorporates recommendations in the Action Program signed in Vienna (1993) and Beijing World Conference (1995); (c) Law 717 about Equal access to land ownership (2010); (d) in 2012, Law 779 - Integral law against gender-based violence towards women; (e) Family Code summarized by the Law 870; (f) Law 896 against human trafficking (2015); (g) National Plan for Human Development (PNHD 2012 – 2016) (LOPEZ URBINA, 2018, p. 57). Furthermore, part of its National Project for Human Development, the country has implemented three essential laws to address food security for rural women: Law nº 693 for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security Law<sup>37</sup> (2009), Law nº 757 for Dignified and Equitable Treatment of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants<sup>38</sup> (2011), Law nº 717 for the Creation of the Fond for the Purchase of Land with Gender Equity for Rural Women<sup>39</sup> (2010).

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<sup>37</sup> Ley de Soberanía y Seguridad Alimentaria y Nutricional (2009).

<sup>38</sup> Ley de Trato Digno y Equitativo a Pueblos Indígenas y Afrodescendientes (2011).

<sup>39</sup> Ley Creadora Del Fondo para Compra de Tierras con Equidad de Género para Mujeres Rurales (2010).



**Fig. 18 Nicaragua's government view on the national model of equity and gender parity**



Source: Nicaragua's government (Cartilla Muyer y derechos), 2019.

For my temporal investigation, rather than exploring previous legal achievements in Nicaragua – including its constitution - I intend to focus on laws and legal reforms about women's economic and social rights conducted during Ortega's government (2007 – 2019) that were considered historical decisions in the country and advanced the global level: the Law 648 and Law 779. Approved in 2008, Law nº 648 (Law for the Equality of rights and opportunities) was created 'to promote equality and equity in the enjoyment of human, civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights between women and men'. Moreover, Law 648 calls for 'public policies aimed at guaranteeing the effective exercise in real equality, in the application of the current legal norm of women and men, to ensure the full development of women', while signaling that public mechanisms should be created by state powers (article 1, Law 648, 2008, p. 2). On top of that, law 648 points out that Nicaragua is committed to an "enfoque de género en las políticas públicas" (gender-sensitive approach to its public policies). In the legal document, Nicaragua commits to gender-sensitive policies as a formal strategy to

guarantee that ‘interests, needs, concerns and experiences of women and men are an integral part in the formulation, execution, monitoring and evaluation of public policies to achieve gender equality as elements of development, in all spheres’ (article 3, item I, p. 3).

In the economic realm, in article 13, Law 648 describes an outstanding legal contribution to women’s economic rights when it expresses the commitment of the Nicaraguan state to ‘adapt national statistics to account for the true participation of women in their contribution to the Gross Domestic Product and the National Accounts’. Moreover, the article explains that the state (or the National Institute of Information for development) ‘*must also quantify, through a Satellite Account, the contribution of women to the country’s economy, with the work they carry out at home*’, in which satellite account corresponds to ‘the account that quantifies the value of the activities generated in the family sphere, mainly carried out by women, whose value at market prices represents a certain percentage of the Gross Domestic Product’. This touches on one of the biggest revindications of feminist economists and women’s movements about the marginalization of women’s participation in the economic system by reproductive work, including domestic and unpaid care work. Formal attempts to measure reproductive labour produced by women and make it visible within the national economies have been a long-awaited public policy elsewhere (Benería et al., 2018). Yet, Nicaragua was a country pioneer in matters of public policies of gender with feminist content when it prescribed the inclusion of unpaid reproductive labour performed by women as part of the national economic product of the country. The law reforms in Nicaragua for gender parity met women’s everyday lives in the form of different campaigns promoted by the Ministry of Women’s Affairs (Ministerio de La Mujer).

According to the Nicaraguan Ministry of Women’s Affairs website, Nicaragua adopts an economic model of “creativity and entrepreneurship” for Nicaraguan women based on female economic empowerment. The Ministry of Women’s Affairs defines economic empowerment for Nicaraguan women as the ‘capacity for Nicaraguan women to generate their own achievements’, ‘evolve, manage and decide about resources in the family and community’ and to ‘live with dignity, well-being and prosperity’. More significantly, the Ministry suggests the main features that enable Nicaraguan women to become economically empowered: proud entrepreneurship, female leadership, self-responsibility for the economy, positive thinking, goal-orientation



and dream achievement, confidence in personal capabilities, and control over the distribution of resources, as shown the images below.

Fig. 19. The model of “Women’s empowerment” in Nicaragua



Source: Nicaraguan Ministry of Women’s Affairs (sp).

Moreover, the government justifies its position over women’s economic empowerment in Nicaragua by commenting that ‘*Nicaragua has one of the highest rates of gender equity in the world*’, comparable to first world countries because of Ortega’s political commitment to gender equity’ (NICARAGUAN MINISTRY OF WOMEN’S AFFAIRS, sp). In the vice-president’s words, some of the main practices of Nicaraguan empowered women in the economy are described as follows:

Nicaragua is on the path of empowerment, you [\*women] must continue advancing until you manage to consolidate those practices of empowered women, knowing and appropriating your rights, further developing your abilities, skills and participating at all levels. PROUDLY ENTREPRENEURIAL NICARAGUAN WOMAN... Because Nicaraguan women are absolutely responsible, we are effective, we are distinguished workers, we are entrepreneurs and we learn every day from all the possibilities to grow in knowledge and grow in human quality

that a new day offers us (ROSÁRIO-MURILLO, sd, our translation<sup>40</sup>)

The Nicaraguan government's focus on female entrepreneurship and economic leadership represents a transformation in the country's business landscape. Based on Pisani's study (2018), as of 2016, Nicaragua has registered the highest women's entrepreneurship rates in the region and is above the average globally. In urban areas, female-owned firms comprise 32.7% of all urban enterprises, while the regional rates are 21.8% and at the global level, 14.5%. Moreover, the author claims that 43.3% of Nicaraguan women are self-employed, a rate much higher than men (28.3%) (INIDE, 2017). In 2012, Law 779 was unanimously approved by the National Assembly of Nicaragua, dominated by an FSLN majority. To sum it up, the law 'criminalizes violence towards women' as a form to protect their human rights and guarantee women's well-being. According to its first article, Law 779 claimed the public commitment of the Nicaraguan state to aid women and "promote changes in the sociocultural and patriarchal patterns that underpin relations of power"<sup>41</sup>. Law 799 (The Integral Law against Gender-based Violence in Nicaragua) expanded women's legal protection under new terms and methods: it has established a legal ground for the responsibility of the state of Nicaragua to protect women against gender-based violence based on the creation of public policies, campaigns and cultural education about gender-based violence at the private and public environments. Moreover, the law has typified different forms of gender-based violence as 'any action or conduct, based on gender, that causes death, physical, sexual or psychological harm or suffering to

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<sup>40</sup> Original quote: "Estas en el camino del empoderamiento, debes continuar avanzando hasta lograr consolidar esas prácticas de mujer empoderada, conociendo y apropiándote de tus derechos, desarrollando más tus capacidades, habilidades y participando a todos los niveles. *MUJER NICARAGÜENSE ORGULLOSAMENTE EMPRENDEDORA... Porque la mujer nicaragüense es absolutamente responsable, somos efectivas, somos insignes trabajadoras, somos emprendedoras y aprendemos todos los días de todas las posibilidades de crecer en conocimiento y crecer en calidad humana que nos ofrece un nuevo día*".

<sup>41</sup> Article 1, Law 799 (2012): "The object of this law is to act against the violence exercised against women with the purpose of protecting women's human rights and guaranteeing them a life free of violence that favors their development and wellbeing in accordance with the principles of equality and nondiscrimination; and establish comprehensive protection measures to prevent, punish and eradicate violence and provide assistance to women victims of violence, promoting changes in the sociocultural and patriarchal patterns that underpin the relations of power."

women' and acknowledged that gender-based violence could be physical, psychological, sexual, institutional, labour-oriented, economic-patrimonial, misogynic and femicide (BROWN, 2013, p. 15-16).

In September 2013, Ortega's government reformed Law 799 (The Integral Law against Gender-based Violence in Nicaragua) with juridical changes that weakened women's legal protection (Neumann, 2014). To Solís (2013), the reform of Law 799 was the government's response to "safeguard the family unit" in Nicaragua based on the promotion of the practice of state mediation (*family counselling*) between the aggressor and the victim instead of prosecution in cases of gender-based violence. This practice was not new; in the perspective of women's organizations, there was evidence that 30% of femicides in Nicaragua had occurred despite state mediation between the aggressor and victim. The executive supported the order for reform in law 799 and advised the creation of "Gabinetes de La Familia" to address forms of gender-based violence. First, as a consequence of Ortega's reform in Law 799, femicide could only be recognized when "there is an intimate relationship between the aggressor and victim", prioritising family counselling instead of accusations of violence. At the local level, there was an explicit de-funding of women's trained professionals and women's police stations (*comísarias*) to attend to victims of gender-based violence, which points to the opposite direction of the Law discourse over the state obligation to protect women against gender-based violence. In 2016 the *Comísarias de la Mujer y niñez*, which consisted of a series of specialized social services for women, including services to address gender-based violence, was officially discontinued by the government due to lack of funding.

Though the political alliances summarized in the conservative gender project pursuit between the state and religious fundamentalism is somewhat novel in Nicaragua and part of a broader trend in the region, there is a strong continuity in how the Nicaraguan state has dealt with women's movements and rights as a political gender project to subject women to ideals of the family with political loyalty to the state's ideology (Kampwirth, 2011; Neumann, 2014). Therefore, this chapter demonstrates that there is a legacy of continuity in "gender projects" promoted across time during the Somoza Era, Sandinista Revolution and Ortega's government. However, local forces, discourses and transnational forces are now different. Past gender projects were critical in shaping and normalizing the current "gender project" of the Nicaraguan state under Daniel Ortega's administration (2006 – nowadays) in its leftist religious hostility towards

women's movements from diverse political affiliations, which undermine women's movements' collective agency unless they are loyal to state ideals (Basu, 2010, 278). I conclude that the history of Nicaraguan women's movements and their constrained collective agency as of now during the administration of the leftist president (and former Sandinista revolutionary) Daniel Ortega cannot be told nor further understood for comparison without considering the variation and impact of gender projects pursuit by the Nicaraguan state across time, so we can explore what has been missed from the Nicaragua experience and what can be learned from elsewhere in Latin and Central America contexts that share similar historical experiences but more progressive results in gender-based violence legislation, women's political citizenship and abortion rights.

### 3.3. NARRATING THE STORY OF NICARAGUA WITH GENDER EQUALITY ACCORDING TO THE GGI: FROM MARGINAL COUNTRY TO GLOBAL LEADER

As the Global Gender Gap Reports measure, analyze and rank countries in matters of gender equality, with 'equality and inequality benchmarks fixed across time, allowing the reader to track individual country progress in relation to an ideal standard of equality' (GGI, 2013, p. 10), in this topic I will address how gender equity Nicaragua is portrayed and accessed across time by the index and will demonstrate the discourses adopted by the index to measure gender gaps not entirely as a matter of human rights and equity, but one of efficiency for the global economy (GGI, 2006; 2013, p. 19). During the 2006s, the first edition of the GGI, Nicaragua was ranked 62nd out of 115 countries covered (90% of the world's population back then), with an overall score of 0.6566 (out of 1). In addition, Nicaragua was featured in 101st place in the performance ranking of Economic Participation and Opportunity, one of the worst world positions at the time; followed by an average global position of 40th and 50th places in the subindexes of Education Attainment and Health and Survival; and an encouraging ranking of 25th at Political Empowerment ranking. But what do those numbers mean for understanding gender dynamics in Nicaragua?

First, in 2006 Nicaragua is said to have low levels of gender parity in Economic Participation and Opportunity, Health and Survival and Educational attainment in the world. In other words, Nicaraguan men and women are present within the economy at differential rates that point towards the formal marginalization of women at that time. Regarding Nicaragua's Economic Participation and Opportunity, the index

portrayed Nicaragua as having one of the lowest levels of women's labour force participation worldwide and significant differences in wages for men and women who performed similar work that year. From the interpretation from GGI's (2006, p.5), huge gaps of gender parity, specifically in economic levels are problematic because 'not only it undermines the quality of life of one half of the world's population but also poses a significant risk to the long-term growth and well-being of nations. In this sense, the index signals that 'countries that do not capitalize on the full potential of one half of their human resources may compromise their competitive potential', where 'the advancement of women is an important strategic issue with a potential impact on the growth of nations'. Therefore, based on Nicaragua's measured performance in 2006 and the interpretation of the GGI, one can argue that the country's long-term potential for growth and global competitiveness in the capitalist economy is, if not threatened, but undermined by the country's low levels of women's economic and opportunity participation in comparison to men, so it is possible that engage for gender parity at the level of Economic Participation, and Opportunity is a pressing issue to be addressed by countries as 'their national priorities' and 'priority area for reform' (idem, p. 5).

Moreover, the correlation between productivity, economic growth and women's integration into formal labour is emphasized in GGI's interpretation. For the index, 'the most important determinant of a country's competitiveness is its human talent—the skills, education and productivity of its workforce. And women account for one-half of the potential talent base' (World Economic Forum, 2007, p. 20), in which the primary solution for leveraging a country's competitiveness lies on 'whether and how it educates and utilises its female talent. To maximize its competitiveness and development potential, each country should strive for gender equality—i.e., to give women the same rights. The GGI does not explore women's economic participation beyond labor force levels in formal corporate environments and differential wage levels for men and women. The high rates of unemployment, inadequate labour protection and women's involvement in reproductive paid and unpaid labour, for example, remain at the root of issues in women's economic participation at the national level and are neglected as part of that measurement (Benería et al, 2018).

Compared to the year before, in 2007 – the first year of Ortega's administration – the GGI portrayed that Nicaragua had an overall decrease in gender parity in all four areas evaluated. The biggest losses were related to its global ranking of gender parity (it had drastically dropped from 62nd to 90th, with a score of inequality of

0.646 out of 1), Economic Participation and Opportunity (from 101th to 117th ranking); Educational Attainment (from 40<sup>o</sup> to 51<sup>o</sup>), Health and Survival (from 50th to 60th), though the country maintained a relatively stable position in its Political Empowerment levels (from 25th to 28th overall position worldwide). Expected to work as a snapshot of their country's relative strengths and weaknesses of their country's performance compared to that of other nations', the GGI's evaluation of Nicaragua in 2007 suggests that one of the relative strengths of the country at the global level, when it came to gender equality, was Political Empowerment, or, in other words, the relatively equal positions where men and women stand regarding the 'political decision-making at the highest levels' (World Economic Forum, 2007, p. 4).

During 2008, Nicaragua climbs from 90<sup>o</sup> to the 71<sup>o</sup> global position in gender parity (score of 0.675 out of 1) among the 130 countries measured by GGI. At the subindex level, the country remains in the same marginal position for the national levels of Economic and Opportunity (117th) and relatively similar for Health and Survival (62nd position in the global ranking). Though the dataset average for Economic and Opportunity levels is 0.587 of 1, Nicaragua earns a score of 0.461, which further stresses the integration of women in the economy as a major problem of gender in the country. Nevertheless, the most impressive outcome narrated by the GGI is that by 2008 Nicaragua supposedly reached a global leadership position in the subindex of Education Attainment, ranking the first place worldwide (score one out 1, where one means full equality or, in other words: *1.0 as a score measured 'means the country meets the ideal standards of equality*, followed by a fair advancement in its subindex of Political Empowerment (23rd place). In terms of its educational attainment levels, GGI measures Nicaragua's world leadership based on the criteria of literacy rate, enrolment in primary education, enrolment in secondary education, and enrolment in tertiary education, all of which Nicaragua scores the maximum levels of equality worldwide (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2008, p. 125).

On that note, for 2009, GGI ranks in the 49th position in overall gender equity at the global level (score of 7.00 out of 1.00), 65<sup>o</sup> position in Health and Survival and 25th position in Political Empowerment. According to the index, Nicaragua (49) makes one of the biggest leaps in the rankings [...], as a 'result of new data having become available for the economic participation and opportunity subindex, which more completely reflects the state of the economic gender gap in Nicaragua'. (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2009, p. 21). Despite this justification, the index attributes

Nicaragua the still unpromising ranked position of 104th in Economic Participation and Opportunity measures of equality between sexes. Moreover, Nicaragua retains its global leadership (1<sup>st</sup> place ranked) in matters of education attainment between sexes. To explain it better, GGI states that the Index wants to reward or penalize countries 'independent of the level of development'. So, in the case of the subindex of education, the index **'penalizes or rewards countries based on the size of the gap between male and female enrolment rates, but not for the overall levels of education in the country'** (p. 3-5), which might be an explanation for the reason why countries from different contexts are understood to score the same levels of gender equality.

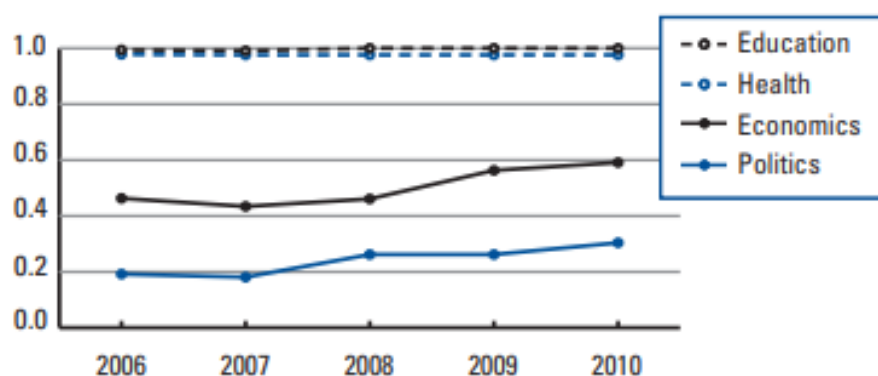
Fig. 20. Nicaragua's global position in education attainment

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT				
Country	Score	Rank		
Australia	1.0000	1	Ireland	1.0000 1
Bahamas*	1.0000	1	Jamaica	1.0000 1
Barbados	1.0000	1	Latvia	1.0000 1
Cuba	1.0000	1	Lesotho	1.0000 1
Czech Republic	1.0000	1	Luxembourg	1.0000 1
Denmark	1.0000	1	Maldives	1.0000 1
Dominican Republic	1.0000	1	Mongolia	1.0000 1
Finland	1.0000	1	New Zealand	1.0000 1
France	1.0000	1	Nicaragua	1.0000 1
Honduras	1.0000	1	Philippines	1.0000 1
Iceland	1.0000	1	Slovakia	1.0000 1
Ireland	1.0000	1	United Kingdom	1.0000 1
			United States	1.0000 1
			Uruguay	1.0000 1
			Norway	1.0000 26

Source: GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX (2009, p.15).

The GGI's report of 2010 reveals that Nicaragua has reached 30<sup>o</sup> place in gender equality worldwide (score of 0.712) among 134 countries. Second, in its subindexes, Nicaragua ranked respectively: 94th in the economy (0.591 out of 1); 24th in education (score one out of 1); 57th in Health and Survival (score of 0.976 out of 1) and 19th in Political Empowerment (score 0.304 out of 1). As it is possible to notice in the following images, based on the GGI's interpretation, Education and Health are two of the most gender-equal areas in Nicaragua at the domestic level (as of 2010) in comparison to the country's performance in the Economy and Politics.

Fig. 21 Nicaragua's global position in gender equality (2006 – 2010)



<b>Gender Gap Index 2010 (out of 134 countries)</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>0.718</b>
Gender Gap Index 2009 (out of 134 countries)	49	0.700
Gender Gap Index 2008 (out of 130 countries)	71	0.675
Gender Gap Index 2007 (out of 128 countries)	90	0.646
Gender Gap Index 2006 (out of 115 countries)	62	0.657

Source: GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX (2010, p. 234-235).

Though the index does not explore the Nicaraguan experience in length, it does comment on the “best practices” of global world leaders in gender equality, such as Iceland, which might hint at some of the impacts of public policies on gender in the overall ranking, the GGI evaluates three types of politics (forms of family care, parental leave, legislative reform to promote women’s participation in the board of public and private companies) as central to the global leadership of that year summarized by Iceland’s experience. Those comments about the “best practices” of world leaders in gender equality are an interesting aspect of the GGI, given its “policy-oriented” nature as a global ranking. It gives us the background to discuss in the next chapter some of the criteria of gender policies considered as “ideal”, “exemplary”, and “successful” as opposed to country’s politics that might be read as the “worst types of practice”, “danger to achieving equality and to the country’s economic growth” and so on:

**[...] The extensive preschool and day-care system provided by most municipalities, a legal right for parents to return to their jobs after childbirth and a generous parental leave system are major contributors to Iceland’s ranking. In March 2010 the Icelandic parliament adopted a legislative reform to promote gender equality on the boards of publicly owned companies and public limited companies having at least 50 employees; these companies must have at least 40% of both genders represented on their boards by September**



2013. Moreover, companies with 25 or more employees are required to disclose the number of men and women employed as well as the number of men and women in management positions (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2010, p. 19-20).

By 2011, GGI evaluates Nicaragua as ranking in 27<sup>th</sup> place, with a score of 0.725 out of 1 (full) gender equity at the global level. The index explains that 'Nicaragua's performance over the last six years puts it among the top climbers of the 114 countries that have been included in the Report since 2006 the GGI'. According to the index, 'Nicaragua's increase is driven mainly by a narrowing wage gap', which signalizes an improvement of the country's context of Economic Participation and Opportunity between sexes. In this sense, within the subindex of Economic Participation, Nicaragua is understood to rank the 79<sup>th</sup> position worldwide as opposed to the 94<sup>th</sup> ranking from the year before. At 2011, it is as if all other social contexts measured (health and survival, educational attainment, and political empowerment) have been held constant in the country, for their changes are minimal: in health and survival, the country climbs down one position (25<sup>th</sup> worldwide), though it had maintained the full score of parity in education (1 out 1); similar to that, Nicaragua's position in educational attainment went from 57<sup>th</sup> position to 58<sup>th</sup>, but it kept its score the same in both years (0.976); as for the subindex of political empowerment, the country has kept the same score from the year before (0.304), but it has climbed up two positions (from 21<sup>st</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>).

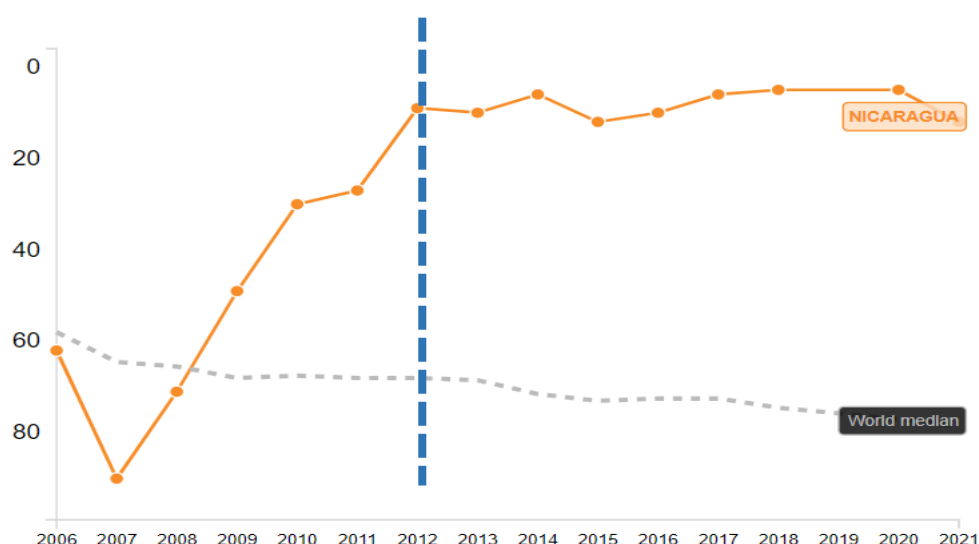
### 3.3.2 Nicaragua "Rising to the global top 10"

In the overall ranking of gender gaps in 2012, Nicaragua's level of gender equality was measured for the first time as part of the Top 10 countries' world leaders in gender equality, in the 9<sup>th</sup> position (score = 0.770 out 1) among the 135 countries measured and evaluated during that year. Interestingly, the GGI points out that in 2012 the most accurate 'top performers and world leaders' models for gender equity in the world can be noticed within the experiences of all Nordic countries, except for Denmark (p. 19). The report justifies the relevance of Nordic countries – Iceland, Finland, Norway and Sweden - as world models for gender equity based on the high rates of women's labour force participation, declining rates in salary gaps, tax incentives, and the successful 'top-down approach to promoting women's leadership' by corporate companies, followed by a historically 'strong record on the percentage of women in ministerial level positions', with Sweden presenting one of 'the highest

percentages of women in parliament in the world (44.7%)' (p. 22).

Performing above the world average of 0.666 in 2012, Nicaragua became the first country from Latin America and Caribe to ever 'hold a place in the top 10 of the global rankings', scoring at least 17.3% better than its first overall score of gender equity measured in 2006 (GGI REPORT, 2012, p.38). Based on the GGI's evaluation, Nicaragua reached this position thanks to 'changes in political empowerment, particularly an increase in the percentage of women in parliament (from 21% to 40%) and an increase in the percentage of women holding ministerial positions (38% to 46%)' (p. 22), as opposed to the performance of *the 'lowest-ranking country (Saudi Arabia) in political empowerment worldwide* (p. 17). In that case, Nicaragua drastically improved its performance in political empowerment by moving from 21st position to the "top 5" at the global level, being measured as the 5<sup>th</sup> best country in political empowerment (0.4889 out of 1), with a similar score value as Sweden (4<sup>th</sup> place, score of 0.4976) and above the sample average of countries (0.195). Aside from this aspect, Nicaragua climbed to 55th place in Health and Survival, scoring the same from 2007 to 2012 (0.976), above the sample average of countries (0.956). Even though the country has maintained the same score of evaluation, for the sex ratio at birth (female-male) Nicaragua ranks 1<sup>st</sup> in the world and 69<sup>th</sup> in healthy life expectancy between sexes. Nevertheless, around Economic participation and Opportunity, the country climbed down a few places: from 79<sup>a</sup> to 88<sup>o</sup> global position (0.615 out of 1), slightly above the global sample average of countries (0.599). Furthermore, detailed data interpreted by the index demonstrates that in matters of labor force participation, Nicaragua ranks 98<sup>th</sup>, and for wage equality for similar work 118<sup>th</sup> global position below the global standards for wage policy, despite being ranked in the first place (full parity) in the measurements of parity for professional and technical workers in the country.

**Fig. 22 Nicaragua's evolution across time**



Year	Overall ranking	Economic P. and Opportunity ranking	Education Attainment ranking	Health and Survival ranking	Political Empowerment ranking	Group of L.A. Caribe ranking	Group of Middle Income ranking
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..... We use yellow to represent instances where Nicaragua reaches Top 10's position.

2006	62°	101°	40°	50°	25°	S/ Registro	S/ Registro
2007	90°	117°	51°	60°	28°	S/ Registro	S/ Registro
2008	71°	117°	1°	62°	23°	S/ Registro	S/ Registro
2009	49°	104°	1°	65°	25°	38°	49°
2010	30°	94°	24°	57°	19°	30°	30°
2011	27°	79°	25°	58°	21°	27°	27°
2012	9°	88°	23°	58°	5°	1°	2°
2013	10°	91°	28°	55°	5°	1°	2°
2014	6°	95°	33°	1°	4°	1°	1°
2015	12°	100°	1°	1°	4°	1°	2°
2016	10°	92°	1°	1°	4°	1°	2°
2017	6°	54°	34°	1°	2°	1°	1°
2018	5°	69°	36°	1°	2°	1°	1°
2019	5°	81°	1°	1°	3°	1°	1°

Source: Elaborated by the author based on Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019); WORLD BANK DATASET (2021, sa).

To expand on the interpretations of the data collected by GGI, in 2012 the index highlights that 'business leaders and policy-makers must therefore ensure that, in addition to removing barriers to women's entry to the workforce, they put in place practices and policies that will provide equal opportunities for rising to positions of leadership within companies' (p. 29). Based on its research, the GGI found that national policy frameworks play a central role in gender gaps in each country and at the global level. Furthermore, the report stresses that gender mainstreaming across different policy areas can be used to address the gaps found in each evaluation. While surveying countries national policy frameworks, the index contend its focus on 'parental leave,

availability of childcare, type of taxation and workplace equality’ as the main important themes that countries should vastly address (GGI, 2012, p. 58-59).

**Fig. 22 Key areas of national policy frameworks of gender**

Key areas of national policy frameworks of gender	Gendered, economic and developmental impacts according to the GGI
Parental leave	<i>‘Maternity, paternity and parental leave—or any other type of additional shared leave—are closely associated with women’s economic participation in many parts of the world and are thus an important element of policies aimed at a more efficient use of a country’s human capital pool’</i>
Childcare assistance	<i>‘Childcare is an important factor in allowing women to reconcile professional and family obligations because women tend to bear the majority of the caregiving responsibilities in the majority of countries. For example, a well-established daycare system can be a long-term investment that supports women in employment, thereby improving the efficiency of labour markets’</i>
Taxation system	<i>‘Tax legislation may contain potentially discriminatory provisions that treat men and women differently.<sup>3</sup> For example, gender-biased taxation might alter the disposable income available to men and women in a family and may thus have implications for the economic and social decision-making at the household level’.</i>
Equality and work	<i>‘Legislative structures may help prevent gender-based discrimination in society and create an ecosystem of support for women through, among other policies, obligatory and voluntary quotas in public and private entities, targeted subsidies to female businesses and supervisory bodies monitoring the implementation of national policies.</i>

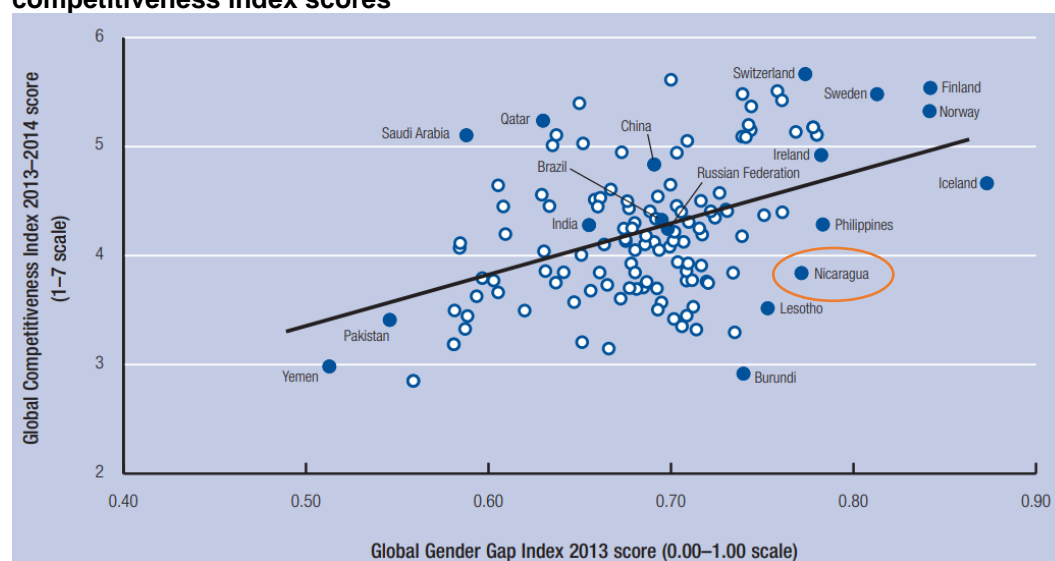
Source: World Economic Forum (2012, p. 58-59).

By 2013, the GGI recognizes that there are many paths to parity that states, companies and stakeholders should consider. Policies around cash transfer programmes, equal access to credit and financial services, parental leave, affordable childcare facilities, innovative hiring process, redesigned career paths and meaningful mentoring programmes represent some of the transformations that most countries should address to change the landscape of gender equity at the global level (GGI, 2013, p. 5). That said, Nicaragua is analyzed as one of the ‘top ten’ world leaders in the 10<sup>th</sup> ranking (among 136 countries) in gender equity of the GGI, and it is characterized as one of the three overall highest climbers of the 110 countries that have been included in the Report since 2006’. Stronger than ever, its ranking of political empowerment is maintained within the 5<sup>th</sup> global position (0.489 out of 1, the same score from 2012), which suggests that Nicaragua has maintained some of the best practices in the world in matters of political empowerment and political parity between sexes, given ‘the Report identifies countries that are role models in dividing their resources equitably between women and men, regardless of the overall resource level’ (p. 5).

Despite its improvement in the score of Economic Opportunity (from 0.615 to 0.622), the country climbed down to ten positions. It was ranked 91<sup>st</sup>, comparatively low when we consider the highest and ideal performer in Economic Opportunity – Norway, whose achievements point to the closing of 84% of its gender

gap. Moreover, Nicaragua has ranked 109<sup>th</sup> in the sub-indicator of parity in Labor force participation among 135 countries (p. 49). Still, it was considered a moderately better performer than the lowest-ranked country in the world in Economic Opportunity – Syria, with only 25% of its economic gap between sexes closed (GGI, 2013, p. 16). The score in Economic Opportunity is particularly important as it is one of the main variables strongly correlated to the global competitiveness of a country, one that weights the global gender gap index as a whole. *To test this hypothesis, in 2013, the GGI crossed countries' overall global gender gap index with their measured and calculated overall global competitiveness index (1 – 7 scale), both global indicators created by the World Economic Forum. However, the report (2013) has concluded that while for some countries, this predicted relationship holds, especially European countries, for countries such as Nicaragua, high overall scores in the global gender gap index do not necessarily can be translated into increased predictions of economic competitiveness performance accessed by global competitiveness index, as shown in the graph below* (GGI, 2013, p. 32-35). Nevertheless, in the area of educational attainment and health and survival, Nicaragua maintains the same score from previous years: for education, it means the country has secured a score of full parity (1), nevertheless climbing down to 28<sup>th</sup> place worldwide; and for health and survival, Nicaragua was evaluated as scoring the same ever since 2007 (0.976), despite moving from 58<sup>th</sup> to 55<sup>th</sup> in the ranking.

**Fig. 23. Modelling the correlation between the global gender gap index scores and global competitiveness index scores**



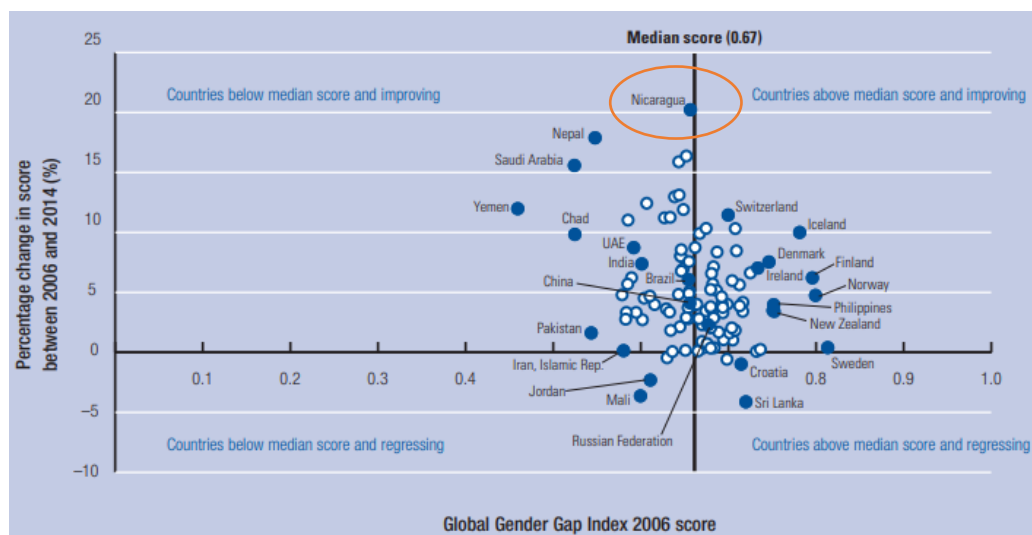
Source: World Economic Forum (2013, p. 32).

In the quantification of the magnitude of gender equity at the global level in 2014, the GGI Report claims that the benefits of gender equality can be understood in terms of *an economic case of competitiveness and fairness case for*

*humanity's collective progress* (GGI, 2014, p. 5). In the economic case, related to the country's low levels of competitiveness is the underutilization of female talent in the economy. More than that, the report calls for investment in girls' education, highlighting that healthy and more educated women are more likely to raise children that are equally healthy and more educated than the average, which in turn leads to a positive cycle for the population in that country (*idem*). Second, the report suggests that corporate companies can also directly benefit from gender equality in two ways: women who are corporate leaders outperform while working compared to companies that lack female representation, and based on the consumer power within women.

As for Nicaragua, the index contends that the country has the highest improvement to date (20%), with 79% of its national gender gap closed, which makes it not only a global but a regional leader in the region of Latin American and Caribe, where the average of gender gaps closed feature 70%. Nicaragua's position is substantially close to the highest ranked countries—Iceland, Finland, Norway, Sweden and Denmark, where the closing of gender gaps is recorded as at least 80% and distant from the worst performer that year – Yemen. Furthermore, Nicaragua improved its labour force participation in the region, whose strengths at the global level are a decisive score in the Education Attainment subindex – it closed 99.96% of its gender gap, Health and Survival, where the country closed 100% of its gender gap and Political Empowerment, where the country ranks 4<sup>th</sup> among 142 countries. Between 2006 and 2014, the index suggests that only 95% of the countries measured showed an improvement across time. Still, the higher pace of this improvement – by 10% or more - is somewhat restricted to Nicaragua, France and Ecuador due to their political indicators of gender, while most countries have improved between 1-5%. In the table below, it is possible to notice that Nicaragua is the only country represented in the quadrant of “countries above the median score and improving” at higher levels of percentage of change and overall score in 2006, despite its shortcomings in the economic participation gap, with Nicaragua heading the bottom of the ranking (from 91<sup>st</sup> to 95<sup>th</sup> position, with a score of 0.635 out of 1).

**Fig. 23 Nicaragua's levels of improvement in score compared to the global gender gap index's overall evaluations**



Source: Global Gender Gap Index Report (2014).

While for countries, the GGI indicated key areas of work in legislation, for corporate companies, the report highlights the role of business in promoting gender parity at the national and global levels. The most successful practices for gender parity, according to the GGI (2014, p. 45), are leadership and company commitment to lead diversity efforts; the creation of accountability mechanisms to track gender imbalances and create target setting; building awareness against gender-based discrimination in management policies; the use of gendered work-life balance policies in corporate settings; mentoring and training for women; and diversity training and engagement with the value chain through gender parity-focused civil society and public sector initiatives'.

**Fig. 24 World Economic Forum's Repository of Successful Practices for Gender Parity**

Leadership and company commitment	'Visible leadership by the chief executive and top management on supporting women in management has proven to be one of the most important levers for progress in achieving gender diversity in a corporate context. This includes concrete and symbolic actions by top management and, in many cases, the establishment of a position or department to lead diversity efforts' (p. 45).
Measurement and target setting	Achievable, relevant recruitment and retention targets at all levels, with an embedded accountability mechanism, are critical. Developing a disaggregated database can help to evaluate the causes of gender imbalances and track progress. Transparent salary bands to track and address male and female salary gaps are additional useful tools to understand the status quo in organizations
Awareness and accountability	'The focus of many companies on building awareness indicates that the case for change still needs to be built to make progress. Accountability of the senior management and transparency of career paths and opportunities have proven to be effective practices. Ensuring that management policies, processes, systems and tools do not harbour genderbiased discrimination and enhancing the understanding of unconscious biases can also make inclusive leadership more tangible'
Work environment and work- life balance	'Women are often the primary caregiver for both children and the elderly in most countries. Ensuring smooth on- and off-ramping; appropriate childcare options; developing guidelines on implementation of work-life balance policies and mentoring for women going through a transition are important levers to ensure a sustained career progression towards management'
Mentorship and	'Companies have benefitted from programmes that promote guidelines on the value

training	of diversity as an underlying culture of the organization; impart knowledge on how to manage a more diverse workforce; and how to attract, retain and promote female talent. These training programmes, for both men and women, can be relevant for shaping an environment within the broader employee base for women to successfully lead'.
Responsibility beyond the office	'Many companies have leveraged the opportunity to exercise external influence along the value chain including diversity training for suppliers, distributors and partners and training to support women-owned businesses in the organization's value chain. External influence can also be exercised by ensuring gender neutrality in advertising, engaging girls and young women to display possible career paths and developing partnerships with gender parity-focused civil society and public sector initiatives'.

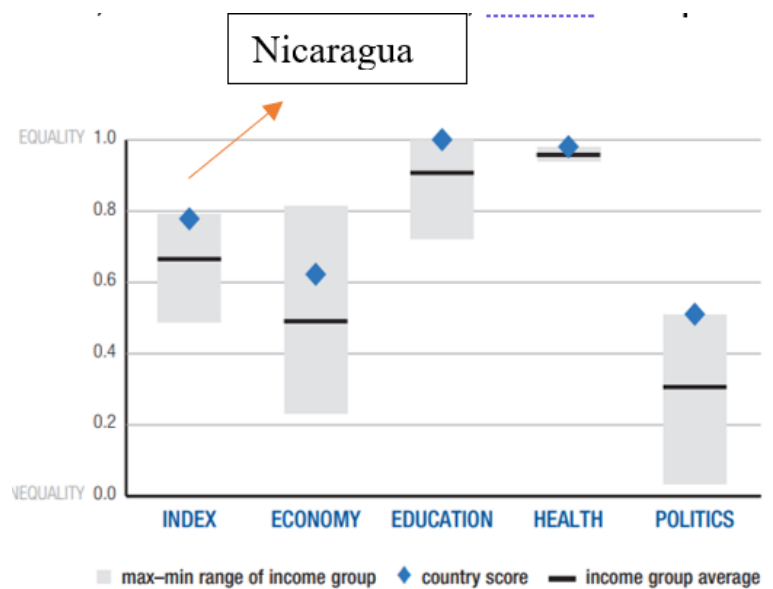
Source: GGI REPORT (2014, p. 45).

Though Nicaragua's global performance was visibly improving from 2006 to 2014, in 2015, the country was ranked 12<sup>th</sup> among 145 countries. Therefore, it was measured among the top 15 best performers worldwide. It went from 6<sup>th</sup> place, with 0.789 (2014) to 0.776 (2015). However, at the regional level, Nicaragua is viewed as the best performer in Latin America and Caribe: 'It has closed the gender gap fully on both Educational Attainment and Health and Survival, and on 'Political Empowerment it is the highest-ranking country of the region and fourth in the world, with more than 50% of the gender gap now closed' (p. 21). Because Nicaragua is understood to be following a progressive pattern to close the gaps in gender equality in the region, the country remains a role model to the worst performers in the region: Belize (103<sup>th</sup> place), Guatemala (106<sup>th</sup> place), Paraguay (107<sup>th</sup> place). Not only those three countries are considered the worst performers in the region, but their performance is also indicative of the opposite trend of Nicaragua's development: they had regressed not only in the overall ranking but in almost all indicators of gender, including Political Empowerment (GGI REPORT, 2015, p. 22-23). In comparison to the scores of countries from the same income group<sup>42</sup>, Nicaragua is also considered a leader: it has had a superior (maximum) performance in all areas: overall index, economy, education, health and politics, as it is possible to notice in the table below.

**Fig. 25. Nicaragua's position in comparison to the scores of countries from the same income group**

<sup>42</sup> Countries from the same income group (LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME (US\$ 1,046–4,125) as Nicaragua: Philippines, Bolivia, Moldova, Kenya, Cape Verde, Lao PDR, Lesotho, El Salvador, Ghana, Bangladesh, Guyana, Ukraine, Senegal, Kyrgyz Republic, Honduras, Georgia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Cameroon\*, Indonesia, Tajikistan, Swaziland, Armenia, Guatemala, India, Zambia, Bhutan, Nigeria, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Morocco, Syria, Pakistan, Yemen (GGI REPORT 2015, p. 17).

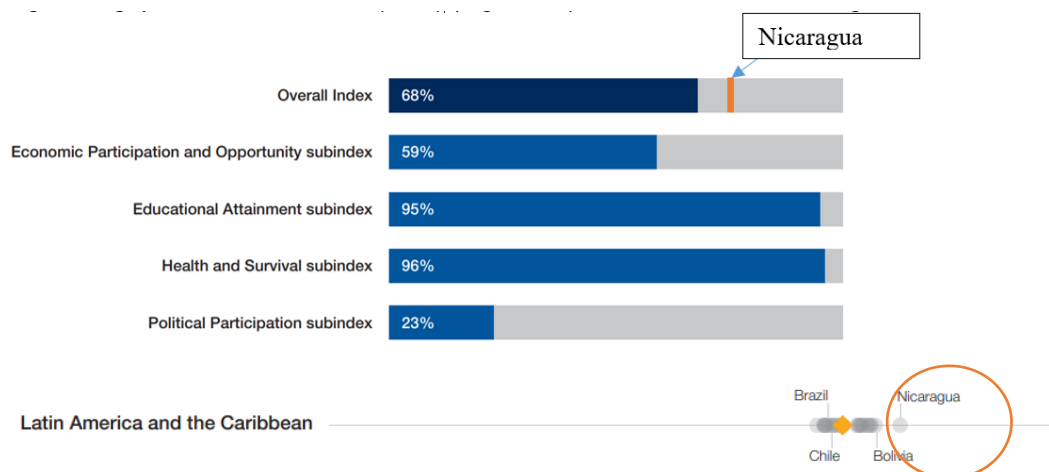




Source: GGI Report 2015 (p. 275).

In 2016, Nicaragua re-enters the 'top 10' in the global ranking among 142 countries covered, scoring 0.780 out of 1; at the same time, the country strengthened its regional performance in Latin America and Caribe. In other words, the country is understood to have closed 78% of its overall gender gap, estimated to be relatively close to the best performer in the world – Iceland, a country that closed 87% of its gender gap and is superior to the average of gender gaps closed worldwide (68%) (Fig below). The main relative strengths of Nicaragua are Educational Attainment (score 1, suggesting the achievement of full parity) and Health and Survival (score 1, suggesting the accomplishment of full parity), where the country ranked 1<sup>st</sup> at the global level, having fully closed any gender gaps in both areas. Nicaragua's achievements are considered remarkable when compared to the underperformance of – at least 17 countries worldwide - that record gaps wider than 10% and 20% in educational attainment (p. 19). Second, in Political Empowerment, Nicaragua has ranked 4<sup>th</sup> (score of 0.506 out of 1). The main category where Nicaragua's performance fell short was within the subindex of Economic Participation and Opportunity, ranking 92nd (0.632 out of 1), above the world average of 0.586.

**Fig. 26 Nicaragua's overall position in each subindex**



Source: Adapted from GGI Report (2016, p. 5; 17).

To track and advise on the development of countries, the GGI (2015) is one of the first reports to comment on the effects of care work on the country's levels of global competitiveness. According to the report, there is a relationship between gender gaps in paid work and gender gaps in unpaid work, with the first being an indicator of the latter. Though unpaid work conducted by women varies, the index argues that the deployment of women's human capital should leverage into transforming the 'care infrastructure' of countries through care policies. For the GGI, 'stronger care-related policies could enhance women's economic participation and re-balance care roles in the home' between the sexes (p. 36). Specifically, the GGI connects care-related policies to the cooperation provided by public-private partnerships based on (1) financial arrangements, (2) working provisions for female workers that are mothers, (3) direct care services.

In 2017, 'Nicaragua (6) defends its place in the global top 10 and remains the best-performing country in the region for the sixth year in a row' (GGI, 2017, p. 7). Ranked in 6<sup>th</sup> place (0.814 overall scores out of 1) among 144 countries, Nicaragua is analyzed as having closed 81.4% of its gender gaps that year, an important achievement in comparison to the global weighted average of 68% and the average in Latin America and the Caribbean of 70%. Partly due to Nicaragua's performance, the region of Latin America and Caribe is understood to be one of the fastest-improving regions in closing gender gaps at the global level since 2006. In contrast to other countries in the region, Nicaragua is one of the 18 countries that had improved their overall score instead of being one of the six countries that regressed in performance. Though Bolivia is considered the second-best performer after Nicaragua in the region, with an overall score of 0.758, the country has one of 'the worst-

performing country in the region on the Educational Attainment subindex', ranked in 108<sup>th</sup> position (p. 20). Meanwhile, in terms of educational attainment, Nicaragua is interpreted as achieving full parity with a maximum score estimated by the GGI (1.0 out 1.0).

Similarly, in the subindex of health and survival and Political Empowerment, Nicaragua reaches the 'top 5' best positions worldwide: 1<sup>st</sup> place in health and survival, scoring 0.980; and 2<sup>nd</sup> place in Political Empowerment, scoring 0.576 (p. 10). According to the GGI (2017), the main challenge in gender equality in the country pertains to the area of Economic Opportunity, where the country ranks 54<sup>th</sup> – an improvement when compared to previous years – but a moderate performance of 0.702, slightly higher than the world average of 0.585, nevertheless. Based on all the criteria considered to measure the economic realm in Nicaragua, including labour force participation, wage equality for similar work, estimated earned income, legislators, senior officials and managers, rates of professional and technical workers, the area where Nicaragua performs worst is the rates of labour force participation, in which the country ranks 115<sup>th</sup> among 144 countries, with a score of 0.631 below the world average of 0.667 (p. 258-9).

**Fig. 27 Nicaragua's country profile**



Source: Global Gender Gap Report (2017, p. 257).

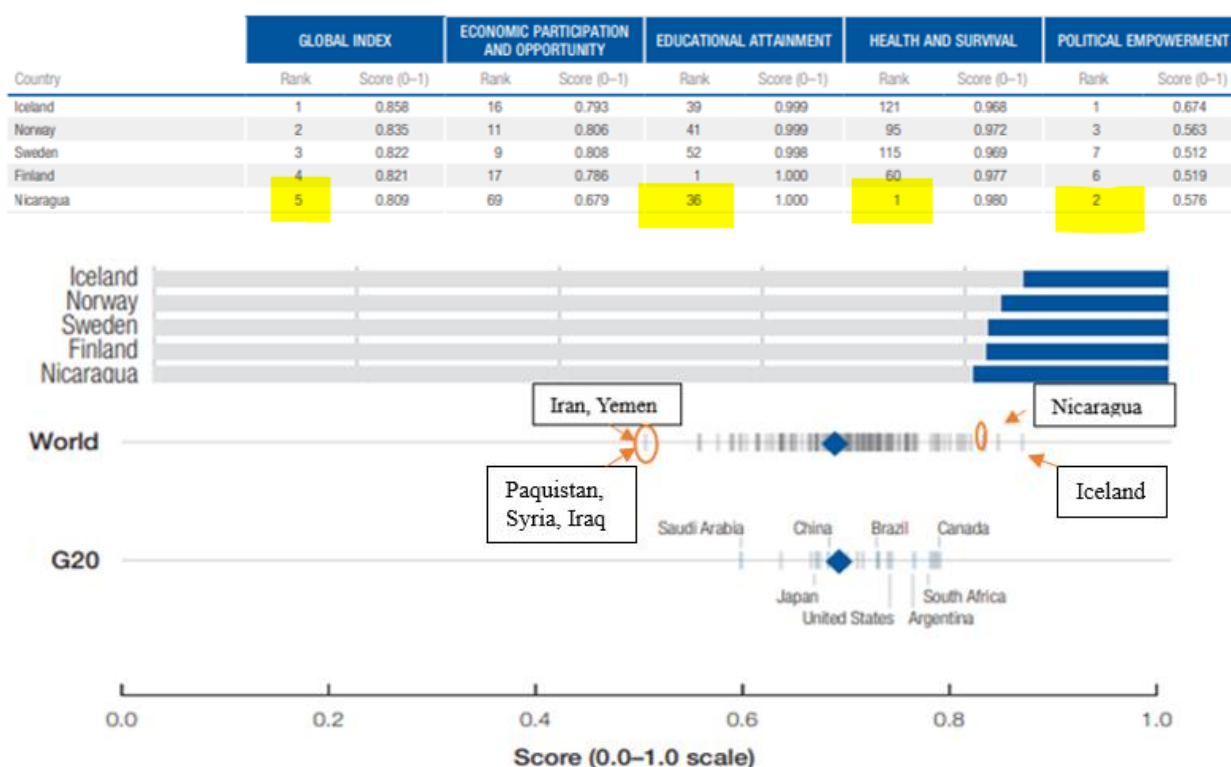
In 2018, the index further claimed the connections between the systemic structure and global gender challenges. The index frames global challenges of gender as being the 'solution' for the challenges posed by the Fourth Industrial Revolution (4IR). According to the report, gender inequity can be noticed in terms of the country's deprivation of female talent in the global economy, as women make for half of humanity, and the only way for humanity to 'cope with increasingly fast technological change and ensure broad-based progress for all' would be to take advantage of women's skills and perspectives in economic sectors and technology-based areas, such

as Artificial Intelligence. The report's key findings suggest the following records in global gender disparities: 77.1% for Political Empowerment; 41.9% for Economic Participation and Opportunity gap; 4.4% and 4.6% for Educational Attainment and Health and Survival (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2018, p. 7). Though no country has achieved full gender equality, the index analyzes the top seven countries in the rankings as having closed at least 80%. It establishes that those countries are projected to be the first in the world to ever achieve gender equality in the near future.

In terms of Nicaragua's performance, the index assessed Nicaragua as the 5<sup>th</sup> best performer (score of 0.804 out of 1) among 149 countries, behind Iceland (0.858), Norway (0.835), Sweden (0.822) and Finland (0.821). Not only had Nicaragua been interpreted to have passed the world average in gender equity, but Nicaragua also outperformed every country from the G20 Group - Argentina, Australia, Brazil, Britain, Canada, China, France, Germany, India, Indonesia, Italy, Japan, Mexico, Russia, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, South Korea, Turkey, the U.S. and the EU, Latin American Region and countries from the same income group (LOWER-MIDDLE INCOME (US\$ 1,046–4,125) to which the country is attributed to, including the Philippines, Bolivia, Moldova, Kenya, Cape Verde, Lao PDR, Lesotho, El Salvador, Ghana, Bangladesh, Guyana, Ukraine, Senegal, Kyrgyz Republic, Honduras, Georgia, Vietnam, Sri Lanka, Cameroon\*, Indonesia, Tajikistan, Swaziland, Armenia, Guatemala, India, Zambia, Bhutan, Nigeria, Mauritania, Côte d'Ivoire, Egypt, Morocco, and the three worst world performers in gender equity of 2018: Syria, Pakistan, Yemen. When it comes to its performance in Economic Participation and Opportunity, Nicaragua ranks 69<sup>th</sup> (0.679). Interestingly, in comparison to the other 'most-gender equal countries' in the world – Nordic countries, Nicaragua outperforms most Nordic countries in three out of 4 areas measured: in Health and Survival, for example, Nicaragua is ranked 1<sup>st</sup> with a score of 0.980, while Iceland, Norway, Sweden and Finland rank: 121<sup>st</sup>, 95<sup>th</sup>, 115<sup>th</sup> and 60<sup>th</sup>, respectively. In Educational Attainment, Nicaragua surpasses three out of four 'most-gender equal countries'. It ranks 36<sup>th</sup> place (1.00) as opposed to the top 3: Iceland, Norway and Sweden, ranking 39<sup>th</sup>, 41<sup>st</sup>, and 52<sup>nd</sup>, respectively. As for Political Empowerment, Nicaragua ranks 2<sup>nd</sup> best with a score of 0.576, outperforming Norway, Sweden and Finland, whose rankings are 3<sup>d</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup>, respectively, as shown in the figure below:

**Fig. 28 Nicaragua's ranking in Gender Gaps compared by country, world average and in the G20**

## group



Source: Adapted from Global Gender Gap Report (2018, p. 8-9, 19-20).

Regarding the year 2019, the most gender-equal countries in the world reported are Iceland (1<sup>st</sup>, having closed 88.8% of its gender gap), Norway (2<sup>nd</sup>, 84.2%), Finland (3<sup>rd</sup>, 83.2%), Sweden (4<sup>th</sup>, 82.0%) and Nicaragua (5<sup>th</sup>, 80.4%) (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX REPORT, 2020, p. 6), the latter showing a decrease of -0.005 in comparison to the score of 2018. More than that, in 2019, Nicaragua is understood to have the biggest overall increase in score among 173 countries: from 0.6566 to 0.804, a rise of +0.147. The only other countries who had reached this milestone of overall progress in gender equity in 2006's edition were France (15<sup>th</sup> place, 0.781, increase of +0.129), Albania (20<sup>th</sup>, 0.769, growth of +0.108), Mexico (25<sup>th</sup> place, 0.754, increase of +0.108), Ethiopia (82<sup>nd</sup> place, 0.705, increase of +0.111) and Nepal (101<sup>th</sup> place, 0.680, increase of +0.132) (idem, p. 9). Besides, Nicaragua attains gender parity in Educational Attainment and Health and Survival, rises to the third place in the Political Empowerment gender gap in the world (43.5% of gender gap yet to close), since 'Nicaragua has more women in ministerial positions than men, and has been led by a female head of state for almost seven years of the past 50' (idem, p. 28). Nevertheless, in the subindex of Economic Participation and Opportunity, Nicaragua demonstrates a relatively poor performance (81<sup>st</sup> in the global ranking, 0.671 in parity), driven by its

persistent low rates of labour force participation (53.9% of them are in the labour market, versus 86% of men) and relatively large wage gaps (45% of this gap is yet to be bridged) (p. 28). According to the GGI's evaluation, some of the challenges associated with the higher gaps in the area of Economy include the following:

The participation of women in the labour market is concentrated in part-time jobs (51.4% of working women are employed part-time) and few women rise to managerial positions (approximately 35% of these positions are filled by women). These aspects show that, although Nicaragua attains a strong performance overall, there are still some important areas for improvement to better leverage female talent in the labour market. In parallel, further investments in skills and education should support better opportunities for all Nicaraguan citizens. For instance, secondary enrolment rates remain low for both boys and girls (52% and 44%, respectively), and greater efforts should be made to increase human capital in the country (p. 28-29).

In the subindex of Economic Participation and Opportunity, it is possible to notice that Nicaragua falls short in the global ranking of Labour force participation rate %. Ranking in the 120<sup>th</sup> position worldwide (0.627), with a score below the world average of 0.661, Nicaragua struggles to integrate women into formal employment. Similarly, in wage equality rates, Nicaragua ranks in 112<sup>th</sup> place, with a score of 0.560 below the global average of 0.613 (p. 267). Based on the GGI projections for regions struggling in the economic area, Nicaragua's stakeholders – businesses and governments ought to address economic challenges together in the form of public-private partnerships to accelerate gender parity (impact-focused initiatives), so both actors can generate 'a new economic and social narrative for action and on coordinating and speeding up the process of change'. On the one hand, companies need to focus on leveraging gender diversity, and governments should act on policies for talent development for all genders and diversification of leadership pools.

Finally, in an overall view, based on the data and interpretation shown during the past paragraphs, the trajectory of Nicaragua with gender equity from 2006 to 2019 is unique in comparison to all 178 countries measured across the years. According to the portrayal of Nicaragua in each edition, it was possible to notice the changes in the narratives about the conditions of gender equity experienced by sexes in the country in four areas: Educational attainment, Health and Survival, Political Empowerment and Economic Participation and Opportunity. Nevertheless, the country's improvement is impressive, especially if compared to the other world leaders in gender equity, who –

distinctly from Nicaragua- have always been evaluated as the best countries in matters of gender equity. Opposed to its peers from the 'top 5' – namely Nordic countries, Nicaragua was interpreted as the fastest-growing country in matters of equity. It went from being interpreted as one of the worst countries for women to one that pursues the lowest levels of gender disparities, advantaged scenarios for women in terms of health and survival, educational attainment and a remarkable sign of 'women's political participation in the country. Considering the criteria of data collection, measurement and country analysis used by the GGI in each area, Nicaragua arrived in 2019 as one of the most gender equal countries, with projected times for the country to achieve full gender equity lower than the world average (257 years), despite its major challenges in the subarea of Economic Participation and Opportunity. However, the case of Nicaragua's evolution over the years and world leadership in the fight against gender disparities also raises important questions about the politics behind forms of quantitative measurement and interpretation of the GGI, considering the political crisis of anti-gender nature lived at the domestic level.

#### 4. “CONFLICTING NARRATIVES ABOUT GENDER EQUALITY IN NICARAGUA”: ANALYZING THE GOVERNING FUNCTIONS OF THE GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX AT PLAY AND BEYOND

In this chapter, I provide a critical assessment of how *the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index help to foster an informal regime of governance of gender in world politics, based on the case study of Nicaragua’s global leadership in gender equality portrayed the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) in contrast to the experiences of anti-gender politics and violence exercised at the local level, from 2006 to 2019.* After all, the World Economic Forum's work on gender and development with neoliberal-compatible discourses, as well as its experience with the benchmarking of nation’s competitiveness and increase of female representation in the annual meeting in Davos, suggest the forms ‘in which the corporate sector has come to play an ever more significant role in the governance of gender and development issues’ (ELIAS, 2013, p. 152). To advance this discussion, I engage with Foucault’s power/knowledge lens and feminist insights to explore the social meanings and implications of the Global Gender Gap Index to international relations based on the case of Nicaragua. As we build an argument about the political functions of the GGI in fostering governance of gender based on the case of Nicaragua, I first recognize power as ‘the ability of one entity to influence the action of another entity’ within displays of force relations that are pervasive to life in society, so we can discuss the extent to which the global gender gap index works not only as a global indicator of gender - that is, a scientific product produced by an organization – but as a device intrinsically embedded in a network of relations of power and knowledge in international affairs. To reflect on the Global Gender Gap Index's political functions is to make sense of their data (collection, sources, coding), analyze, limit, and, most importantly, it is to centre the quantitative and qualitative work of this global indicator of gender in its relationship to the exertion of power, management and discipline over social actors.

During the previous chapter, I presented an overview of the history and work produced by the Global Gender Gap Index, exposing its projections at the global level and in the case of Nicaragua. Once again, I call attention to the connection between the global gender gap index and its responsible institution – the World Economic Forum, because the data infrastructure created at the expense of the Global Gender Gap Index is undoubtedly grounded in the political project of this institution. For



example, the WEF's core mission is aligned with corporate governance practices to advance stakeholder capitalism and build resilient communities of public-private cooperation in the face of global economic challenges. This institutional framing of the world economy and affairs speaks volumes to the argument that data produced by the organization does not represent the *neutral output*. After all, for feminist perspectives of science, the 'extraction, production and interpretation' of large datasets often answer to the three S's – science, surveillance and selling led by corporations, with life-altering consequences for those contexts that are being measured and categorized (D'IGNAZIO and KLEIN, 2020, p. 45).

Over 13 years (2006 – 2019), the Global Gender Gap Index and its annual analyzes and ranks of countries have established itself with sufficient scientific authority over the diagnosis and interpretation of gender issues at the global level. Little to no other global indicator of gender continues to receive global attention in every report published in the media and local news. What sets the Global Gender Gap Index apart from other indicators of gender is, perhaps, its overall emphasis not only on quantitatively measuring countries' levels of gender inequality (instead of women's empowerment or development) but it is the comparative focus that places no weight in countries' levels of economic resources in the global economy, as well as its functioning as a *global ranking* of gender rather than a mere indicator of demographic statistics. Along with these starting points about the distinctiveness of the Global Gender Gap Index as a global ranking of gender, I join a Foucauldian-inspired perspective about the study and social role of quantitative forms of knowledge employed by political institutions. Where authors such as Clough and Willse highlight 'the consolidation of apparatuses for organizing, assessing, and investing populations in terms of the biopolitical (in)capacities of life and death' as critical mechanisms of violence in contemporary politics (2014, p. 4), this dissertation is concerned with a less visible, and certainly more subtle case of assessing interpretations at the global level based on countries' efficiency capabilities of 'performing gender equity', with a special focus on lessons provided by the case of Nicaragua.

Though we explored some of the reasons for the popularity of the creation and use of global indicators in international institutions in the previous chapter based on Merry (2015), it is worth mentioning that the Global Gender Gap Index fits with the overall demand for large-scale data about social issues that can be standardly measured, analyzed, and translated into supposedly 'reliable' non-political forms of

knowledge: numbers (quantitative work). At first sight, the quantitative results embodied by the Global Gender Gap Index Reports promise substantial knowledge about the evolution of national gender disparities, with global projections of gender, rankings and development of agenda-setting to tackle inequality and foster the country's competitiveness. It is noticeable how those technical and managerial purposes can obscure the political and cultural assumptions that shape the Global Gender Gap Index quantitative measurement and analysis. In the power-knowledge framework about global indicators, Davis et al (2015) maintain the production of global indicators and rankings comprises an inherently political process if we consider they are built based on the authoritative power 'to categorize, count, analyze, and *promote a system of knowledge* that has effects' in governance (p. 1). On that note, before diving into our case study of Nicaragua, when describing the Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019) as a system of knowledge in international relations, I consider the following processes concerning this global indicator: infrastructure of data collection, production and interpretation, conceptualization-framings of gender, forms of use and impact in the global governance of gender. I agree with Roses (p. 18) that rendering the reality thinkable through global indicators is to render it governable. Furthermore, I expand this perspective by discussing the ways reality is rendered thinkable and governable by the global gender gap index in *gendered terms* and *for gendered purposes in international affairs*.

*From a Foucaultian methodological reflection (FOUCAULT, 1979, p. 5), I disentangle the political functions of government of the global gender gap index starting from the governmental rationalities and praxis identified within this tool of quantification and move from there to uncover the framings of the 'universal' categories of government (state, political institutions, citizens, society and sovereign), so that we can notice how these universals (state, institutions, citizens, society) of international relations are modulated and transformed by conjunction with other praxis in history. In other words, Foucault asks the following question: what can we do from the 'universals' (institutions, concepts, forms of understanding reality) by first describing and understanding them based on the practices that structure them instead of taking universals as given? The main universals I take into account, per the description of the global gender gap index's traits as a text, are gender equality and inequality, states, economy and global competition and governance of gender.*

Following Baez's Foucauldian analytics that consider technologies of government in terms of texts, I interpret the global gender gap index reports as a 'text' – an artefact that creates meanings through different means beyond written forms, in which 'things are invented so as to justify their governance' (p. 2). The point of treating the GGI reports and quantified measures as a text is not to downplay the non-linguistic aspects of the indicator but to theorize the GGI's measurement and interpretation of Nicaragua as a complex linguistic text that also relies on a material infrastructure of data collection, production and interpretation that generate forms of government and games of truth. Arguably, not all forms of knowledge are necessarily tied to forms of government or effective forms of political intervention. But, according to Baez, particular forms of power use knowledge to incite action and change the conduct of actors in governable terms. Therefore, the case of the Global Gender Gap Index is one of many examples of devices whose text functions as forms of government based on different technologies of power. As Merry points out in her evaluation of global indicators of gender-based violence, I maintain that the Global Gender Gap Index uses numbers to craft and conjure broader narratives about gender equality between sexes in each country in relation to each other, with wider discursive and material consequences in international affairs. First and foremost, the indicator addresses a language of feminist social justice in its terms to *define what is being measured as gender equality, how gender equality can be understood and achieved, whose subjects are responsible, and what set of actions social actors need to engage with to improve their behaviour and maximize optimal positions in the global rankings.*

To analyze the quantification of gender inequality and the numbers behind each measurement in Nicaragua's experience, one must consider what the numbers of the GGI represent – for they represent not only the size and scope of an issue such as gender inequality between sexes but in Merry's words, but the establishment of global standards of counting, data collecting, thinking, projecting the issue of gender inequality and taking action for the sake of country's status and economy. Two things should be put in perspective: in the global gender gap index, gender inequality – a nonobjective phenomenon – is turned into a measurable category. Therefore it becomes the object of measurement and interpretation through arbitrary processes of commensurability. As I evaluate, gender inequality – the main feature measured and ranked in countries – including Nicaragua, 'embody the assumptions

about what should be counted, how to understand material reality' (MERRY, 2015, p. 36).

Inside a Foucaultian toolbox, power includes rationalities, techniques and practices to direct behaviour and action in a web of relations. Therefore, the global gender gap index's forms of engagement with quantitative measurement and interpretation of Nicaragua through the years attend to major forms of discipline and government at the structure of global governance of gender, as shall be explained during this chapter. Based on Foucault's (1997, p. 88) concept of power as government, I call attention to the *strategies, techniques and procedures* employed by the global gender gap index reports *to guide and control states' conduct* in gender relations in international affairs. *Despite the Foucaultian consideration centered on 'governmental technologies have human life as their object' (LEMKE, 2009, p. 51), in the case of the global gender gap index, we have a governmental technology of gender that has state life as their first object of intervention before arriving at human life in the individual and populational level, the reason why I chose to focus on a single case study to investigate such phenomena. Suppose quantification helps the government through numbers in transnational governance processes (DEMORTAIN, 2019, p. 275), and the global gender gap index emerges as one of the most stable and reliable quantitative tools for gender inequality for cross-country comparison, ranking and agenda-setting (ELIAS, 2013). Furthermore, I take the case study of Nicaragua to move my discussion forward toward the analysis of the political functions exerted by the GGI reports on the governance of gender in international affairs, so we can untangle the specific processes to which the numbers, interpretations and rankings provided by the GGI are most expressive to what the literature calls 'neoliberal governmentality of gender' (Peterson and Runyan, 2011; Prugl, 2015). I invoke such interpretation of the GGI's political functions as a form to expand Elias's analysis about the World Economic Forum-produced gender and development discourse, whose production of neoliberal-compatible female subjectivities is aligned with the politics and practices of neoliberalism (p. 152).*

*The case of Nicaragua is central to this analysis because it allows us to dig deeper into how the GGI assesses countries individually and what implications of this type of measurement are to gender issues that take place at the international and domestic levels. I do not intend to argue that the GGI has direct (causal) implications for Nicaragua's domestic or foreign policy toward gender equality. However, I will discuss*

*some commonalities shared by the index as a text in Foucauldian terms regarding the national gender project of Nicaragua under Ortega's administration. It is not my intention to discuss the GGI as a tool of power that is enforcing a form of governance; I would rather argue that the GGI is part or mutually constitutive of a web of power relations that reveal a fragment of the political functions of statistical aggregates in the attempt of governance over a social issue – in this case, gender equality. It is in this explicative spirit that I look at the case of Nicaragua's global leadership of gender – reported by the GGI, considering its ambiguity, its novelty for a country from the Global South and its potential to claim and use numbers as a repertoire of government and discipline in broader areas of governance. To explain such engagement, I recur to Erkilli and Pironne's (2018) model, in which global indicators present governing functions based on the successful execution of four processes in the context of global governance: objectification, subjectification, depoliticization or arena shifting and legitimation.*

In objectification, 'ambiguous—often subjective—ideas and concepts are turned into well-defined and collectively shared knowledge products' (idem, p. 25). The process of objectification at the global gender gap index displays a new language of global social change. For one, we should consider the GGI's novel approach towards gender equity as if 'gender equity' itself is a material asset or resource to advance a country's status in the global economy rather than a structural trait of oppression and disadvantage takes different forms in patriarchal societies. Specifically, the GGI structures itself based on the correlation between countries' gender gaps and national competitiveness within the economy (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2020, p. 30), arguing that for countries to remain competitive, they must create conditions for gender equality by maximizing the engagement with the nation's human capital development' (p. 33). In the rationale provided by the GGI, countries' long-term economic growth and productivity can be accelerated and expanded if countries would invest in 'gender equality' as a core aspect of national projects ('priority area for reform') (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2007, p. 20). To that extent, the GGI stresses gender equality, use of female talent and expanding men's rights to women as *the solution* 'to leverage a country competitiveness and development' (idem). As such, we ought to invoke critical analysis on the use of the language of gender equality and women's empowerment through international institutions has shown the extent to which feminist language has been 'inserted' into the international development industry, especially at the Millenium Declaration and Millenium Development Goals. In such contexts, both terms – gender

equality and women's empowerment - 'have been eviscerated of conceptual and political promises (...) to demand rights and justice' (CORNWALL and RIVAS, 2015, p. 1). On that note, I argue that a similar phenomenon occurs with the employment of "feminist language" by the Global Gender Gap Index, as already demonstrated by Elias (2013), in which the 'WEF's attempts to articulate a neoliberal-compatible gender and development discourse is that women, rather than men, emerge as the archetypal neoliberal subject—as those in society most capable of ensuring the right kind of market-led economic development' (ELIAS, 2013, p. 153).

*Most western feminist traditions in theory and advocacy address gender inequality as a structural subject to be tackled by and through collective action from grassroots movements against patriarchal and gendered forms of power-making that privilege masculine forms over feminine to subordinate women, though the theoretical alignments and specific goals vary depending on one's vision of feminism (BENERÍA et al, 2018). In contrast to this perspective, the GGI's framing of gender equality (and inequality) at the countries' levels deserves our consideration due to its incompatibility with gender inequality in social justice languages and feminist theories. That said, this dissertation highlights the GGI's language of gender is a rhetoric and shift in meaning-making of how nations should understand gender inequality using a historically 'feminist' language for social change and yet attaching new meanings to the relationship between gender inequality, populations and country competitiveness in the global markets. According to Lehman's (2019, p. 6) analysis of the Global Gender Gap Index, the language used by the index silences issues of violence against women by turning gender equality into something that can be solved through a 'business case', as it follows:*

The language (\*in the GGI) includes investment in girls, women as consumers and impacts on competitiveness. Claiming an objective measure in using ratios while claiming the WEF drives change for betterment is an example of symbolic violence under which impacts on women are naturalized into the language of business objectives which claim dominant and normalized conviction. Through a particular business language, a mindset is molded and developed toward privileging competitiveness, consumerism and profits. A movement is lauded not for social justice aims per se but for "deliverables" to the business community and economy. Measures are needed to prevent loss articulated with gentle advocacy, as if natural (idem, p. 6).

*Drawing on Lehman's (2019) critical reflection of accounting practices conducted by the GGI, I maintain that the GGI has removed the feminist ideological character of gender inequality and politicized the global issue in new areas of concern, whose target was not necessarily people but countries' behaviour. To count gender inequality in terms of educational attainment, economic opportunity, political empowerment and health and survival – restricting the quantification process to birth and death rates, for example – ignores a large area of concern for gender inequity in feminist terms and at the societal level. Defining, quantifying, and measuring gender inequality around these four parameters enables the government of gender to conform to the numbers present in criteria, scale and field of action. It is, in many ways, to model and attempts to optimize countries' behaviour in specific directions based on their supposedly ranked 'performance' as reported by the numerical and governance authority of the index from the World Economic Forum. In his power-knowledge framework, Foucault explains that "there can be no possible exercise of power without a certain economy of discourses of truth which operates through and on the basis of this association" (1986, p. 229), calling attention to the dissemination of regimes of truth to render power operational.*

Second, at the global gender gap index, the unit of analysis is nation-states instead of populations or individuals, which also makes the unit of analysis – or the national accounts that distinguish the conditions of one country from another, a set of political and technical choices that demand decision making and subjective criteria from the expertise team of the indicator. That said, the number 1 in the global gender gap index – whose meaning is full gender equality – tells us the story of maximum efficiency and ideal achievement to be set as global standards of a country's levels of gender equality. In contrast, the number 0 tells us about abnormal and suboptimal countries' experiences with gender equality, necessarily below the minimum standards of gender equality and policies. In other words, the spectrum of numbers quantified as countries' performance in the GGI holds the political power to exercise public international authority over gender matters to countries, leaders, and populations. Narratives of success and failure of countries' performance of gender equity by the indicator illustrate how the social phenomena of gender equality can be rendered 'real', 'governable' and 'disciplined' around specific areas of action and numerical quantification. Of course, each index and resulting outputs depend on an extensive data collection and production infrastructure to feed information into the GGI. The key

starting point is the infrastructure of data collection used to build the yearly evaluations and rankings produced by the GGI. Interestingly, as shown in this dissertation (p. 55) and World Economic Forum (2019, p. 45-46), in terms of sources, it is useful to recall that global data that feeds the global gender gap index for Economic participation and opportunity is derived from at least four sources: reports and modelled estimates from the International Labour Organization (ILO) and its section of statistics, the World Economic Forum – the organization that produces the indicator and Executive Opinion Survey (EOS) answered by corporate leaders who share membership in the World Economic Forum; The pieces of ‘raw information’ collected through those sources are compiled, re-organized and presented as an objective description of country’s levels of gender equality.

As Merry (2016) explains, indicators act as technologies of knowledge embedded in governance frameworks and power relations. This intertwining can be examined from what is considered relevant enough to be quantified and measured within a research theme or agenda. Thus, the GGI displays its objectification of gender equality and disparity around four basic categories (1) Economic Participation and Opportunity; (2) Education; (3) Health and Survival and (4) Political Empowerment) and 14 indicators allow us to point out more precisely which elements are considered politically important by the indicator’s formulator - the World Economic Forum, as they drive a production of knowledge that grants privilege to the above criteria, leaving aside, for example, the measurement of issues or forms of disparity between the sexes with regard, for example, to gender violence in its various contexts (domestic violence, in the workplace, harassment and exploitation sexual intercourse, in contexts of displacement, among others). By seeking to systematize and simplify the understanding of the global gender disparity in national units, the GGI sanitizes the understanding of how oppression makes women’s experiences vulnerable around the globe, highlighting the collection of data through databases of United Nations agencies, World Bank and executive surveys of the World Economic Forum – which accounts for 1/3 of the data collection for the sub-index Economic Participation and Opportunity, carried out with its working groups in the business sector around the world.

Hence, what are the implications of cognitive restrictions in framing gender equality, and how do they answer political questions of the governance of gender? By dislodging gender inequality from its main components – gendered violence, structural sexism and society – the index successfully reinscribes gender



equality as a performance of capabilities in using the nation's human capital. Had a country used and invested in its human capital fully, the more gender equal that country would be evaluated in its global performance. To illustrate such a description, the GGI frames that 'gender-based inequality prevents societies as a whole, women and men, from reaching *their full potential*' (2006, p. 3). Such description is compatible with a narrative of women's empowerment and gender equality that has emerged in the contemporary business and development agenda (CORNWALL and RIVAS, 2015, p. 1). In feminist thought and social work, Cornwall clarifies that empowerment entails the transformation of power relations contingent upon someone's positionality rather than principles to foster women's inclusion in a domain concerning their male peers: 'it concerns the relations of power in which people are located, within which they may experience disempowerment or come to acquire the 'ability to make strategic life choices', and it is contingent on a prior or future state'.

Furthermore, 'it is not just about improving women's capacities to cope with situations in which they experience oppression or injustice' (p. 10). Nevertheless, when women's empowerment is employed in conjunction with languages of gender equality in the Global Gender Gap Index, one can notice the GGI uses a feminist language in similar ways to the ones explored in previous developmental agendas, such as the Millennium Development Goals, World Bank and International Monetary Fund. Far from an isolated framing of gender, women's empowerment is a powerful language in the history of the international development industry and significant human rights instruments. More than that, scholars contend that The Beijing Platform for Action (1995) established a global call for women's *empowerment in political participation*, educational attainment, reproductive health and rights, employment and economic resources, among others (MOGHADAM and SENFTOVA, 2005, p. 289). In all of those, 'the intrinsic value of women's empowerment (...)' is associated with "unleashing potential' and harnessing the power of billions of women workers and their transformative economic effects as the producers and consumers who will drive growth" (CORNWALL and RIVAS, 2015, p. 11).

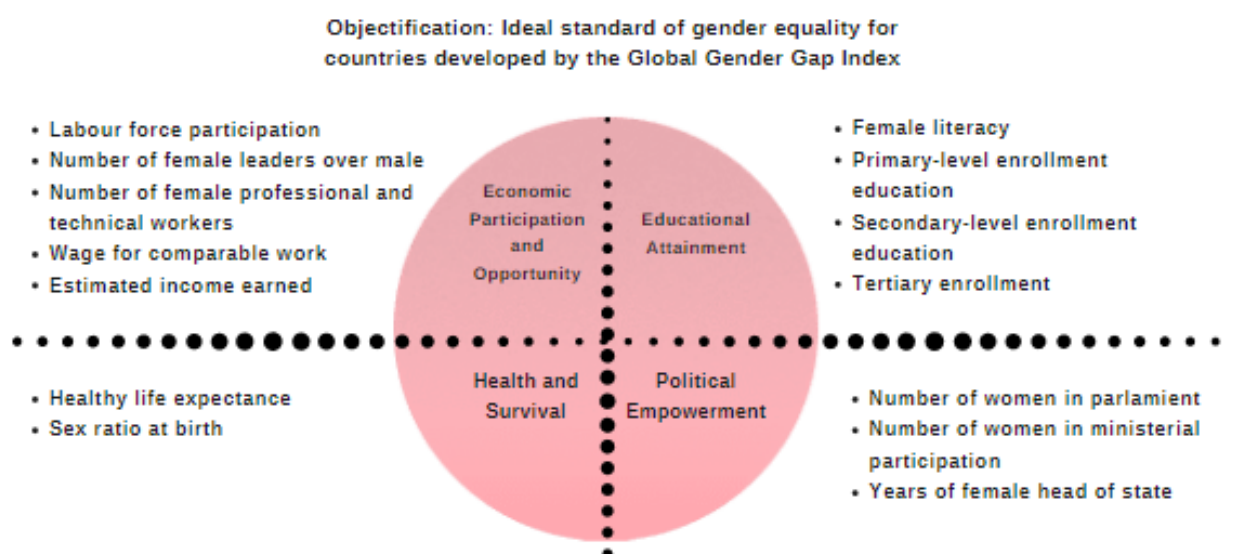
In this sense, where Runyan and Peterson (2012, p. 126) sustain that Gender Equality Indices are used for the global institutionalization of gender equality, with the World Economic Forum and Global Gender Gap Index as examples of the participation of corporate actors in the governance of gender equality, I join their feminist foucaultian interpretation of such phenomena as forms of neoliberal

governmentality based on the production of feminized, 'good economic woman' and entrepreneurial subjectivities. More specifically, I attend to the notion of 'neoliberalisation of feminism' (PRUGL, 2015, p. 4) to analyze the 'the interweaving of feminist ideas into rationalities and technologies of neoliberal governmentality'. To that, I consider neoliberalism in the foucautian sense, understanding its multidimensional character as a cultural formation in the mixed form of a rationality and orthodoxy economics in which market-based forms of government occurs. For example, the GGI's edition in the aftermath of the 2008 financial crisis points out that the skills and talent of the female human resource pool are one of the cornerstones of economic growth available to countries and companies. Moreover, '*as consumers, voters, employees and employers, women will be integral to global economic recovery*' (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2009, p. 05). In this sense, the rhetorical work of the GGI connects a range of identities integral to women's usefulness as resources in the global economy: consumers, voters, employees and employers in the face of the financial crisis. Second, we can notice a similar trend with the subjectification of identities but this time with relation to 'girls' as 'development investments' with large returns to countries: 'Girls' education yields some of the highest returns of all development investments, yielding both private and social benefits that accrue to individuals, families and society at large' (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2009, p. 47). Another demonstration is seen when the GGI claims that 'educated girls who become mothers are more likely to send their children to school, passing on and multiplying benefits. This breaks the intergenerational chain of poverty' (idem). By connecting girlhood, motherhood and the end of poverty, the GGI establishes new relationships in which girls are the bearers of 'global solutions' for countries' growth ("girls' education and its multiplier effects"), similarly to Cornwall's analysis on empowerment-gendered discourses promoted at the World Bank and Development Goals Agenda for the United Nations. Thus, the World Economic Forum, supported by the knowledge and scientific authority provided by the GGI, acts as an agent of neoliberal governmentality and the latter, a technology of power and knowledge. It governs gender equality (or, as I will expand on later based on the case of Nicaragua: national gender projects) as a co-terminal goal with the country's levels of economic efficiency and the maintenance of capitalism, with both states and populations as neoliberal subjects. About this interpretation, Runyan and Peterson (2012, p. 131-132) explain:

‘(...) Governmentality pertains not only to state and suprastate bureaucratic apparatuses and policies but also to civil society institutions that enable governing on the basis of rational, scientific, and statistical calculations and produce human subjectivities that are amenable to being “managed” or “regulated” and even participate in self-management or self-regulation in conformance with rationalized approaches to “problem-solving,” now associated with “good governance” (Woehl 2008: 65–66 apud RUNYAN AND PETERSON, 132).

However, how does the case of Nicaragua illustrate the objectification performed by the global gender gap index reports? *Concerned with the optimization of countries’ performance in gender equity based on gender gaps across four areas, the GGI certainly provides a map of the state of gender affairs in many countries, where ‘it ranks countries according to their proximity to gender equality rather than to women’s empowerment’ (GGI, 2006, p. 5). From 2006 to 2019, the period to which this dissertation refers, one could illustrate ‘the map of the state of gender affairs in Nicaragua’ by engaging with the data from the GGI reports into two distinct moments of Nicaragua’s contemporary history: (1) when Nicaragua is portrayed as a country whose performance situates ‘below the average standards of gender equality’ (2006 – 2011) and (2) when the country is represented as a ‘world leader in gender equity’ above the standards of gender equality abroad (2012 – 2019). In these two temporal intervals (2006 – 2011, 2012-2019), it is possible to notice precisely how the objectification process performed by the GGI re-creates boundaries of quantification and representation used to reflect the social world of Nicaragua.*

**Fig. 29 Operationalization of objectification in the GGI**



Source: Developed during this dissertation.

*In addition, this type of objectification affects not only how international actors understand gender equality in the country but also it exercises power over how the state of Nicaragua might define gender equality at the domestic level. Each numerical evaluation describes a four-axed scenario of gender disparity in Nicaragua in relation to ‘an ideal standard of gender equality’ (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2013, p. 10). GGI attribute distinct descriptions of national and global identities to ‘gender issues’ in Nicaragua based on the GGI’s authority in scientific measurements compared to more than 100 countries. Interestingly, because international financial institutions – including the World Economic Forum, responsible for the development of the GGI – framings of gender equality as a matter of modern economic efficiency’ (RUNYAN AND PETERSON, 2012, p. 132), which along with other mechanisms open interpretation to the neoliberal governmentality that underpins gender equality promoted at the global level, it becomes prevalent the fact that the major shortcomings of evaluations provided by the GGI’s with respect to the Nicaragua – political empowerment, gender-based violence and health and survival - are related to the social construct of gender equality as a capability. In this spirit, ‘accountability for reform resides in the “objects” themselves’ with ‘the promotion of individual aspirations and corporate identities’ (PRÜGL, 2015) under an ‘androcentric construction of states as not responsible for the welfare of their citizenries’ (RUNYAN AND PETERSON, 2012, p. 133). Therefore, as this dissertation will demonstrate in the following paragraphs, little space is left in the measurements provided by the GGI to recognize the actual violence, forms of gender inequality and gendered challenges in Nicaragua when it comes to analyze the country in terms of political empowerment, health and survival and socioeconomic status beyond neoliberal rationalities assumed by the GGI to govern states as their main objects. Moreover, I argue that the main political functions performed by the GGI can be further traced by considering the instrumentalization of neoliberal rationalities of gender as well as its controversial effects when we look at what has been missed in its evaluation of Nicaragua’s levels of gender equality under a feminist analysis. Hence, one of the political effects noticed in the GGI’s framings of gender equality in Nicaragua is its potential to maintain the status quo of gender-based violence at the structural level by fostering heteronormative rearrangements of gendered constructs under marketized notions while failing to address gender equality as a systemic structure and women’s emancipation as a critical and collective project of political transformation.*

*In the time frame (2006- 2011), when Nicaragua is portrayed as a country whose performance situates 'below the average standards of gender equality' (2006 – 2011), one should consider not only the objectification of gender equality into a measurable phenomenon but also the impacts of such objectification to Nicaragua's state-branding in gender equality. For one, as we analyze the GGI's narrative about Nicaragua across the years based on the bar graph below, it becomes clear that there are drastic changes in Nicaragua's conditions, given the country's levels of gender disparity went from 62<sup>nd</sup> place in the 2006's global ranking, below gender equity global standards to the 27<sup>th</sup> position in 2011. Based on the analysis of the GGI, one can imply that Nicaragua's place in the global ranking and its poor performance in economic participation posed a significant risk for Nicaragua's development in the global economy, suggesting a definite poor use of its female talent. This type of rhetoric works as a universal global policy script of gender. For instance, the global gender gap index report (2012, p. 58-59) highlights 'Key areas of national policy frameworks of gender' that are central to mitigate gender inequality at the global level and adopted by countries that are world leaders in gender equality: parental leave, childcare assistance, taxation system and equality and work. Moreover, it attributes 'under-performing' subjective identities to states, as if they were cohesive units of human behaviour instead of political institutions and calls for action in policymaking. The political imaginary of gender equity is altered with respect to gender and countries. Though gender equality is treated as structural subject, in the sense that countries are compared to each other, the content of gender equality is treated as an individual trait within the countries' domestic structure that such countries are responsible for. The relationships between countries created by the GGI are relative to competition, performance and 'naming-and-shaming' discursive techniques. Undeniably, the GGI first report stresses the role of country comparisons, as the following:*

The country comparisons are meant to serve a dual purpose: as a benchmark to identify existing strengths and weaknesses; and as a useful guide for policy, based on learning from the experiences of those countries that have had greater success in promoting the equality of women and men. The index quantifies the gender gap within the four critical categories— economic-, educational-, political and health- based criteria—thus highlighting the priority areas for reform (2006, p. 3).

To exemplify this characteristic, in Nicaragua, the GGI demonstrate the 'weakest points' in Nicaragua's social structure of gender equality, namely economy and

political empowerment (2006 – 2011), in which the government and international stakeholders must take action to change it and outperform its peers. By understanding and measuring each country within the same criteria and not accounting for the structural and historical differences between countries, the GGI publicized shared identities that would not be existent without the process of quantification and objectification of gender equity. In 2006, Nicaragua ranked 62<sup>nd</sup> and performed poorly in the subindex of Economy. However, the relational effects of the ranking allow us to compare Nicaragua as a country that could have better conduct in gender equity if the country mirrored the actions of the best performer in the world: Sweden. At the same that the GGI subtly demonstrate the best performers, it is also implying the message that such countries had somehow managed their gender disparities better than the “worst performers” as self-responsible actors.

On that note, the case of Nicaragua enables us to expand on the second governing function of global indicators present within the GGI. Second to the objectification of gender equity, Erkkila and Piirone (2018) argue that subjectification is a governing function often performed by global indicators in good governance, democracy levels, country's economic competitiveness and global higher education. In this definition, subjectification takes place when ‘classifications, often obtained through measurements, are linked to personal or collective identities’. When a global indicator performs subjectification, it shapes new identities within political imaginaries, ‘leading currently to the atomization of subjects—states, institutions and individuals—that are increasingly seen to compete in global economy’ (idem, p. 31). As an illustration of the subjectification performed by the GGI, each country will be numerically represented with different profiles in gender disparity: in the image below, Nicaragua's narrative of gender disparity (2006, 2007) shows observed weaknesses (Economy and Political Empowerment) and strengths shown by measures (Health and Survival, Educational Attainment). Those suggest different directions for social actors and policymaking: areas with higher scores reinforce those successful practices are taking place; while areas considered ‘weaknesses’ of countries (low scores) indicate domains that should be prioritized to improve Nicaragua's efficiency in gender equity at the global level so the country can be a world leader just as ‘best cases’ (Nordic countries). In the GGI's words (2006, p. 15): as strong performers in the GGI, ‘they (\*Nordic countries) provide a useful benchmark for comparison purposes and in some ways offer a model for the rest of the world’.

Though 2006 – 2011, Nicaragua is below global standards of gender equity and certainly far from the conduct of the ‘world leader in gender equity’ – Sweden, Nicaragua is nevertheless above the supposedly ‘world loser in gender equity’ in the global ranking, to use the same precarious language – Yemen. Interestingly, the GGI enable comparison with the overall score of Nicaragua and with respect to each area evaluated an aspect that complexifies the results of subjectification into identity-formation of international actors. During the 2007’s edition of the GGI, for example, Nicaragua reaches one of its lowest scores during its 13 years of trajectory: 90<sup>th</sup> position in the overall global ranking of the gender gap. Furthermore, its precarious position suggests that Nicaragua is a country for global concern with gender equity and in the economic domain, as its score deteriorated in all areas concerning the previous year’s performance. Moreover, due to the comparative and benchmarking nature of the GGI, one can inevitably contrast Nicaragua with other self-fulfilling and responsible agents in the realm of gender disparity (states). When we position Sweden and Yemen’s profiles close to Nicaragua (2006, 2007), it becomes possible to contend *the areas* in which Nicaragua assembles and diverges from Sweden (world leader) and Yemen (world loser), forging new cognitive meanings and data references for international actors. Because Nicaragua and other countries’ measurements provide a competitive performance-based scenario of gender disparity, states are treated as atomistic entities whose behaviour can be ‘separate’ if not isolated from the web of relations. This atomization that accompanies the subjectification of countries measured by the GGI creates a political imaginary in which countries should strive for improvements and whose relationships in international affairs are ones of competition through the system of ‘rewarding and shaming’ each performance in the global ranking. The recurring references of ‘model subjects’ such as Nordic countries – especially Sweden during these two first years – create a dichotomy towards subjects whose performances are further from the ideal standards of gender equity proposed by the GGI through objectification. For example, from 2006-2007, in the evaluations and projections below among Nicaragua (62<sup>nd</sup> and 90<sup>th</sup> place, 2006-2007), Yemen (115<sup>th</sup> and 128<sup>th</sup> place, as more countries were added to the GGI’s evaluation in the following year) and Sweden (1<sup>st</sup> place in world ranking both in 2006 and 2007), we might interpret that Nicaragua’s description of the social reality of gender disparity is suboptimal but more alike the best performer – Sweden in the areas of Educational Attainment and Health and Survival,

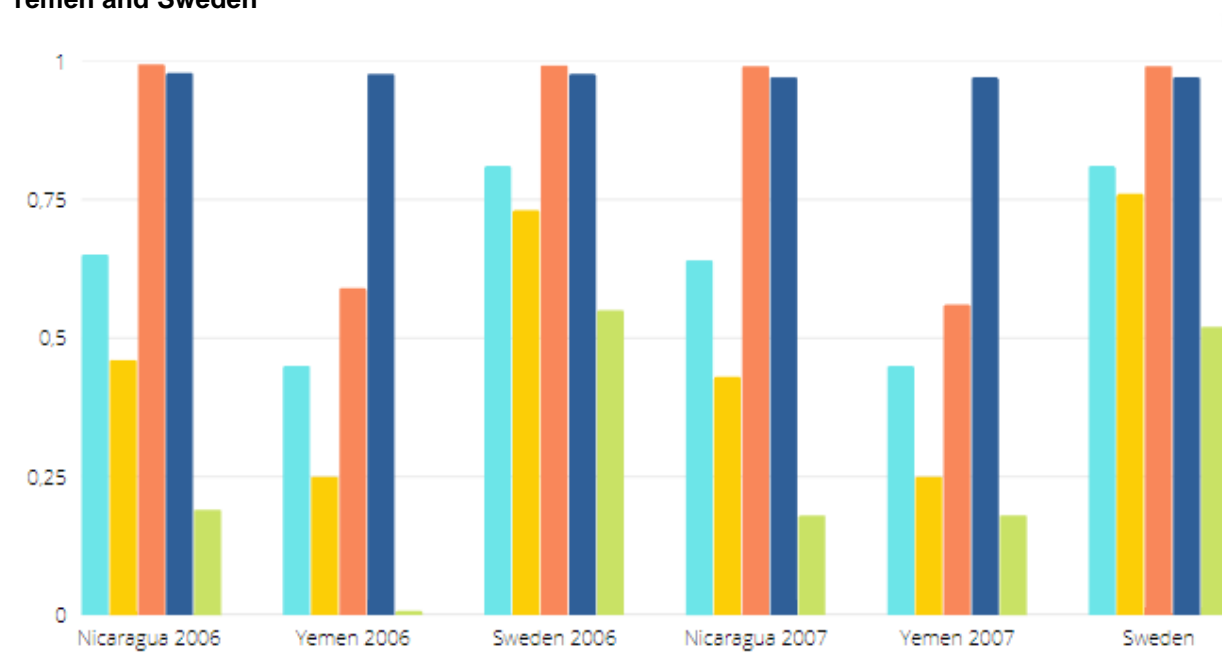
which creates space for the making of its global status in gender equity in the domains of Educational Attainment and Health Status that will be more prevalent after 2011.

In contrast, when Nicaragua's overall performance (2006-2007) is compared to the optimal performance of Sweden, it becomes visible that the hugest gender gap in Nicaragua is related to Political Empowerment, even more than the gap in Economic Opportunity. Though this might be seen as a discursive framing of Nicaragua's potential priorities areas for social change, I argue that there are policy implications for Nicaragua that challenge a traditional view of power relations in international affairs; after all, it is not as if the GGI is governing nation-states in a top-down directional approach of power, or if, at the opposite side, governed states are simply influencing the knowledge produced by GGI. Instead, the GGI is one manifestation of broader gendered dynamics that are taking place within countries simultaneously as the GGI's evaluations. The numbers represented through the bar graphs build a simplified overview of Nicaragua as a country that should not pursue the same steps taken by penalized countries with poor performance, such as Yemen. The creation of otherness ('worst', 'poor performance', 'abnormal') is then relational to the identity-making of Nicaragua during 2006-2007. Because the global gender gap index scores also provide a time projection for the country's achievement of gender equity, the statistics predictions are future-making. The report presents conditions and predicts future outcomes for Nicaragua, and interestingly, those future outcomes of economic growth and competitiveness in Nicaragua had associated the country with a negative image and disadvantaged scenario for women in the long haul. As an example of the subjectification process of identity-making and state-branding, when Nicaragua is in the 'top 10' best performers in gender equality in the world, other international actors make use of this knowledge: *The news website Sunday Times (2013), for instance, is one of the media outlets that report that 'Women in Cuba, Nicaragua and Lesotho are more likely to be treated as equal to men than those in Britain, according to an influential report on gender gaps'.* In this type of interpretation, there is an implicit world competition between countries as gender equality becomes a trait that represents 'fast progress' for countries' identities. Hence, the source automatically connects performance results from different countries to assume that based on the Global Gender Gap Index's evaluation Nicaragua is more women-friendly than supposedly developed countries such as Britain by arguing that *'Britain lags behind (...) in the race to gender equality'.* Another organization, Instituto de Nutrición de Centro América y



Panamá, reports that *‘Nicaragua remains the most advanced country in the region with respect to gender equality (...), ranking 10<sup>th</sup> in the world index and 5<sup>th</sup> place in political participation’*<sup>43</sup> (INCAP, 2014) based on the evaluation provided by the GGI. Furthermore, another media source points out that *‘Nicaragua is the world’s unlikely champion in gender equality’*<sup>44</sup> (QUARTZ, 2015). According to this interpretation from the GGI, gender equality is objectified not only as a capability, but it becomes a matter of competition in which there are countries subjectified as ‘champions’, ‘winners’, and ‘losers’ in the annual race to mitigate gender inequality at the global level. Rosario-Murillo, Nicaragua’s vice-president is quick to comment that Nicaragua’s world leadership: ‘We were there when we came to the government. (From there) to the fifth place in 2018, we continue to maintain gender parity, that is, gender equality in ministerial positions and (Nicaragua) has one of the highest proportions in the world of women in parliament’ (TELESUR, 2018, sp).

**Fig. 30. Modelling Nicaragua’s graphic evolution in scores of gender parity in comparison to Yemen and Sweden**



Source: developed during this dissertation based on data collected from GGI (2006-2007).

All things considered, it is worth understanding that the supposedly weaknesses in gender disparity in Nicaragua (2006 – 2011) are *specific dimensions* of Economic Participation and Opportunity and Political Empowerment. After 2007 the GGI

<sup>43</sup> See Incap (2014):

<https://www.sica.int/busqueda/Noticias.aspx?IDItem=84377&IDCat=3&IdEnt=29&Idm=1&IdmStyle=1>.

<sup>44</sup> See Quartz (2015): <https://qz.com/556722/nicaragua-the-worlds-unlikely-champion-of-gender-equality/>.

reports a significant improvement in Nicaragua's score. Based on the bar graphs of Nicaragua's scores over the years (2007 – 2011), in 2008, the country's growth was driven by an improvement in Political Empowerment and a 1<sup>st</sup> world place in educational attainment. The subjectification of Nicaragua's precarious national and global identity in matters of gender is further supported by its below-the-world average scoring in Economic Participation - 0.461. While leader in education attainment, with promising conduct in political empowerment, it is certainly an *outlier* case in the economic domain, where the world average score was 0.587 (GGI, 2008, p. 125). As a response to suboptimal performances in countries such as Nicaragua over the years, the GGI models and signals 'best practices' of world leaders in gender equality to be followed by their underperforming peers over the years. From this perspective, 'Best practices' is a loose term for global policy scripts of gender promoted at the GGI – drawing from the case of Iceland, for example, 'best world practices' include family care, parental leave, and legislative reform to promote women's integration into the formal labour market and leadership corporate positions (GGI, 2010, p. 10-20).

In the Economic Participation and Opportunity sub-index, it is also possible to question the economic orthodoxy present in this criterion's measurement and quantification process in the GGI through a critique of the methodological production field of feminist economics. In their proposal of gender analysis in the international economy, Benería et al (2018) draw our attention to some of the fundamental objectives of an economic approach with gender analysis, such as "generating explanations about the causes, nature and role that gender inequalities fulfil in the economy while seeking to modify the subordinate position of women in society" (idem, p. 106), while at the same time making the process of recognizing the sexual division of labour and accounting for work central, including its informal, voluntary and unpaid reproductive work dimension performed by women in the economy. In their critique of statistical practices and accounting around traditional work, Benería et al (2018, p. 291) demonstrate that there is a persistent disconnect between official statistics on rates of women's economic activity in relation to what was observed during in-loco visits in the countries, with underestimation of the participation rates of women in informal work and its centrality to reproductive work. Thus, in the political and theoretical project *Accountings for Women's Work*, bases are offered for us to problematize the case of accounting for work disaggregated by sex of the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex of the GGI. After all, the sub-index makes an important part of

women's economic activity invisible within the care economy and its links with the market economy, which, on the one hand, neglects the possibility of analyzing more broadly the scenario of work and economic activity of women in the world and on the other hand, the possibility of thinking about policies for reconciling paid and unpaid work performed by women. This is because much of the literature highlights the intrinsic relationship between gender inequality and the naturalization and precariousness of women's unpaid reproductive work, an issue ignored by the GGI's social theory premise, which conceives gender as a fixed and binary category and disparity of gender through an orthodox logic or gender analysis of neoclassical legacy with prioritization of data disaggregated by sex. To expand on that, research has shown the prevalent nature of heteronormativity in the international development industry (discourses, policies and programs) with its overall focus on normative family models and the status quo of gender structures and relations, which often exclude queer communities in detriment of governing constructs of heteronormative intimacies (LIND, 2010, p. 2-3).

That said, I will now contextualize improvements and constraints to gender equality in Nicaragua beyond what is shown by the Global Gender Gap Index in this same time frame (2006 – 2011) in an attempt to analyze and discuss its political functions and limitations. I provide an alternate narrative of gender equality in Nicaragua based on local and international data (Human rights reports from organizations from civil society and international agencies and government archives) as part of the method of data triangulation within this dissertation. As the past paragraphs had shown, through the years 2006 – 2008, GGI's evaluation of Nicaragua's conduct in gender parity was not promising. Again, I argue that the negative characterization of Nicaragua's national identity with social issues of gender fostered by such scores and rankings (62<sup>nd</sup> place, 90<sup>th</sup> place, and 71<sup>st</sup> place, respectively) is consistent with a general view propagated by the GGI's first editions that countries from the global south – specifically from Latin America and Caribe – are in the worst position of gender developments in comparison to those of the global north, partly due to the inaction of the Nicaraguan government, considering that the GGI relies on an argument of self-sufficiency and self-government of gender within countries, in which states are treated as individual actors self-responsible for their gender affairs. As of 2013, though, the global gender gap index reports Nicaragua as one of the fastest improving countries in gender parity in the world with the 'highest improvement to date (20%)', compared to exemplary leaders such as Nordic countries. In 2014, the third year Nicaragua entered the 'top 10', the GGI

describes Nicaragua's position (6<sup>th</sup> best country in gender parity in the world) and contends that Nicaragua *is the "best performer in the region and the only country from Latin America and the Caribbean to make it into the top 10, having achieved this for the third consecutive year, (...) having closed 79% of the gender gap"* (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2014, p. 22).

Furthermore, as we recall that one of the main political functions performed by the GGI is governing functions under neoliberal governmentality, we should not ignore the fact that Nicaragua's public authorities have used the GGI's reports on Nicaragua's world leadership in gender equality in its political platforms, which suggests an overt form of positive interaction and assimilation of the index's framings of gender equality about its measured objects. Ultimately, Nicaragua's vice-president, Rosario Murillo, uses Nicaragua's world leadership to celebrate and compare the country's levels of development as "superior" in relation to western peers. Not only the vice-president celebrates the results reported by the GGI on Nicaragua's performance, but she also uses a similar language of gender-based justice to the one adopted by the GGI and United Nations Development Agendas:

'Compañeros, compañeras, gran noticia también, vamos, estamos, nos reportó nuestro embajador Ricardo Alvarado desde los países nórdicos, **5to lugar Nicaragua en equidad de género en el mundo, quinto lugar.** Dios nos bendice, Dios escucha, Dios nos guía, Dios nos ilumina. **Primero está Islandia, después Noruega, después Finlandia, después Suecia, después Nicaragua, nuestra Nicaragua de Luz, de Vida, de Verdad, de Equidad. Nueva Zelanda, luego Irlanda, luego España, luego Ruanda y luego Alemania. Son los primeros 10 lugares y nosotros, este paisito pequeño, este paisito lleno de coraje, este país inmenso en espíritu en el quinto lugar por encima de tantos otros países poderosos, potentes [...]** Por ejemplo dice, **los Estados Unidos 53, lugar 53.** Nosotros estamos en los cinco primeros lugares en el mundo, por eso siempre decimos: **no somos un país pobre, somos un país empobrecido por la rapiña de las potencias y luego por los vendepatrias** que también quieren seguir rapiñando como rapiñaron en los 16 años, seguir saqueando el país, seguir arrebatando derechos al pueblo humilde, al pueblo trabajador. **No somos un país pobre sino empobrecido por los ánimos y los apetitos insaciables del imperio y de los imperialistas o serviles o sicarios de los imperialistas aquí localmente.** Somos un pueblo grande, rico en espíritu, esto lo prueba. **Vamos adelante con muchos éxitos de la justicia, porque eso es justicia, la equidad de género es justicia!**' (EL 19 DIGITAL, 2019).

Besides the narrative created by the GGI's reports, it is undeniable that historical key events provide another angle – and to some extent, entirely other narratives – about gender affairs in the country. For didactic reasons, I will expose the connections between such historical events with new narratives about gender equality in the country based on similar 'criteria' employed by the GGI, only within a different order and qualitative engagement: health and survival economic opportunity, political empowerment and educational attainment. My argument here is that Ortega's administration had developed a national gender project in Nicaragua (2006 – 2019), one that is compatible with the Global Gender Gap Index reports' content and, lastly, one that demonstrates some of the governing and normalizing functions of the GGI at play throughout the years. I now will contextualize key historical events to gender equality in Nicaragua under Ortega's government based on a qualitative approach of data triangulation and feminist literature on Nicaragua and gender politics. To avoid how broad (and sometimes vague) the notion of 'gender politics' can be for one to identify 'key historical events to gender equality', I must clarify that the alternative narrative with 'key historical events' to gender equality in Nicaragua is based on the concept of 'national gender project' (CONWELL, 2002; FERREE, 2013). Gender projects refer to *the nature of gender politics* pursued within political institutions, such as states: when nation-states – or, in this case Nicaragua under Ortega's administration – actively attempt to maintain or transform the status quo of gender relations and women's rights. I define the content from the national gender project of Nicaragua based on legal reforms and laws passed during Ortega's administrations (2007 – 2019), reports from international human rights and women's organizations from civil society, and lastly discourses from the Ministry of Women's Affairs and vice-president Rosario Murillo.

For each area measured at the GGI in the case of Nicaragua, I consider alternative domestic events as part of my qualitative analysis. The key events, discourses and outcomes explored provide not only an alternative narrative of gender disparities in the country, one that largely contrasts with the evaluations provided by the GGI, but also allows us to recognize the political functions performed by the GGI in the government of gender - or rather, national projects of gender, as I shall explore later. In matters of health and survival, I consider as main events for my analysis: (a) gendered discourses within policies and speeches from Ortega's administration as well as adverse outcomes of policies that target women's health; (b) the outlawing of all forms of abortion, with the penal code reform based on law 641 and its implications to

women's health in the country; (c) the investigation on the violation women's rights in matters of health and health care conducted by the International Amnesty; (d) when the state of Nicaragua was reported by women's movements to the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights, being later subjected to preventive measures. In the axis of political empowerment evaluated by the GGI, I contrast it in the case of Nicaragua by exploring an alternative perspective on Political Empowerment and feminist-state relations through the following elements: (a) gendered discourses that target women's political empowerment during Ortega's administration; (b) Ortega's actions of repression and political discourses against activists and women's movements; (c) law reforms for gender parity. Furthermore, I discuss gender-based violence in Nicaragua based on law reforms, such as (a) the launching of the Integral Law 779 against gender-based violence towards women (2012), (b) the reform of Law 779 to 'safeguard the family unit' in Nicaragua (2013); (c) the creation of 'Gabinetes de la Familia (state institutions for family counselling and state mediation in cases of gender-based violence); (d) the discontinuation of the social program 'Comísarias de la Mujer y niñez' (2016); finally, in the account of gender disparities in the economic domain, I bring attention to the discursive and material implications from national campaigns, discourses and laws.

For this dissertation's data collection, literature review and analysis, I have found evidence that the national political project within Ortega's administration *is gendered in four specific areas: women's health, reproductive rights and survival; women's political participation and interests in state-civil society relations and women's economic participation. I consider Ortega's national project a gendered project for Nicaragua, because* it carries discursive and material implications for the form and content of gender relations, women's lives, and the degrees of gender inequality. Moreover, I contend the GGI cannot capture the particularity of the national gender project of Nicaragua in the context of gender equality. Rather, the GGI provides an inaccurate assessment of Nicaragua as a world leader in gender equity, a label incompatible with the state of gender affairs at the domestic level. Considering that Nicaragua's Report to the United Nations (2019, p. 8) has stated 'gender equality and empowerment' as a fundamental axis in the National Policy of Gender in the country, one should not ignore the institutional engagement of the government with gender issues, gender relations and women's interests is part of a broader national political project rather than an organic movement pursued in Ortega's administration.

#### 4.1 THE GGI'S NORMALIZING FUNCTIONS TO WOMEN'S HEALTH AND SURVIVAL IN NICARAGUA

When gender equality in Nicaragua is understood at the domestic level through qualitative data rather than the quantitative measurement of the GGI, one can argue the path towards Ortega's consolidation of power and its administration in Nicaragua (2006 – 2019) is illustrative of how nations and national projects can be gendered with significant (negative) effects to women's lives, in fair contrast with the narratives on the low levels of gender disparities in health and survival reported by the GGI, in which Nicaragua is considered a world leader in the matter. To problematize such measurement and interpretation provided by the GGI over Nicaragua is to contextualize this narrative with domestic events that are certainly neglected within the GGI's forms of evaluation. In this topic, I bring attention to some of the main events that have negatively affected women's lives in Nicaragua in terms of health and survival, including but not limited to (a) the outlawing of all forms of abortion, with the penal code reform based on law 641 and its implications to women's health in the country; (b) the investigation on the violation women's rights in matters of health and health care conducted by the International Amnesty; (c) when the state of Nicaragua was reported by women's movements to the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights, being later subjected to precautionary measures and (e) gendered discourses in Rosario-Murrillo and Ortega's administration as well as negative outcomes of policies that target women's health.

By comparing domestic matters, it becomes possible to consider the broader political functions executed by the GGI's forms of measurement and rationales. Historically, the symbolization of Nicaraguan women's roles in the Sandinista project has been present within the nationalist imaginary. Yuval-Davis (1997), for instance, asks the double-side question: "what women can do for nations and what nations can do for them" the contemporary history of Nicaragua demonstrates the differential ways national projects can be gendered in Latin America. In this sense, "Mothers, daughters and comrades" of the revolution were one of the collective identities in which women's roles were portrayed throughout the years concerning the public and political life in the country (KAMPWIRTH, 2012), with an emphasis on the association between motherhood and war. To illustrate this ideological positioning of female identity, Zpniga and Viquez (2014, p. 237) report the current president Daniel Ortega was of the patriarchal opinion that *"the revolutionary task of Nicaraguan women was to give birth*

*and give birth*” to replace the human losses from the Sandinista revolution. Motherhood in Nicaragua had a two-fold role in its revolutionary nationalist project: women were fighters and child-bearers and were central to the reproduction of the political memory of mourning and suffering the war against the Somoza dictatorship, which could be perceived in women’s articulations such as the National Marching of Mourning Women (1944), or even the creation of Women’s Association for the National Problematic (AMPRONAC) in the 1970s.

Based on Walby’s (2000, p. 523) notion that nations and national projects can be gendered, I maintain that Nicaragua’s national project has been imperative in articulating gender differences at the domestic level. The first report released by the GGI (2006) is separated by the historical outlawing of women’s reproductive rights in Nicaragua within one month. After all, the full prohibition of therapeutical abortion was the agenda of the electoral platform in the country of Daniel Ortega’s presidential campaign, signed and supported by the FLSN party. According to Kampwirth’s (2011) study into leftwing gender politics in contemporary Nicaragua, Daniel Ortega’s government fostered what she calls ‘anti-gender politics’ that combines a leftwing face with a neoliberal, nationalist and religious ideology. One cannot help but notice how ‘the gendered components of Ortega’s 2006 electoral strategy (...) have weakened feminists and made life more precarious for many women’ (idem, 2016, p. 31). Because reproductive rights are so central to feminist history, organizing and progressive agendas for gender equality, the full prohibition of abortion became a historical turn of gender politics and debates in the country, and certainly, it did not represent the only gendered struggle that would be a turning point for the nature of gender policies during Ortega’s government. As such, one should consider the limitation of reproductive freedom as part of a broader political project that fosters and model particular gender relations between sexes (KAMPWIRTH, 2016, p. 34), a project necessarily supported by the political allyship between religious groups (roman catholic and protestants) and the FLSN party. That said, the national project of Nicaragua drew heavily on the domestic gender regime fostered by ideals aligned within catholic and protestant religious groups of power in the country.

Ever since 2007, the autonomy of Nicaraguan women’s bodies has become a dispute terrain and object by the political coalition between the state, Ministry of Family and religious powers as opposed to the positions of local women’s movements, feminists, and marginalized communities. In essence, the limitation of



women's reproductive freedom and prohibition of health care to abortion in cases where the women's life is threatened reinforces women's subordinate roles as mothers and daughters for the sake of the Christian nuclear family, whose fertility is vital to the strengthening of Nicaragua society. In 2007, when the therapeutical abortion ban was expanded with penalties for women and health care practitioners (Law 641) under Ortega's administration, one can notice the safeguarding of the family unit for nationalist purposes and livelihood of Nicaragua, with women subordinate to the country's interests, with strong anti-imperialist rhetoric against feminism and with pro-family values. That being the case, it is worth emphasizing Rosario Murillo (2006, sa) public speech about the prohibition of women's reproductive rights: *"El frente, la Unidad Nicaragua Triunfa dice: "No al aborto, sí a la vida!" (...) Somos enfáticos: Si a las creencias religiosas; sí a la fe; sí a la búsqueda de Dios"*. In her speech, the outlawing of women's access to therapeutical abortion is equated with further support for *Christian religious beliefs* and pro-family values. Nicaragua's conservative legislation that has prompted the banning of women's reproductive rights with harsher penalties for women and health care professionals, the country becomes one of the places with the most rigid legislation about women's health in the world (CEPAL, 2013), combined with highest rates of adolescent fertility and child abuse (AL JAZERA, 2014). It is rightfully investigated by organizations such as International Amnesty to report human rights violations of women's reproductive rights and health. For instance, the full abortion ban implemented during Ortega's administration stated a 14-year prison sentence for medical staff who help with procedures that could potentially endanger the fetus (THE LANCET, 2009, p. 677).

Hence, in this first period (2006 – 2008), Nicaragua's precarious position on the Global Gender Gap Index (62<sup>nd</sup> place, 90<sup>th</sup> place, and 71<sup>st</sup> place, respectively) is somewhat representative of the ambivalent state of domestic affairs of gender in the country. However, for matters of gender disparities in health and survival, Nicaragua's global position measured by the subindex (50<sup>th</sup> place) fails to acknowledge any deterioration of the conditions in women's health and survival over the years and instead, it rewards the country's supposed "health improvement" in differences between sexes over the years, up to the point where Nicaragua becomes a global leader in the domain of health levels between sexes. As evidence of such rewards, authors from the GGI point out that 'rich countries have more education and health opportunities for all members of society and measures of education levels thus mainly reflect this well-

known fact (...) *Global Gender Gap Index, however, rewards countries for smaller gaps in access to these resources, regardless of the overall level of resources*' (Hausmann et al., 2010, p. 3). Because of this, I argue the subindex of Health created and measured by the GGI *performs the governing function of objectification* over the governable subjects – including Nicaragua - *as it establishes a subjective and specific definition of how gender disparities in health should be measured and understood among countries: acceptable levels of life health expectancy and sex ratio at birth (WORLD ECONOMIC FORUM, 2007, p. 7). The World Health Organization calculates the first, and it provides 'an estimate of the number of years that women and men can expect to live in good health, by taking into account the years lost to violence, disease, malnutrition or other relevant factors'*. In contrast, the second captures the phenomenon of "missing women" (idem) with data provided by the World Health Organization. Moreover, eleven subcategories are considered to account for the two benchmarks in health and survival: (1) Health Mortality of children under age 5, all causes, age-standardized deaths per 100,000 (female, male); (2) Mortality due to non-communicable diseases, age-standardized deaths per 100,000 (female, male); (3) Mortality due to infectious and parasitic diseases, age-standardized deaths per 100,000 (female, male); (4) Mortality due to accidental injuries, age-standardized deaths per 100,000 (female, male); (5) Mortality due to intentional injuries and self-harm, age-standardized deaths per 100,000 (female, male); (6) Maternal mortality in childbirth (per 100,000 live births); (7) Existence of legislation on domestic violence; (8) Prevalence of gender violence in lifetime; (9) Law permits abortion to preserve a woman's physical health; (10) Births attended by skilled health personnel (%) and (11) Antenatal care coverage, at least four visits (%) (GGGR 2018, 51-52).

To Repo (1996, p. 110), the discussion of demographic and population conditions touches upon mechanisms that deploy the apparatus of gender as an example of the biopolitics of power, which makes biopolitics necessarily gendered. In other words, 'gender became woven into the rationalities of population governance and was central to new attempts to regulate population through behaviour modification' (113). Foucault argues that populations are regulated through statistical categorization and quantification to manage their productive potential for the economy (2007a, 104-105). Surprisingly, the same rhetoric highlighted above by Foucault through statistical knowledge in biopolitics and biopower can be found in the GGI's discourses about the role of women as a population in a country's competitiveness, economic growth and

economic growth and development. In 2006, the GGI report's first page warned that 'countries that do not capitalize on the full potential of one-half of their human resources (\*women) may compromise their competitive potential' (p. 5). In matters of health and survival, the GGI 2009 report states that 'Girls are still missing out on primary and secondary education in far greater numbers than boys, *thus depriving entire families, communities and economies of the proven and positive multiplier effects generated by girls' education and instead aggravating poverty, the spread of HIV/AIDS, and maternal and infant mortality*' (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX REPORT, 2009, p. 5). Hence, according to the GGI, gender disparity is entitled to state and market intervention because countries with low levels of gender parity are not taking advantage of women (and women's and girl skills reservoir) as a capital resource for the nation's growth. Therefore, the GGI calls up countries and businesses to promote the 'necessary flow of this talent in the future' at the global level, establishing further connections between health and survival and the economy. In this sense, health and survival are portrayed as a capability to a country's long-term competitiveness in the global market. Moreover, health and survival levels should be further improved upon ideals of efficiency, following what the GGI defines as proper 'health and survival' levels between sexes. The government of gender disparities in terms of health and survival becomes particularly visible in the case of Nicaragua, as the country proceeds to "adjust" its global position in the GGI by attending to what is expected from statistical measures of female healthy life expectancy over male and sex ratio at birth (female over male).

*The boundary-making of health disparities between sexes proposed by the GGI is set up as 'norm'. It normalizes the way that gendered disparities in health are to be considered in global discussions and the global governance of gender issues. No space is left to discuss the impact of social determinants of health on women in their material conditions in the contexts of countries such as Nicaragua, where the deliberate lack of access to health care services in case of medical complications that require interruption of pregnancy to safeguard a woman's life is a public policy with forms of punishment supported by the state (2007 – nowadays).* One of the main issues with the measurements in the health and survival domains is that the GGI operates under a binary logic that considers gender disparity as a given. For instance, the GGI's subindex of health and survival does not consider experiences of gender disparity in health because elements that make women's health are neglected, such as maternal health care and medical and reproductive rights. It is not just a matter of access to health care

in the same services compared to men, as cisgender men do not experience any struggles with pregnancy, motherhood, lactation, and so on. Hence, it is also a matter of accessing health care services that broadly impact women or bodies that are socially understood as biologically reproductive and still neglected medical care.

*As an example of such limitation from the GGI to capture disparities of gender in health issues, at the time, The Lancet (2009, p. 677) and international Amnesty reports that the abortion ban in Nicaragua has led to an increase in maternal deaths in the country, Nicaragua becomes one of the top climbers (“performers”), reaching up to 27th place in the overall ranking and 25<sup>th</sup> position in health and survival worldwide according to the global gender gap index reports.* In the words of Leonel Arguello, a Nicaraguan doctor interviewed during the investigation conducted by International Amnesty; there were “(...) several cases where women with cancer and kidney problems died because they could not get treatment. If they could have had therapeutic abortions, they would still be alive”. Second to this circumstance, there were reports that young victims of sexual violence (10 and 14 years) were forced to “give birth to their brothers” (idem). *Meanwhile, it was in 2010 that Nicaraguan feminist networks reported the Nicaraguan state to the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights to protect the life of a Nicaraguan woman from the country’s penal code against medical abortion (“Case Amalia vs Nicaragua”) (OAS, sa).* Due to the criminalization of abortion in Nicaragua in all cases, Amalia was denied treatment for cancer on the grounds that chemotherapy could endanger the fetus (THE GUARDIAN, 2010), which led to IACHR requesting the state to take precautionary measures to ensure she had proper access to health care treatment as shown below:

On February 26, 2010, the IACHR granted precautionary measures for a person who the IACHR will identify as Amalia in Nicaragua. The request seeking precautionary measures alleges that Amalia, the mother of a 10-year-old girl, is not receiving the necessary medical attention to treat the cancer she had because of her pregnancy. The request alleges that the doctors had recommended urgently initiating chemotherapy or radiotherapy treatment. Still, the hospital informed Amalia’s mother and representatives that the treatment would not be given, due to the high risk that it could provoke an abortion. **The Inter-American Commission asked the State of Nicaragua to adopt the measures necessary to ensure that the beneficiary has access to the medical treatment she needs to treat her metastatic cancer; to adopt the measures in agreement with the beneficiary and her representatives; and to keep her identity and that of her family under seal. Within the**

**deadline set to receive an answer, the State of Nicaragua informed the IACHR that the requested treatment has been initiated (OAS, 2010, sa)**

Because the GGI aims to foster a global script for policymaking on gender issues, it is undeniable its limitations in capturing health disparities between sexes within countries negatively impact the field of action for international actors, as it sets global standards within its measures that countries and other international actors should look for to manage their behaviour and optimize their “performance” in health disparities between sexes: *acceptable levels of life health expectance and sex ratio at birth*. No wonder Foucault’s approach to power had considered the role of statistics in what the author has named “biopower” and “biopolitics”. As a technology of power, biopolitics is, if not explicitly present, embodied within the structure of the GGI due to the GGI’s complementary relation committed to governing states’ behaviour in gender matters in health and survival. In Foucault’s words, biopower addresses as its main object the multiplicity of humans (human species) as a global mass, or population, susceptible to collective biological threats and phenomena such as living, dying, sickness. More importantly, among mechanisms associated with biopower are analytical predictions, statistical measurements, global measurements that aim to regulate and intervene over phenomena that impact global masses rather than individual bodies (FOUCAULT, 2005, p. 292-293). In this case, the biopower contained within the GGI creates a norm of behavior that targets states, one that relies on *the control over rates of life health expectance and sex ratio at birth between sexes within a country*. Furthermore, one should consider the fact that both statistical measurements are not isolated from broader governance systems in global health. As the GGI points out, the World Health Organization provides the calculated gap between women and men’s healthy life expectancy (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2007, p. 5). The latter – World Health Organization’s conceptualization of health – ‘a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being, is created and lived by people within the setting of their everyday lives — where they learn, work, play, and love’ (1986) have been subject of inquiry of Foucaultian researchers. Therefore, I argue that healthy life expectancy can be used as a surveillance mechanism of gender disparities in health and survival, as it is one of the only measures used as a benchmark from the GGI to analyze the status of a country’s population health status by sex, given that it benefits the development of a standardized approach to data collection, statistical measurement and global ranking to

foster decision-making and inform governance efforts for gender equality in matters of health and survival depending on the country's placement in the global ranking.

*To regulate the state of gender disparities in health and survival at the level of the population within countries, the GGI considers not only the optimal state of life health expectance and sex ratio at birth (which is by registering no difference between sexes) that should be acquired by a country, but it also punishes countries that feature below the global average in health and survival measurements, so as to use it to predict the exact number of years that will take for a region to achieve gender parity.* In the case of Nicaragua, we notice a double-fold implication of the GGI's biopolitical function over gender disparity in health and survival in states: from 2006 to 2013; the GGI interprets Nicaragua's performance in health and survival with a – less than ideal - range of scores that go from 50<sup>th</sup> to 62<sup>nd</sup> global position among countries. However, in 2014, GGI portrayed Nicaragua as a world leader against gender disparity in matters of health and survival. For six years in a row, the country achieved the first position in the global ranking of health and survival and is represented as an exemplary case of health and survival rates. In 2013, for example, Nicaragua was presented as the 6<sup>th</sup> world leader overall and ranked 1<sup>st</sup> in health and survival (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2014, p. 8). It is positively compared to the world leaders countries against gender inequity such as Iceland (1<sup>st</sup> overall, ranked 128<sup>th</sup> in health in survival); Finland (2<sup>nd</sup> overall, ranked 52<sup>nd</sup> in health and survival); Norway (3<sup>d</sup> overall, 98<sup>th</sup> in health and survival); Sweden (4<sup>th</sup> overall, ranked 100 in health and survival) and Denmark (5<sup>th</sup> overall, ranked 65<sup>th</sup> health and survival). As it is possible to notice, according to the Global Gender Gap Index (2013 – 2014), Nicaragua demonstrates a privileged position in gendered matters of Health and Survival, ranking 1<sup>st</sup> place in the world with a score of 0.9796 in 2014. Though this is only one of the axes explored in the GGI, it is clear that such “above the average” performance fosters the political imaginary for the country, which positions Nicaragua with more substantial resources (or capabilities) than its peers in the world ranking. Such interpretation reinforces a new form of subjectivity that was not considered previously in global public opinion on gender equality, making it particularly powerful in knowledge legitimacy over the years. The message sent by the Global Gender Gap Index Reports is aligned with an evaluation of Nicaragua, which included an already optimized performance above the norm of minimum global standards of health and survival established by the GGI.

**Fig. 31. Nicaragua's position in health and survival**

Country	OVERALL		HEALTH AND SURVIVAL	
	Rank	Score	Rank	Score
Iceland	1	0.8594	128	0.9654
Finland	2	0.8453	52	0.9789
Norway	3	0.8374	98	0.9695
Sweden	4	0.8165	100	0.9694
Denmark	5	0.8025	65	0.9741
Nicaragua	6	0.7894	1	0.9796
Rwanda*	7	0.7854	118	0.9667
Ireland	8	0.7850	67	0.9739

Source: Global Gender Gap Index (2014).

Not only had Nicaragua been considered to have achieved the 'norm', but it has also surpassed the levels predicted by the GGI, which led to Nicaragua being portrayed as one of the 'top climbers' in the global competition for the development in gender equality at the national level. This slow but permanent change of national identity promoted the GGI's biopolitical functions, which should be contextualised with the legislation changes for women's health during Ortega's government. As women's reproductive rights and survival are not the objects of regulation and control promoted by the GGI's criteria for health and survival in countries, the deterioration of women's health and survival as a product of the changes in Ortega's government – namely the outlawing of abortion in all cases and penalty for women and health care practitioners – become somewhat compatible with the objectification of health and survival performed by the GGI. In turn, one can argue that where the GGI's forms of measurement and interpretation over Nicaragua are concerned, Nicaragua's government can instrumentalize the positive data and national identity framings of Nicaragua to delegitimize women's advocacy for reproductive rights and health care concerns at the local level. This type of instrumentalization occurs because Ortega's administration's national gender project concerns gender relations, women's bodies and traditional roles in preserving motherhood and fertility as strong components of the country's nationalist discourse. In 2011, when Daniel Ortega was reelected under the slogan "Christianity, socialism and solidarity" with strong advocacy towards conservative policies to constrain women's access to reproductive rights and proper health care services, Muller (2020) called attention to the position of the FSLN government is vis-à-vis sexual and reproductive rights of women in 2011. In her long-term study of the decision-making

process around teenage motherhood and early childbearing in Nicaragua, she illustrates Ortega's official position based on '(...) a case of a 12-year-old who was pregnant as a result of being raped became public, and obliged to have the child as a consequence of the criminalization of abortion'. During this episode that took place in 2011, 'Daniel Ortega's wife, Rosario Murillo (since 2017 Vice-President of Nicaragua), commented the birth of this child as "a miracle, a sign from God"<sup>13</sup> while Ortega said his government was "the enemy of Herodes" (idem, p. 12-13).

Those types of discourses were not isolated events. In 2016, Rosario-Murillo<sup>45</sup> commented on motherhood and mothers of *Nicaragua as having a central role in the country's evolution as safe-keepers to Nicaragua's culture and heroic character. In a similar discourse at the Supreme Justice Court in Nicaragua, Cerda (2015) highlights that "Ortega's government has given a special role to the family, to the mother and to women, considering the political affairs in Nicaragua, the constitutional reform and in the Family, Code has made it clear that family is the central unit in the country", moreover: "the judicial system highlights the double-role performed by women as mothers and workers", but it states that it is the family unit that plays a central role in the advancement of Nicaragua, as Nicaragua's mother's roles are to be understood (PRESS NOTES, 2015, sp).* At the local level, such emphasis on the role of maternity and motherhood as an axis of Ortega's national gender project for Nicaragua can be noticed by strengthening Motherhood Houses (*Casas Maternas*). Motherhood Houses represent a groundbreaking initiative in providing health care and essential services to

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<sup>45</sup> 'Queridas Madres de Nuestra Nicaragua, todas las Culturas del Planeta celebran la Vida, y honran a las Madres como Fuente de esa Energía Sagrada que en nuestros Cuerpos de Mujer se asienta y toma forma (...) El Protagonismo de las Madres, incluyendo muchas llamadas Madres "solteras" o solas, en un País, una Sociedad y una Cultura como la nuestra, es tanto Material, de Luchas Valientes, para mejorar la Vida de sus Familias, como Cultural y Espiritual. És un Rol profundamente Evolutivo, de Guardianas y Portadoras de una Cultura Valiosa; Rol de Madres, Forjadoras de Espíritu, muchas veces ignorado, desestimado, e invisibilizado, por un Mundo cada vez más superficial, frívolo, materialista, y simplista. En estos Tiempos únicos de nuestro Proceso Histórico, [l@s nicaragüenses](#) queremos Ir Siempre Más Allá, en Reconocimiento y Respeto genuino de todo lo que nos hace Mejores. Saludamos y rendimos Homenaje a las Madres nicaragüenses, Madres que frecuentemente también son Padres, porque todas, en cualquier circunstancia, asumimos integralmente Hogares y Familias, con Fé, y Valentía admirables. Las Madres y Jefas de Familia, en Nicaragua, somos Protagonistas sustantivas de estos Nuevos Días, con los que Dios ha bendecido a esta Patria de [todas](#). (...) Nuestro Presidente, nuestro Comandante Daniel ratifica su Compromiso invariable de Victorias, en las Luchas contra la Pobreza, y con Amor se dirige a las Madres, que representamos Carácter nicaragüense Heroico, Entereza, Determinación y Convicción de Seguir Unidas' (ROSARIO-MURILLO in EL DIGITAL 19, sp, 2016).



pregnant women from rural areas to secure safe childbirth for women, with more than 88 houses in full operation as of 2011. According to JICA (2012, our translation<sup>46</sup>):

Casas Maternas are community-level boarding and meal services for pregnant women in rural areas who have difficult access to safe delivery services. These services are intended to improve the maternal and infant mortality rate [32]. The maternity homes operate with medical institutions to enable safe deliveries, and have contact with provincial hospitals, which can provide support from doctors and nurses when necessary. They are also managed in coordination with volunteers, posts, health centres and a network of communities (p. 47).

Therefore, the GGI is ‘an annual overview to policy-makers about the extent to which resources and opportunities in their countries are being equally distributed among men and women, to allow them to track progress over time and to catalyse action to close the gender gap’ (p. 5), which it means that from the years the GGI’s portrays Nicaragua as a first place-ranked world leader of gender parity in health and survival (2013 – 2019), the GGI needless states that resources and health-care opportunities in Nicaragua are being equally distributed between sexes, which it is simply not accurate. The non-recognition of health and survival struggles from the suppression of women’s reproductive rights and access to healthcare treatments in Nicaragua (as of 2007 – 2019) by the GGI has depoliticized debates on gender disparities in health-care issues at the local level. More than that, the GGI’s subjectification fosters a positive national branding of Nicaragua when it highlights its global leadership in gender parity for health and survival and its extensive comparison with countries considered “model examples in gender equity” at the global level, namely Nordic countries. What does it mean to be positioned in a parallel evaluation with countries such as Finland, Sweden and Norway, whose national gender projects are distinct from the health care system and legislation for reproductive rights in Nicaragua?

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<sup>46</sup> ‘Las Casa Maternas son servicios de hospedaje con comidas al nivel comunitario para mujeres embarazadas de zonas rurales quien tienen acceso difícil a servicios para parto seguro. Estos servicios tienen como motivo la mejora de la tasa de mortalidad maternal e infantil [32]. Las casas maternas operan con instituciones médicas para posibilitar partos seguros, y tienen contacto con los hospitales provinciales, los cuales pueden dar soporte de médicos y enfermeros cuando sea necesario. Además son administradas en coordinación con voluntarios, puestos, centros de salud y red de comunidades” (JICA, 2012, p. 47)

Moreover, what does it mean for Nicaragua to be not only a world leader in health and survival but a regional leader in the group of states belonging to Latin America and Caribe and lower-middle income?

Though the biopower that comes from the knowledge structure from the GGI builds specific boundaries around gender disparities in matters of health and survival for countries, we can notice that in Nicaragua, the biopower takes place within its forms during Ortega's administration. For instance, the full prohibition of abortion and punishment to those that seek medical treatment that might endanger the fetus represents, in feminist perspectives, the full exercise of biopower over biologically born females – in this case, as a population. Both forms of biopower – one that is a mechanism for the GGI's knowledge system, regulating and rewarding actors that act accordingly such ideal standards and other than the regulated actor performs - address the human life at the population level *are ultimately gendered. In this sense*, 'as biology and life have become political objects of power, biopolitics ensures the visibility of bodies for regulation and discipline' (FOUCAULT, 1978, p. 139). Hence, in the GGI, the collective female body (women-as-species) and sex are objectified for political investments from states to maintain the minimum (statistical) standards in what the GGI considers "gender equality" in population measures. For example, the Nicaraguan women's bodies are heavily regulated by state investments – or rather de-investments – in recording fertility rates considered abnormal by global human rights standards. Coincidence or not, it is in 2012 that Nicaragua stops its data collection on adolescent rates of fertility – by then considered one of the highest rates in the world and it aggregates its measurements into 'women's fertility'. As much of the scholarship of gender gaps in health and survival relies on quantitative measures such as the GGI and its counterpart for data collection – the World Health Organization, one should not overlook that a qualitative account of how women in Nicaragua experience the "gender gap" in health and survival might enhance and expose context-specific challenges. In Nicaragua, evidence shows not only reduced freedom of choice for girls and children, but no health care support is available in risky cases of teenage pregnancy in Nicaragua, with the human rights of Nicaraguan girls at stake (MULLER, 2020, p. 9).

As the subindex refers to 'health *and survival*', we cannot avoid discussing health and survival and gender inequality in its relationship to gender-based violence. Empirical research in this area has argued that gender-based violence is a multi-faceted public health problem as it worsens women's well-being and harms their

access to basic human rights (NAKRAY, 2013, p. 2-6). In the international policy arena, gender-based violence is already addressed as a public health issue. As Heise et al (1994) notes, the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women suggested that ‘any act of gender-based violence that results in or is likely to result in physical, sexual or mental harm or suffering to women including threats of such acts, coercion or arbitrary deprivations of liberty, whether occurring in public or private life’ (UNITED NATIONS GENERAL ASSEMBLY, 1993). Among the main negative costs of gender-based violence, we could cite impacts on physical, mental and reproductive health; inter and intra-generational impact; loss of self-esteem; higher levels of alcohol and drug abuse; adverse impacts on interpersonal relationships and social exclusion (NAKRAY, 2013, p. 7-8). Though gender-based violence is never discussed in length by the GGI, it certainly is a key aspect to be addressed if one intends to provide a ‘map of global action’ for countries to mitigate gender inequality. In her critical analysis of the accountability of violence by the Global Gender Gap Index in health and survival, Lehman (2019, p. 7) argues that the summary results and analysis from the Global Gender Gap Index fail to mention gender-based violence while at the same time the reports highlight an overall improvement in health and survival at the global level. More importantly, the Global Gender Gap Reports ‘privilege women as consumers, as investments in technology, as cultivators of economic prosperity, while ignoring and silencing the pervasive violence toward them’ (idem, p. 9). With respect to addressing levels of gender-based violence as a ‘national framework for policy making’, the case of Nicaragua touches upon several questions and limitations from the GGI. In 2012, the approval of Law 799 – Integral Law against Gender-based Violence towards Women by the National Assembly marked a historical advancement for the recognition that the state of Nicaragua is responsible for women’s legal protection in the context of patriarchal violence. According to the Article 1, Law 799 (2012):

‘The object of this law is to act against the violence exercised against women with the purpose of protecting women’s human rights and guaranteeing them a life free of the violence that favours their development and wellbeing in accordance with the principles of equality and nondiscrimination; and establish comprehensive protection measures to prevent, punish and eradicate violence and provide assistance to women victims of violence, promoting changes in the sociocultural and patriarchal patterns that underpin the relations of power’ (sp).

By the time Nicaragua is portrayed as a world leader against gender disparities overall and in health and survival matters (2013 – 2019), almost two years later than its approval for Law 799, law 799 suffered a strong backlash from conservative sectors in Nicaragua and was reformed to change many of its elements and to include *state mediation for women who suffer gender-based and domestic violence* (SOLÍS, 2013), ‘Gabinetes de la familia’ (family counselling and state mediation in cases of gender-based violence) was created to mediate gender-based violence cases between victims and aggressor. Such a mechanism was usually instrumentalized to settle domestic cases of gender-based violence in the country. To Neumann (2014, p. 69-90), the conservative reforms on the Ley 779 demonstrate Ortega’s longstanding tensions with the country’s feminist movement, his “pro-family” alliance with conservative religious groups’ – such as catholic and evangelical churches - and ultimately the deterioration of women’s rights under the personalization of state patriarchal authority during his government. The term patriarchal authority is not used loosely here; after all, there was an organized legal backlash in the country to push against the ‘feminist content and language’ of the law. For instance, in an opinion piece published in La Prensa (2013), Nicaraguan Lawyers argued that “[Ley 779] is a product of an assault of radical international feminism that encourages women to abandon their husbands in order to later legalize aberrant same-sex unions or homosexual marriage”.

In this sense, the case of Nicaragua’s leadership by the Global Gender Gap Index suggests that the privileging of women as consumers, investments and workers also play a large role in neglecting the measurement of key factors that have aggravated gender-based violence in Nicaragua, as this chapter shows. It becomes problematic that the GGI not only underrecognizes the role of gender-based violence in its health and survival measurements of Nicaragua, but it also portrays the country as a ‘world example’ in health and survival. In Wade’s (2019) interpretation, the relationship between the evaluations provided by the GGI and Nicaragua should be considered carefully, given that behind the results provided by the ranking, there is a larger picture of gender-based violence and inequality in the country. In questions such as health and survival, she argues that ‘life expectancy and sex ratios may tell us something about gender parity on those indicators, but they do little to illuminate the genuine health and survival issues faced by Nicaraguan women’, as Nicaragua has high rates of gender-based violence. Moreover, as legislation on gender-based violence in Nicaragua has become more conservative over the years (2012 – 2014) through the reform of Law

799, the GGI maintain its endorsement of Nicaragua's world leadership in gender disparity. As the GGI explains, the index aims to measure the levels of access to resources in a certain domain between sexes, which means that in matters of gender-based violence, there has to be a consideration of how legislation plays an important role in diminishing and harming women's rights in cases of gender-based violence. Hence, the governing, subjectification and arenashifting functions performed by the GGI carry discursive and practical implications in the case of Nicaragua, as the index acts up as a technology of knowledge with scientific authority that could potentially delegitimize women's movements' claims against the reform on Law 799. At the international level, the positive image of Nicaragua as a world leader in gender equity and health and survival created by the index could, in turn, pacify the global public opinion and international pressure against conservative mechanisms adopted under Ortega's administration. For instance, the scholar Wade<sup>47</sup> contends that 'the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap rankings create a false impression of progress in many countries, including Nicaragua. This gap between ranking and reality obscures women's real struggles in countries like Nicaragua' (EL PAÍS, 2020, sp). Here, it is possible to infer that the domain of governing and governance exerted by the GGI of national gender projects for countries targets gender-based violence as a minor or secondary element. In this sense, one can observe through the measurement in the case of Nicaragua that there is an active arenashifting of gender-based violence as a global standard for countries, one that enables Nicaragua to be ranked a world leader alongside countries with different levels of impunity on gender-based violence.

#### 4.2 THE GGI POLITICAL FUNCTIONS EXERTED TOWARDS THE INTERPRETATION OF WOMEN'S POLITICAL EMPOWERMENT AND WOMEN-STATE RELATIONS IN NICARAGUA

In the previous topic, I discussed the politics of gender disparities in terms of women's health and survival status in Nicaragua as opposed to the evaluations provided by the GGI. Now, we must recall that the GGI interprets political empowerment through the compilation of measures of the gap between men and women in political decision-making at the highest levels in a country (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2006, p. 7), including the ratio of women to men in minister-level positions, the ratio of

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<sup>47</sup> See Wade (2020) in <https://agendapublica.elpais.com/noticia/13744/nicaragua-gender-gap-rankings-and-reality>.

women to men in parliamentary positions and the ratio of women to men in terms of years in executive office (prime minister or president) in the last 50 years. To advance the analysis of the political functions performed by the GGI in fostering the government of 'national gender projects' based on the case of Nicaragua, we first should engage with the timeline of changes evaluated by the GGI in the country. Similar to GGI's measurements of Nicaragua's level of gender disparities in health and survival, when it comes to political empowerment, the GGI's evaluation of Nicaragua's performance over the years can be easily divided into two periods: 2006 – 2011, a period in which Nicaragua ranks from the promising range of 19<sup>th</sup> position to 28<sup>th</sup> among more than 100 countries evaluated, and 2012 – 2019, a period in which Nicaragua is represented as a world leader both in the overall ranking of gender disparities and at the political empowerment subindex. In this sense, I will explore some of the key events at the local level, such as (a) gendered discourses that target women's political empowerment during Ortega's administration; (b) Ortega's actions of repression and political discourses against activists and women's movements; (c) law reforms for gender parity. So, we can also contextualize Nicaragua's evaluation and evolution in the ranking of political empowerment with its domestic aspects. After all, research has shown that some of the major changes and trends accessed by the Global Gender Gap Index about Nicaragua (2006 – 2017), especially in this subindex, is positively associated with political events at the domestic level, where supportive social and political environments are said to play important roles in empowering women in the country, driving Nicaragua's scores to increased records at the global level (NGUYEN et al, 2020, p. 1-2, 6).

To that, I argue that the Global Gender Gap Index misrepresents the context of political empowerment in Nicaragua, by associating the country with an image of world leadership in gender equality in the political arena. In turn, based on discourses, data collection and previous literature (KAMPWIRTH, 2011; HEUMANN, 2014; EXPEDIENTE PUBLICO, 2021; among others), I maintain that under Ortega's administration there has been a shift and constraining of women's civil, political and human rights in the political arena, particularly with respect to the discursive criminalization of women's movements, NGO's and activists, and actual episodes of political violence and repression against women that led to imprisonment, and the development of a feminist diaspora of Nicaraguan women who are considered political refugees. Not only those worrisome developments cannot be captured by the GGI's

evaluation, but the GGI's positive representation of Nicaragua is also instrumentalized by Ortega's government to delegitimize women's political mobilizations and actions to the public opinion in both the domestic and international arena. In this sense, the GGI's political functions led to depoliticization, arena-shifting and the creation of shared-norms about how political empowerment to gender equality should be pursued by states, thus acting up as a technology of knowledge that relies on fostering specific female subjectivities of neoliberal leadership and representation. Problematic as it is, the framework promoted by the GGI implicitly rewards countries with formal female representation in policy without further inquiry into the content of representation while neglecting other forms in which women exercise political participation. In the extreme case of Nicaragua, where political repression and persecution of feminist and women's movements represent a long-term issue, the GGI's become yet another tool – this time a technology of knowledge with international authority – that can undermine women's political rights regardless of the political violence suffered at the domestic level.

As such, when considering that 'political empowerment' is an element measured by the GGI, it is imperative that we also discuss the meaning of the expression 'political empowerment' explored by the index. As Alexander et al (2016, p. 432) note, theoretically driven definitions of women's global political empowerment are limited and often derived from the broader concept of "women's empowerment". Despite this, the author advocates that women's global political empowerment can be defined as 'the enhancement of assets, capabilities, and achievements of women to gain equality to men in influencing and exercising political authority worldwide' (p. 433). In the case of the GGI, there is a palpable difference between what is considered gender equality vs women's empowerment during the measurement and interpretation of a country's performance, as quite possibly the use of 'women's empowerment' as the major paramount of GGI's measurements could fuel notions and incite contexts where women might be outperforming men ("winning" the "battle of the sexes") (GGI, 2014, p. 4). Because of that, the GGI's extensive focus is restricted to gender equality as its main benchmark, leaving space to the concept of empowerment to be considered only in the axis of 'political empowerment' in country. Recalling the politics of the interpretative work on making global indicators described by Merry (2015, p. 20-21), we should explore the politics present with the GGI in several angles: 'choosing approaches for measurement', 'construction of categories', 'selection of data sources', 'labels used for the phenomenon measured', 'what things are counted and how'. (p. 20-21).

Feminist scholars committed to analyzing gender politics in Latin and Central America suggest the use of qualitative criteria to understand the gendered role of the electoral leftwing in contemporary dynamics of gender disparities. During this topic, I will follow the analytical (qualitative) model explored in Friedman (2009) about the nature of gender politics in Brazil, Bolivia, Chile. According to Kampwirth (2011), Friedman's model can be applied to the case of anti-gender politics in contemporary Nicaragua during Ortega's government. To that, I consider gender politics in Nicaragua based on *the state of feminist state-society relations and women's representation in decision-making positions at the domestic level* in the country and contrast it with narratives provided by the GGI. I do so because the GGI provides quantitative evaluations based on gender disparities in political empowerment in Nicaragua, pointing out the latter as a world leader. As it was said in the previous chapter and a few paragraphs earlier, feminist literature reports an intrinsic relationship among the varying types of regimes, political forces and national gender projects, whose combination might mobilize and affect women's agency and interests in the public sphere in the form of political opportunity structures or, in some other cases, political structures that could constrain ever further women's collective action (RAY and KORTEWEG, 1999, p. 53). That said, it becomes imperative that I engage with the state of gender politics in Nicaragua as to compare local dynamics with what is exposed by the GGI, so we can discuss the GGI political functions towards the analysis, ranking and measurements of women's political empowerment summarized by the case of Nicaragua.

During its first measurement, the GGI reported that women from 115 countries had only 15% of the political empowerment available to men, with the regions of Asia, subSaharan Africa and the Middle East occupying the last places in global performances of gender gaps in political empowerment (GGI, 2006, p. 12), meanwhile, ever since the first edition of the GGI, Nordic countries such as Iceland, Sweden, Finland and Norway are represented as world leaders in gender equity with 'a long tradition of political empowerment of women' (p. 15). Still, in 2007, for example, Nicaragua was already positively portrayed in the 'top 30' of gender parity in the axis of political empowerment by the GGI, ranking 28<sup>th</sup> place with a score of 0.1813 above the world average of 0.142 (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2007, p. 11), due to the period of government of its former president Violeta de Chamorro (1990 – 1997). Violeta de Chamorro was the first female president in the region of Latin America, with Mireya Moscoso in Panama (1999-2004) being the second. Namely, the GGI stresses that



Nicaragua's position is driven by its above the average number of years with a female head of state (12<sup>th</sup> global position). In the other areas of political empowerment – women in parliament and women in ministerial positions, Nicaragua secured 52 and 51<sup>st</sup> positions at the global level among 128 countries evaluated (idem, p. 117-118). Therefore, based on the criteria used by the GGI to measure political empowerment, we notice an overall focus on women's descriptive (and quantitative) representation in formal political institutions, such as women's presence in legislature-parliaments and adoption of gender quotas. To that, I maintain that the GGI acts up as a technology of knowledge and power directed at the governing of what should be understood and measured as "women's political empowerment" in the global arena, largely neglecting a transformative framing of political empowerment such as citizenship and women's political behaviour.

The careful wording choice within the index, for example, reveals some of its rhetoric alignment with the phenomenon analyzed: after all, instead of measuring women's political participation, the subarea of the index claims to measure 'women's political *empowerment*', which points out that the GGI is measuring more of trends of gendered participation in politics *fostered by governments* than simply women's levels of engagement in the political system. Evidence of this interpretation is noticed in the Global Gender Gap Index Report (2007, p. 18). According to the report's portrayal of the word empowerment in its framework, there is a correlation between gender equality and the level of development of a country, 'consistent with the theory that *empowering women translates into more efficient use of an economy's human resources*, and thus affects the overall productivity and economic performance of countries'. For instance, whether the government and state exert active roles in fostering women's political representation (aka "empowering women" in politics) through gendered policies and quotas becomes two of the main objects of consideration throughout the qualitative aspect derived from the index. To illustrate this argument, we notice that the Global Gender Gap Report (2012, p. 58-59) highlights 'Key areas of national policy frameworks of gender' that are central to mitigating gender inequality at the global level, including parental leave, childcare assistance, taxation system and equality and work. In the latter, the index suggests that countries should develop legislative structures to support women and though '(...) among other policies, obligatory and voluntary quotas in public and private entities'. This becomes particularly meaningful as we understand that one of the biggest achievements and transformations during Ortega's government is related to

the implementation of gender-parity quotas, as shall be commented on later. Though we cannot trace back any causal relationship to the index's global script of gender towards the adoption of obligatory and voluntary quotas to ensure gender equality in public and private sectors and Nicaragua's expansion towards the political inclusion of women in legislative areas, we can certainly argue that Nicaragua's adoption of quotas has played a key role with improving the way Nicaragua was evaluated by the GGI.

In the snapshot provided by the GGI on Nicaragua's gender disparities in political empowerment, from 2012 and on, there is a steady improvement in Nicaragua's performance, as the country climbed from 5<sup>th</sup> place in 2012 and 2013 to 4<sup>th</sup> place in 2014 – 2016, reaching 2<sup>nd</sup> place worldwide in 2017-2018, and 3<sup>d</sup> place in 2019. In 2012, Nicaragua entered the 'top 10' global performers in gender equality according to the GGI in the 5<sup>th</sup> position – just below Nordic countries – world leaders in gender equality, and above the score from the sample average of countries measured (0.195). That said, Nicaragua becomes the first country from central and Latin America to 'ever hold a place in the top 10 of the global rankings (p. 38), scoring at least 17.3% better than its first overall measurement in 2006', the index analyzes that Nicaragua achieved such privileged position thanks to 'changes in political empowerment, particularly an increase in the percentage of women in parliament (from 21% to 40%) and an increase in the percentage of women holding ministerial positions (38% to 46%)' (GGI, 2012, p. 22). Moreover, in 2014, the GGI reported that among the countries with a fast pace of change towards gender equality over the years, climbing significant positions are Ecuador, France and Nicaragua, 'all three primarily driven by changes in political indicators (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2014, p. 31).

As a critique to the forms of measurement and evaluation of political empowerment promoted by the GGI, I bring attention to the fact that limited studies have been conducted to explore the real effectiveness of gender quotas to promote women's political engagement, knowledge and interest in a country. Moreover, it is necessary to consider not only women's formal participation in politics but women's styles of government, political engagement outside decision-making and citizenship behaviour (O'BRIEN and PISCOPO, 2019, p. 59-60), in which 'political engagement can include both conventional activities, namely turning out to vote, following politics in the news, discussing politics with friends, or contacting one's representative, and unconventional activities, such as participating in protests, demonstrations, or civil disobedience', those other contexts are neglected by the GGI and increasingly

important when we analyze the outrageous extent of gender inequality in the political arena in Nicaragua.

Women's participation in Nicaragua politics as well as its engagement with movements from civil society to contest the state are influenced by *the gendered political legacies* from the Somocista Era, Sandinist revolution and postsandinist period (NEUMANN, 2014). For instance, Kampwirth (2011, p. 10-11) contends that Nicaragua bears the most significant second wave feminist movement in Central America and one of the biggest in the context of Latin America. Moreover, it is a fact that after the revolution the movement has maintained autonomy in relation to political parties, the Nicaraguan state and public institutions. In particular, the autonomy of Nicaragua feminist movements from the Nicaraguan government remained strong despite Daniel Ortega's electoral plead to increase women's participation in politics with 'half of his cabinet would be filled with women' (DANIEL ORTEGA, 2006). What's more, research has shown an increased antagonism between feminist and women's political activism and Daniel Ortega's administration over the years (HEUMANN, 2014, p. 290). There are 'interrelated processes of (self)censorship and self(silencing) through which women were disciplined into the "revolutionary discourse" (...) that affected the relationship between Sandinista movement and feminists' (idem, p. 292), with contradictory effects to women's rights and the stigmatization of feminism (and supposedly feminist agenda) in Nicaragua. Part of this "revolutionary discourse" that disciplined and tied women's bodies to motherhood and nationalist ideals was discussed in the previous topic about women's health and survival in Nicaragua. Nonetheless, I argue that it is through an analysis of negative discourses on women's political participation in Nicaragua that such context becomes palpable, specially when looked in comparison to what is reported by the Global Gender Gap Index in matters of political empowerment in the country. To illustrate the political functions played by the GGI in matters of political empowerment in the case of Nicaragua, I engage with Kampwirth's description of politics of gender in Nicaragua where she emphasizes the presence of an antifeminist movement that counts on the support of powerful political institutions: the Catholic Church, a number of evangelical churches, and the state, especially the Ministries of the Family, Education, and Health as my main model of qualitative analysis (KAMPWIRTH, 2011, p. 10-11). However, I mostly engage with discourses and controversial events that could be descriptive of the nature of women's political action in Nicaragua in relation to matters conducted in Ortega's administration.

As commented in the previous chapter, the antagonism between feminist women's political activism and Daniel Ortega as a leader over the years is far from unidirectional. Tensions date to the late 1990's, when Daniel Ortega was accused of childhood sexual abuse by his stepdaughter Zoilamérica Narváez (HEUMANN, 2014, p. 305). Despite the case being reported to the Inter-American Commission of Human Rights, to the disappoint of many women's movements, and Ortega remained protected by legal immunity. In this case, the autonomous feminist movement in Nicaragua, especially the Women's Network Against Violence (Red de Mujeres Contra la Violencia) were supportive of Zoilamérica (KAMPWIRTH, 2011, p. 11). However, it was in 2007, due to the outlawing of women's reproductive rights in Nicaragua, that political tensions between the government and women's movements rose again. To explore the ambivalence of the tensions of gender politics in Nicaragua in contrast to the GGI's evaluation of Nicaragua as a world leader driven by its changes in political empowerment (2012 – 2019), one should consider two simultaneous events: (i) In the context of Ortega's political platform, Nicaragua became one of the few countries in the region where chief executives appointed cabinets following the principle of formal gender parity (half female and half male) (HTUN and PISCOPO, 2010, p. 3), an element that played the biggest role in fostering Nicaragua's global leadership in gender equality in matters of political empowerment by the Global Gender Gap Index (per GGI's statement, 2014); (ii) the discourses and actions of political repression and imprisonment of female activists and feminist leaders performed during Ortega's government have actively undermined women's political mobilization, civil and human rights during the same period evaluated by the index.

With respect to gender politics, one of the most controversial political pamphlets from Ortega's government has been its government propaganda called "The connection between feminism and low intensity wars" (PRINCENTON'S DIGITAL ARCHIVE OF LATIN AMERICAN AND CARIBBEAN EPHEMERA, 2008, sp). According to this book, the now vice-president declares its hostility towards feminist and women's movements in Nicaragua by arguing that '(Nicaraguan) feminism serves to the model of neocolonization, with a key role as a strategy to deteriorate revolutionary projects in Nicaragua (...) this feminism is in the hands of women who do not live as women, who do not know the feminine soul' and, due to this "cultural threat", the vice-president emphasize that Ortega's government intends to block the cultural occupation of feminist movements with its public policies, notions of civilization, prayers and faith (PRADO,

2010, p. 63). Following this publication, Ortega's government initiated arbitrary legal proceedings against human rights, female activists and women's organizations from civil society, including the Autonomous Women's Movement (MAM) accused of "subverting the constitutional order" (2008), as shown in the previous chapter. Furthermore, on the International Day for the Elimination of Violence Against Women, the government – represented by Managua's police – blocked the passage of four hundred activists that were having demonstrations to bring awareness to issues of gender-based violence in the country. We can see the antigender politics at play in Nicaragua's government with relation to women's activism: Dona Maria Telles (2017 apud RIBEIRO-GOMES<sup>48</sup>, 2018), former Sandinista guerrilla commander, feminist activist and leader of Renewal Sandinist Movement, stresses that under Ortega's government in 2007, 'the women's movement has been persecuted, its offices have been raided by the police, and the Foreign Ministry has taken steps to eliminate all kinds of financing and external support', with at least 'eight criminally charged feminist leaders'.

Far from being punctual events of 'antifeminism and antigender politics' in Nicaragua, such events describe a common scenario of political repression and hostility against feminist women in the country. This scenario becomes even more aggravating as we put it in the context of the historical Protests and political crisis of 2018 in Nicaragua. Even though the public protests in Nicaragua were a response to Ortega's reform in the social security law, those protests carried deadly implications for women's activism and political behaviour, as pro-orteguist paramilitary groups, Managua Police and the Nicaraguan Army exerted political harassment, with numerous episodes of violence against protesters. In April 2018, hundreds were arbitrarily detained under accusations of terrorism against the state, and 322 people were killed (HUMAN RIGHTS WATCH, 2019). As for the imprisoned protesters held in Managua, the OHCHR found evidence that Nicaraguan women and men suffered sexual abuse and rape by police guards (OAS PRESS RELEASE, 2018, sp). Moreover, the UN refugee Agency (2019) reported that around 62,000 citizens fled Nicaragua after the killings of protesters and popular protests that were initiated in 2018. One of the results of the 2018 protests were, among other things, the strengthening of a transnational activist network of female leaders who are exiled, denouncing political repression in Nicaragua - Feminist Network for Nicaragua (Red Feminista por Nicaragua).

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<sup>48</sup> See Ribeiro-Gomes (2018) in <https://www.redalyc.org/journal/745/74556945002/html/>.

Again, in the case of political empowerment, we can argue that the GGI's functions as technology of knowledge has serious implications to how Nicaragua is perceived worldwide, as the country's results often erase – if not recognize the political crisis of anti-gender politics that occurs at the local level. In Nicaragua's report to the Human Rights Council of the United Nations<sup>49</sup>, the country uses the GGI's evaluation to leverage its commitment to the restoration of women's rights and political empowerment:

'Although we do not accept recommendations 117.14 to 117.7 (\*from the Human Rights Council of the United Nations), we would nonetheless like to elaborate on some aspects of the amendments to Act No. 779 and action to combat violence against women, which is a matter of great concern for the Government of Reconciliation and National Unity. **Since 2007, Nicaragua has promoted the restoration of women's rights**, as part of the National Human Development Plan and a policy to combat violence, on the basis of a model of shared responsibility. **Nicaragua is one of the most advanced countries in terms of women's participation and empowerment. According to the 2013 World Economic Forum Global Gender Gap Report, it ranked tenth in the world for gender equality. In America as a whole, the average proportion of women parliamentarians is 22.6 per cent, while in Nicaragua it is 40.2 per cent and 50 per cent of ministers are women**' (UNITED NATIONS, 2014, p. 5).

In 2017, for example, the report contends that 'on the Political Empowerment subindex, only Iceland has closed more than 70% of its gender gap. While no other country has closed more than 60% of its gender gap, four countries—Nicaragua, Rwanda, Norway and Finland—have crossed the 50% threshold' (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2017, p. 9). Furthermore, at the institutional level, Rosario-Murillo, Nicaragua's vice-president, is quick to comment on Nicaragua's world leadership: 'We were there when we came to the government. (From there) to the fifth place in 2018, we continue to maintain gender parity, that is, gender equality in ministerial positions and (Nicaragua) has one of the highest proportions in the world of women in parliament' (TELESUR, 2018, sp). Moreover, in the same year of the Protests and political crisis of 2018, the vice-president highlights that the GGI's evaluation of Nicaragua as a world leader in gender equality and political empowerment is evidence of how Ortega's government is 'working together for justice, (...) *working together to*

<sup>49</sup> See Report of the Working Group on the Universal Periodic Review\* Nicaragua (2014, p. 5), General Assembly in [https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/documents/2014-10/a\\_hrc\\_27\\_16\\_add.1\\_e.pdf](https://www.upr-info.org/sites/default/files/documents/2014-10/a_hrc_27_16_add.1_e.pdf).

*implement a state policy of reconciliation and peace, (...) women and men, families'* (idem, sp). Another evidence can be found on the report provided by the Nicaragua's government<sup>50</sup> to the IOT (2019-2020) about the gender pay gap and occupational segregation between sexes in decision-making and political arenas, in which the government cites its global position in gender equality to describe and legitimize Nicaragua's government commitment to gender equality. Those examples demonstrate important interactions between the knowledge produced by the GGI about Nicaragua and the country itself. At the same time they can be used as evidence that political functions performed by the GGI entail objectification, depoliticization, subjectification and *legitimation of the world economic forum and GGI as authorities on the subject of gender equality*. The four discursive processes above (as of Erkkilla, 2018) render the phenomena of 'normalization' of the agenda for gender equality operational within global indicators and rankings.

#### 4.3. THE GGI'S POLITICAL FUNCTIONS ON ECONOMIC PARTICIPATION AND OPPORTUNITIES BASED ON THE CASE OF NICARAGUA

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<sup>50</sup> 'In its supplementary report, the Government emphasizes the fact **that at the global level Nicaragua continues to occupy fifth place in the Global Gender Gap Index in 2020, achieving a 80.4 per cent reduction in inequality between men and women**. Women occupy more than 50 per cent of decision-making posts in the legislative, executive and judicial authorities, in the Government cabinet, local governments, and in senior management in decentralized autonomous entities. With regard to the judiciary, the Government recalls that, in response to a growth in demand for judiciary services, in 2015 the overall number of judiciary staff increased by 60 per cent compared with 2008. The Government indicates that it has increased the number of women judges in the Supreme Court of Justice by 37 per cent and the number of women judges in the Appeal Courts by 47 per cent. Moreover, two of the four chambers are presided over by women judges of the Supreme Court, and one woman judge is the president of the highest body of the judiciary. Four of the eight Appeal Courts are presided over by women judges. A total of 64 per cent of posts in the judiciary are held by women, and in the administrative service 285 out of 465 senior management posts, 1,045 out of 1,797 executive posts and 1,281 out of 2,771 operational posts are occupied by women. The Government therefore affirms that there is no salary gap between men and women of the same rank and that any differences are owing to hierarchical position. In other words, the judges of the Supreme Court of Justice have the highest salary, followed by the judges of the Court of Appeals. Lastly, the Government recalls that the Judiciary Commission on Gender (established in 2003 to improve access to justice for women and to promote diligent and efficient judicial action which respects and protects women's rights) is the body that implements gender mainstreaming' (IOT, 2021, sp).

Finally, in this topic, I expand on GGI's political functions to foster governance of gender in world politics in one of its main domains: Economic and Opportunity. Though I did explore its political functions in the first part of this chapter, I now intend to advance understanding of the normalizing functions in the subarea of Economic and Opportunity by connecting it to Nicaragua's evaluations and domestic affairs perceived outside the realm of the index. Ultimately, it is in the economic realm that the neoliberal rationality of gender promoted by the GGI's political functions of government is broadly transmitted to states, as explored throughout this chapter. In other words, this interpretation follows along with a poststructural feminist perspective of international political economy, as it entails considering the ways in which 'gender equality'-discourses promoted by international actors and agendas of governments become aligned with dominant paradigms of economic development in market-based governance (TRUE, 2015, p. 329-330; PRUGL, 2015; RUNYAN AND PETERSON, 2012). In addition, in the case of Nicaragua, the discourses and actions from the 'national project of gender' in economic matters pursued by Ortega's government are more aligned with the rationalities fostered by the GGI. Furthermore, in this topic, I emphasize that commonalities found between the rationalities behind the GGI's forms of measurements in the case of Nicaragua and the 'national project of gender' in the country are two axes of a larger power dynamics. This dissertation suggests that the focus of the GGI is not simply to govern 'gender' but rather 'national projects of gender' for countries, businesses and ultimately populations, which makes it an even more compelling case for the study of gender politics, neoliberalism and forms of public-private governance. The GGI functions as a technology of knowledge structured around neoliberal governmentalities that shape understandings of health and survival, political empowerment, educational attainment and economic and opportunity. In addition, the index namely depoliticize feminist languages of social change for international actors, fosters and normalizes numerous feminized subjectivities of entrepreneurship, state-performance and individual competition, largely connecting economic growth and female empowerment as a solution to untap the global economy while at the same time it fosters national policy frameworks rather than simply governing 'gender'. National projects of gender, for instance, entail an active role for political institutions to maintain or change gender relations, gendered status for women and minorities and gendered roles.



In this sense, it is worth recalling that Economic Participation and Opportunity is a subindex and at the same time one of the most important aspects from the GGI's forms of evaluation, ranking and interpretation on countries' experiences with gaps and gender inequality. The index uses as a benchmark Ratio: female labour force participation over male value; wage equality between women and men for similar; ratio: female estimated earned income over male; ratio: female legislators, senior officials and managers over male value; and ratio: female professional and technical workers over male value. In all of its editions (2006 – 2019) analyzed throughout this dissertation, the Global Gender Gap Report emphasize much of the relationship between country's economic growth and competitiveness as contingent to women's participation in labour markets and countries' and businesses commitments to gender equality. The organization notes that 'the report will serve as a call to action to governments to accelerate gender equality through bolder policy-making, to businesses to prioritize gender equality as a critical economic and moral imperative and to all of us to become deeply conscious of the choices we make every day that impact gender equality globally' (2017, p. v). After all, the reports point out that 'competitiveness on a national and a business level will be decided more than ever before by the innovative capacity of a country or a company. In this new context, integrating women into the talent pool becomes a must' (idem). That in the World Economic Forum's Global Gender Gap Index, True (2015, p. 330) contends that there is a liberal instrumentalization of gender equality see women (and women's participation in labour markets) as a 'resource to be governed' to enhance national growth and the functioning of the global economy. As an example of such dynamic, the Global Gender Gap Report<sup>51</sup> (2010, p. 30-31) *demonstrates the link between gender equality and productivity, growth and development can be seen through the capitalization of women in the form of investments in (a) girls' education; (b) women's labour force participation; (c) women as consumers; (d) women and their spending decisions; (e) and women and leadership.* Not surprisingly, in several reports, the GGI justifies that women should be integrated into the economy and gender equality pursued by countries and corporate actors, 'because women account for one-half of a country's potential talent base, and a nation's competitiveness in the long term depends significantly on whether and how it educates and utilizes its women' (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2012, sp apud TRUE, 2015, p.

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<sup>51</sup> See Global Gender Gap Index Report (2010, p. 30): [https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_GenderGap\\_Report\\_2010.pdf](https://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_GenderGap_Report_2010.pdf)

331). Interestingly, as the GGI employs this language on the role of women in the global economy, it becomes possible to notice that the responsibility for country's economic development partly falls on women's shoulders, the report clarifies the power of women as workers and as consumers (2007, p. 20), with direct implications to the global economic recovery in face of the 2008 financial crisis.

The GGI's (2007, p. 20) makes the case by arguing that 'to maximize competitiveness and development potential, each country should strive for gender equality'. Thus, the index actively calls governments and business in fostering gender equality in economic participation. Governments would be responsible for 'creating the right policy framework for improving women's education and economic participation' and companies responsible to 'create ecosystems where the best talent, both male and female, can flourish' (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2011, p. 5). More specifically, the subindex of economic participation and opportunity establishes ideal standards of gender equality that include the maximization on female labour force participation, wage equality, earned income and female leadership in public and private positions. Therefore, those are the areas that countries and corporate actors should focus on with their national frameworks of gender equality. Most, if not all, the key areas of national policy frameworks of gender suggested as 'best practices' by the GGI – parental leave, childcare assistance, taxation system and legislative structures to mitigate discrimination in public and private entities - somehow strengthen the inclusion and better accommodation of women as labor force. As the GGI points out, *'a well-established daycare system can be a long-term investment that supports women in employment, thereby improving the efficiency of labor markets'* (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2012, P. 58-59). At this point, my dissertation interprets that the Global Gender Gap Index's rationale behind its evaluations on Nicaragua and other countries reflects not the simply co-optation of feminist ideas but what Prugl (2014, p. 4) calls the *neoliberalisation of feminism* altogether, specially when we consider the GGI's discursive approach towards gender equality on the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex. Here, neoliberalism is defined 'not only as an economic orthodoxy, but also as a cultural formation, a rationality in the Foucaultian sense "linked less to economic dogmas or class projects than to specific mechanisms of government' (FERGUNSON, 2010, p. 171 apud PRUGL, 2016). I argue that the Global Gender Gap Index through the case of Nicaragua demonstrates a new facet of neoliberalism with 'the interweaving of feminist ideas into rationalities and technologies of neoliberal

governmentality' (PRUGL, 2015, p. 4-5). In this scenario, gender equality should be promoted because it fosters economic efficiency, world competition and the maintenance of global economy. This ultimate goal is to be achieved by self-responsible actors – states and corporate stakeholders – with the adoption of national frameworks of policy and the absorption of neoliberal rationalities that place in women's empowerment and labor inclusion as two of the main arenas for intervention, standardization and international monitoring. Moreover, as Prugl (2014, p. 7) proposes, the neoliberalisation of feminism entails a discourse that 'generates individuals as entrepreneurs of the self and favours the creation of external environments that lead individuals to self-monitor so that they conduct themselves in ways that respond to market principles'. Moreover, the GGI's discourses reveals forms of neoliberal governmentality that are little discussed by the feminist literature, including the instrumentalization of the 'care infrastructure of countries' through 'care-related policies' not exactly to enhance human rights and the expansion of social support through the valorization of care labor and care economy. Instead, the index comments that countries should invest in care infrastructure of countries to expand women's economic participation to leverage national competitiveness (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2015, p. 36). The depoliticization of feminist understandings of the care-economy followed by the subjectification of 'care-related policies' under a neoliberal rationality to serve the productivity of markets, and it emphasizes the extent to which the neoliberalisation of feminism occurs in the GGI. In the case of Nicaragua, we will notice the particular ways to which governments respond to those forms of government promoted at the GGI and, to some extent, embrace the major discourses of neoliberal governmentality in its national gender project for gender equality at the domestic level, especially in the programs and frameworks developed at the Ministry of Women's Affairs to improve women's economic status under the label of 'women's empowerment and gender equality'.

Over time, Nicaragua's position in the subindex of Economic Participation and Opportunity has been one of the biggest challenges faced by the country. In contrasting with other evaluations, we can notice that economic participation and opportunity diverges from (a) the overall ranking, where Nicaragua retained a range of 90<sup>th</sup> to 27<sup>th</sup> global ranking position (2006 – 2011), entering in the 'top 10 best performers' from 2012 – 2019, with 5<sup>th</sup> world ranking being its most promising position in the GGI; (b) political empowerment subindex, in which the country also was evaluated

in two moments: 2006 – 2011, ranking a range from 28<sup>th</sup> to 19<sup>th</sup>, 2012 – 2019, ranking a range from 5<sup>th</sup> to 2<sup>nd</sup> best performer in the world; (c) health and survival subindex, where Nicaragua is ranked in a range of 65<sup>th</sup> to 50<sup>th</sup> (2006 – 2013) and 1<sup>st</sup> place in the world (2014 – 2019); and educational attainment, where there is an uneven trajectory in the GGI's evaluation about the country. That said, how do the Economic Participation and Opportunity subindex's evaluations about Nicaragua diverge from the previous categories? First, different from the other subindexes evaluations, over time Nicaragua's global position in Economic Participation and Opportunity is, in many years, below the global average and outside the 'top 50' world leaders in this domain. More specifically, from 2006 – 2019, Nicaragua ranks 101<sup>st</sup>, 117<sup>th</sup>, 117<sup>th</sup>, 104<sup>th</sup>, 94<sup>th</sup>, 79<sup>th</sup>, 88<sup>th</sup>, 91<sup>st</sup>, 95<sup>th</sup>, 100<sup>th</sup>, 92<sup>nd</sup>, 54<sup>th</sup>, 69<sup>th</sup>, and 81<sup>st</sup> place in the world. In 2011, when Nicaragua climbs up almost 20 positions in world ranking in economic participation and opportunity (ranking from the almost hundredth position to 79<sup>th</sup>), GGI interprets that 'Nicaragua's increase is driven mainly by a narrowing wage gap', and it indicates that 'Nicaragua's performance over the last six years puts it among the top climbers of the 114 countries that have been included in the Report since 2006' (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2011, p. 24). The highest achievement in Nicaragua's performance through the subindex of the economic domain was recorded in the year of 2017, where the GGI evaluates Nicaragua in the 54<sup>th</sup> place and states that '*Nicaragua (6) defends its place in the global top 10 and remains the best-performing country in the (Latin American and Caribbean) region for the sixth year in a row*' (GLOBAL GENDER GAP INDEX, 2017, p. 20). With respect to its overall leadership and yet less than ideal score in economic participation and opportunity, we notice that Nicaragua's score is very different – particularly large – in comparison to how other countries on the 'top 5 global performers' rank overall and in the economic domain: the world leader Iceland reaches 1<sup>st</sup> place overall and 14<sup>th</sup> position in economic opportunity; Norway, 2nd place overall, ranks 8th place; Finland, third place in the world, ranks 16<sup>th</sup> in economic participation and opportunity (idem, p. 10).

Despite the evaluations from the economic subindex not being ideal for Nicaragua in the global ranking, at the domestic level, to Nicaragua's government<sup>52</sup>,

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<sup>52</sup> 'El Estado de Nicaragua, desde el Gobierno de Reconciliación y Unidad Nacional (GRUN), en armonía con su vocación de respeto a los derechos humanos, a la paz y la solidaridad, a través del Modelo Cristiano, Socialista y Solidario; ha venido priorizando la incorporación de la Equidad e Igualdad de Género en instrumentos normativos y jurídicos que orientan la ejecución

gender equity, economic empowerment and gender equality are some of the main axis in its domestic and national strategies. However, their national framework towards gender equality is one inspired from Ortega's government Nicaraguan model of Christianity, socialism and solidarity: its framework aims to promote the restitution of rights, empowerment, women's and family leadership in different spaces of participation in the country (CEPAL, 2019, p. 5). As an official archive from the Ministry of Women's Affairs<sup>53</sup> (2020, p. 2-3) explains, ever since 2007 Nicaragua has adopted a model of equity and complementarity with the main goal of *promoting economic, social, cultural and political empowerment of women and their family* through public policy, projects and programs associated with human development According to Nicaragua's government<sup>54</sup>, Nicaragua's world leadership position evaluated by the GGI – as 5<sup>th</sup> place in world gender equality - is evidence from the government management, political efforts and commitment to strengthen women's rights in the country.

As we analyze that the GGI encourages countries to align their national frameworks of gender policy with the frameworks considered priority areas by the index to improve their performances and achieve gender equality, True (2015, p. 331) argues that world leaders by the Global Gender Gap Index's evaluations – countries such as Sweden – become in fact 'policy entrepreneurs' in the arena of gender equality. As the GGI analyzes, world leaders – top performers – in the index are to be understood as role models on gender equality at the global level: 'the Index points to *potential role models* by revealing those countries that—within their region or their income group—are leaders in having divided resources more equitably between women and men than other countries have' (p. 32). Hence, I contend that Nicaragua's case of world leadership can also be seen as an example of countries with a strong 'policy

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de Estrategias y Programas Sociales, Económicos, Culturales y Políticos para la restitución de los Derechos, Empoderamiento y Liderazgo de las Mujeres y sus familias en los diferentes espacios' (CEPAL REPORT, p. 5). See in [https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/nicaragua\\_em\\_2019.pdf](https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/nicaragua_em_2019.pdf).

<sup>53</sup> See Cartila Mujer y derechos:

<https://www.minim.gob.ni/storage/documents/Bn7RijqbMMg14okn2I0ueAAMBdzfxn4ZWzOztan2.pdf>.

<sup>54</sup> 'La gestión del Gobierno en la restitución y fortalecimiento de Derechos de las Mujeres ha permitido que organismos internacionales destaquen a Nicaragua como un país con avances extraordinarios y consistentes en la reducción de las desigualdades de género; el Informe sobre la Brecha Global de Género del Foro Económico Mundial (FEM), publicado el 17 de diciembre 2018, ubica a Nicaragua en el 'top' 5 a nivel mundial de los países con mayor Equidad de Género de América Latina, avanzando 85 puestos en relación a la posición 90 que ocupaba en el año 2007; Nicaragua forma parte de un selecto grupo de 10 países a nivel mundial que han cerrado la brecha de género en más de un 80%' (CEPAL REPORT, p. 5). See in [https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/nicaragua\\_em\\_2019.pdf](https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/nicaragua_em_2019.pdf)

entrepreneurship' in gender equality. The harmonization between Ortega's frameworks with the discourses of women's empowerment and gender equality as a global policy script for economic growth becomes more prominent as we explore the discourses adopted during Ortega's administration (2006 – 2019). As such, this dissertation shows that in theory Nicaragua bears a robust national legal-regulatory framework on gender equality<sup>55</sup>, including the Law 648 for Equality of Rights and Opportunities (2008); Law 717 about Equal Access to Land Ownership and creation of the fund for the purchase of Land with gender equity for rural women (2010); National Plan for Human Development (2012 – 2016). That said, I bring attention to the discourse in which the Law 648 is based and national campaigns for women's empowerment in Nicaragua, given the proximity between the language and framework adopted by the GGI and those two legal frameworks of public policy. The Law 648 addresses national principles for equity and equality of rights and opportunities in Nicaragua between women and men<sup>56</sup> (LAW 648, article 1, 2008). The law is structured<sup>57</sup> under a 'gender approach' (gender

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<sup>55</sup> Political constitution of Nicaragua (1987) and legal reforms of 2014; (b) in 2008, the Law n° 648 (Law for the Equality of rights and opportunities), since it incorporates recommendations in the Action Program signed in Vienna (1993) and Beijing World Conference (1995); (c) Law 717 about Equal access to land ownership (2010); (d) in 2012, Law 779 - Integral law against gender-based violence towards women; (e) Family Code summarized by the Law 870; (f) Law 896 against human trafficking (2015); (g) National Plan for Human Development (PNHD 2012 – 2016) (LOPEZ URBINA, 2018, p. 57). Furthermore, part of its National Project for Human Development, the country has implemented three essential laws to address food security for rural women: Law n° 693 for Food and Nutrition Sovereignty and Security Law<sup>55</sup> (2009), Law n° 757 for Dignified and Equitable Treatment of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendants<sup>55</sup> (2011), Law n° 717 for the Creation of the Fund for the Purchase of Land with Gender Equity for Rural Women<sup>55</sup> (2010).

<sup>56</sup> Artículo 1 'Es objeto de la presente Ley promover la igualdad y equidad en el goce de los derechos humanos, civiles, políticos, económicos, sociales y culturales entre mujeres y hombres; establecer los principios generales que fundamenten políticas públicas dirigidas a garantizar el ejercicio efectivo en la igualdad' (2008). See [https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/2008\\_ley648\\_nic.pdf](https://oig.cepal.org/sites/default/files/2008_ley648_nic.pdf).

<sup>57</sup> 'In order to comply with this Law, the following general public policy guidelines are established: 1) The incorporation of the gender approach is guaranteed to ensure the participation of women and men in public policies by the Powers of the State, its administrative bodies at the national level, the Governments of the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast, municipalities and the institutions of constitutional creation as a comprehensive strategy to guarantee equality and the elimination of all forms of discrimination. 2) Public policies, actions, programs and projects to achieve equal opportunities and treatment between women and men will be designed and executed within the framework of sustainable human development and

mainstreaming) and executed under the framework of sustainable human development with citizen participation for the strengthening of democracy. In the economic area, the law establishes similar guidelines<sup>58</sup> - *with the exception of counting women's productivity and contribution to Nicaragua's economy*<sup>59</sup> - for the development of public policies in Nicaragua as the ones promoted by the Global Gender Gap Index: *increase women's labor participation in the form of employment policies; guaranteed equal pay; promote the protection of women's working rights*. Moreover, based on this law, Nicaragua developed its own statistical mechanism to control and measure the women's access and participation in labor markets: '7) the national registry of employment status and wages should be periodic and disaggregated by sex' (ARTICLE 7, LAW 648, 2008). Though this legislation does not extend in length towards its definition of women's economic empowerment, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Women's Affairs along with the Instituto de La Mujer are the main public institutions responsible for integrating the guidelines from the Law 648 into the everyday lives of Nicaraguan women in the form of campaigns and projects. For instance, the Ministry of Women's Affairs clarifies that *Nicaragua relies on an 'economic model of creativity and entrepreneurship' based on*

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with citizen participation for the strengthening of democracy and fight against poverty' (LAW 648, article 6, 2008).

<sup>58</sup> 'The following guidelines must be applied in employment policies, plans, programs and projects for job placement: 1) Include in employment policies the provisions contained in this Law in order to achieve real equality in the exercise of labor rights between women and men, access to work, labor relations and the conditions generated by them. 2) Women and men must receive equal pay for equal work, in accordance with their work experience, academic preparation, level of responsibility of the position, as well as enjoy the labor rights and social benefits that correspond to them. 3) The requirements and criteria for the selection of personnel that are established must contemplate equal access and opportunities between women and men, without discrimination. The requirement of a pregnancy test to apply for a job is strictly prohibited. 7) The national registry of employment status and wages should be periodic and disaggregated by sex. 8) Guarantee the protection of the labor rights of working women, in accordance with current labor laws and international instruments ratified by the Republic of Nicaragua on labor matters' (LAW 648, ARTICLE 7, 2008)'.

<sup>59</sup> Art. 13 The Powers of the State, their administrative bodies at the national level, the Governments of the Autonomous Regions of the Atlantic Coast, the municipalities and the institutions of constitutional creation, must adapt the national statistics in order to account for the true participation of the women in their contribution to the Gross Domestic Product and to the National Accounts. They must also quantify through a Satellite Account the contribution of women to the country's economy, with the work they do at home. Satellite Account is understood as the one that quantifies the value of the activities generated in the family sphere, mainly carried out by women, whose value at market prices represents a certain percentage of the Gross Domestic Product (LAW 648, 2008).

*female economic empowerment: in this model, women are prioritized to become economically empowered in the development of 'proud entrepreneurship', female leadership, self-responsibility for the national economy, positive thinking, confidence in personal capabilities, goal-orientation and control over the distribution of resources.* That said, we can infer that Nicaragua's national policy framework of gender equality and principles of women's economic empowerment does represent an example of neoliberalisation of feminism with empowerment-discourses similar to the ones present within the Global Gender Gap Index, one that supports 'a particular machinery of governing women in global markets' (PRUGL, 2015, p. 14). Unsurprisingly, the Nicaraguan Ministry of Women's Affairs comments that '*Nicaragua has one of the highest rates of gender equity in the world – comparable to first world countries, because of Ortega's political commitment to gender equity*'. The vice-president Rosario-Murillo (2019) expands on the subject of women's empowerment by explaining the following:

Nicaragua is on the path of empowerment, you [\*women] must continue advancing until you manage to consolidate *those practices of empowered women, knowing and appropriating your rights, further developing your abilities, skills and participating at all levels. PROUDLY ENTREPRENEURIAL NICARAGUAN WOMAN...* Because Nicaraguan women are absolutely responsible, we are effective, we are distinguished workers, we are entrepreneurs and we learn every day from all the possibilities to grow in knowledge and grow in human quality that a new day offers us (ROSÁRIO-MURILLO, sd, our translation<sup>60</sup>)

Again, women's empowerment and gender equality strategies with neoliberal logics co-terminal with capitalist goals represent discourses through which governing functions are exerted over subjects: feminized identities are developed through neoliberal logics, such as of women *as workers, entrepreneurs and self-responsible empowered leaders*. In the case of what we observe in Nicaragua's national framework of gender, we see a different – yet similar – degree of neoliberal

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<sup>60</sup> Original quote: "Estas en el camino del empoderamiento, debes continuar avanzando hasta lograr consolidar esas prácticas de mujer empoderada, conociendo y apropiándote de tus derechos, desarrollando más tus capacidades, habilidades y participando a todos los niveles. *MUJER NICARAGÜENSE ORGULLOSAMENTE EMPRENDEDORA...* Porque la mujer nicaragüense es absolutamente responsable, somos efectivas, somos insignes trabajadoras, somos emprendedoras y aprendemos todos los días de todas las posibilidades de crecer en conocimiento y crecer en calidad humana que nos ofrece un nuevo día".



governmentality when compared to the neoliberal governmentality of gender national projects fostered by the Global Gender Gap Index. Where the Global Gender Gap Index refers to women's neoliberal subjectivities ('the good woman'; 'womenomics') by referring to the power of women (and sometimes girls) as workers, consumers, voters, leaders and 'untapped resources' to foster financial recovery and economic growth, Nicaragua's governments national framework of gender equality explored in this dissertation refers to women's neoliberal subjectivities in similar terms: women are also targeted as 'solutions to economic growth', but they are also associated with the survival of the conservative portrayal of Nicaragua's revolutionary legacy as a reproductive force (of motherhood and family unit) in the country, often subjected to the standards and ideals of 'Christianism, socialism and nuclear heteropatriarchal family'. Second, where Nicaraguan women are considered important as voters, consumers and leaders, Ortega's political commitment to gender equality scrutinizes feminism (and women's mobilizations) while instrumentalizes and modifies feminist notions and language for social change. Third, based on definitions from the Nicaraguan Ministry of Women's Affairs and Nicaragua's vice-president discourse on nicaraguan female empowerment: 'women's economic empowerment' seem to be the cornerstone of the national project of gender fostered by Ortega's government with self-responsible entrepreneurship and 'good woman citizenship' as key elements for women to achieve gender equality themselves rather than through collective struggle of social activism. To that, authors such as Pisani (2018) report that Nicaragua has registered the highest women's entrepreneurship rates in the region, above the average at the global level. The case of Nicaragua's approach to women's empowerment and gender equality shows a form of neoliberal governmentality of gender that targets mainly Nicaraguan population, including women to whom the national framework is being developed. It works well as an example of how self-government forms of conduct can be further transmitted from a range of international actors where technologies of knowledge – such as the Global Gender Gap Index – are concerned.

## 5. CONCLUSION

This conclusion is an attempt to provide an overview of this dissertation, its goals, theoretical background, methodological choices, analytical results and overall contributions to the field of IR. From the methodological point of view, our methodological strategy was based on Barragán (2006), followed by a feminist research design (TICKNER, 2006; D'IGNAZIO AND KLEIN, 2020) with qualitative methodology. This dissertation was carried as an explicative case study using qualitative methods and techniques, including triangulation of data, documental observation and documental data analysis. In naming this dissertation a feminist project, I presumedly called for an engagement between feminist theory and discussions about power in the data production of global indicators of gender, in hopes that some of the ideas exposed in this research could travel beyond Brazil and point to other pathways in research practices and international institutions as data producers on gendered segments. In this dissertation's research design, I spoke indirectly to Ferree's (2012) influential book on the importance of exposing varieties of feminism, forms of gendered states and gender projects in countries other than the United States, coming from a methodological place that Cynthia Enloe (2014) calls 'feminist curiosity' in international affairs. To claim this dissertation as a feminist investment, however, as Tickner (2006) contends requires an acknowledgement on my positionality as an author. It is clear that my affiliations here – Brazilian *amazônida*, white and cisgender woman who studied at the Federal University of Latin American Integration – played an important role in my articulation of this subject, including the feminist questions this dissertation allowed me to ask.

Among the questions raised through my *feminist curiosity* were to what extent global data production and evaluation on gender issues led by institutions in the Global North is representative of gender disparities and gender-based violence that takes place in countries in the Global South, such as Nicaragua; and how such incongruence present within the case of Nicaragua's representation is illustrative of power relations and neoliberal narratives about gender inequality engrained in aspects of governance and governing functions in the Global Gender Gap Index Reports. As many international institutions and actors search for formulas and ways to "fix" gender inequality with little regard for the social structures, discourses and forms of behavior that render gender inequality material in people's lives, and – what's worst – doing that for the sake of economic efficiency and world competition rather than from a place of shared humanness and desire for structural change, it becomes a pressing issue to

change the terms of discussion, so we can analyze what can kind of social process and change – if any - has been fostered throughout data collection and evaluation.

With that in mind, this dissertation aimed to provide a critical assessment on how *the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index help to foster an informal regime of governance of gender in world politics, based on the case study of Nicaragua's global leadership in gender equality portrayed the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) in contrast to the experiences of anti-gender politics and violence exercised at the local level*, from 2006 to 2019. Our specific objectives were the following: (a) to identify and analyze the representation of Nicaragua's national and global performance according to the "Global Gender Gap Index Reports (2006 – 2019)", taking into account how the four dimensions of the index are evaluated (Economic Participation; Health and Survival; Political Empowerment and Education attainment); (b) examine knowledge, gendered and governance-effects produced by the Global Gender Gap Index with respect to Nicaragua's case; (c) contrast Nicaragua's world leadership with contextual data from alternative sources (human rights' reports and academic literature about gender issues in the country) about the country's politics of gender, using the same range of time (2006 – 2019); and, finally, (d) inquiry about the limitations in the social practices of data production (inputs) and measurement of gender disparities (outputs) by the Global Gender Gap Index on Nicaragua's representation over the years, as in looking the gendered contexts that are privileged or under-considered by this particular dataset and how their de-prioritizing connects with broader discussions on the informal governance of gender in world politics.

At first, based on what has been discussed within the specialized literature, I hypothesized that the Global Gender Gap Index acted as a policy device to shape informal governance of gender in world politics, producing knowledge about gender equality worldwide and political evaluations. That said, I expected Nicaragua's assessment by the index to show the articulate forms the global gender gap index participates as a political device of neoliberal technology from an assembly of power relations of normalization, disciplinarian, government and biopolitics. Furthermore, the index's political functions posed it as a technology of neoliberal governmentality of gender, which is operationalized by social processes such as "gendered" subjectification, objectification, de-politicization, and arena-shifting of its "measured objects", Nicaragua included. At the same time, I analyzed that the index produced measurements of Nicaragua's performance through neoliberalizing social macro

readings or "gender neoliberalization" of the specific scenarios it analyzes. The labelling of Nicaragua as a world leader in gender equality by the index, as opposed to its problematic experience of anti-gender politics at the local level, allows us to infer that the ranking creates ways of changing, rewarding and disciplinarize subjective identities of international actors through notions of competitiveness and competence in gender issues worldwide, especially in the categories of the sub-index of Political Empowerment and Education. If we understand that labels are constituted by social processes operationalized by the index with material implications, from the perspective of data feminism and intersectionality, my hypothesis concluded that the index's shaped the informal governance of gender in world affairs by acting as a technology of neoliberal governmentality of gender in Nicaragua.

To confirm and further explore this hypothesis, I relied on many chapters: after the introduction, the second chapter of this dissertation was a theoretical one. Thus, in this second chapter, I presented the basic definitions of global indicators for world politics; more specifically, it focuses on the *Foucauldian views on knowledge and power and Foucaultian-inspired literature about global indicators and poststructural lens of feminist political economy about gender, governance and governmentality studies*. These two conceptual parts complement themselves and present an excellent site for further interdisciplinary dialogue between International Relations (IR) and Gender Studies. Both analytical approaches allow us to consider the cultural dimensions that shape the production of political narratives in the Nicaraguan context by the Global Gender Gap Index Reports. They also provide ground for a feminist account of the index's production by the World Economic Forum. Theoretically, I argued that current Foucaultian-inspired perspectives on quantification studies *alone* do not offer sufficient tools for theorising gendered politics and subjects related to portraying Nicaragua's gender equality by the Global Gender Gap Index Reports. Partly, I claimed that this research carries an epistemological and critical commitment to address both objects through the expertise of Women's and Gender Studies as a form to produce knowledge to address transformative politics. One of the reasons why I argue that gender studies add to our analysis of the representation of Nicaragua's performance of gender by the GGI is purposefully neglecting gender issues and women's and gender studies literature in analysing world politics on its gendered subjects, such as a global indicator of gender, means ignoring the understanding of a portion of the gendered dynamics mobilized or shaped at the international domain. As feminist and gender

studies are ultimately committed to understanding, describing, and theorising women's and gendered oppression and subordination, those approaches are inherently political because they aim to liberate women and other gendered-oppressed populations to their conditions subordination from structures of inequality. In turn, this is what makes those approaches unique and critical to our dissertation. In this dissertation, the disclosure of the basic features of global governance towards understanding it as informal governance of gender and the recognition of the social practices of gendered assimilation in governance structures, including the process of "neoliberalization of feminism" to produce "governmentality of gender".

After that, I exposed the rise of governance indicators in world affairs based on a foucaultian-inspired analytics of knowledge-power. This notion of power and ideology interviewed with governance is essential to this investigation. It allows us to widen how regimes of quantification can interact, influence or reflect the ideological and power aspects on the structures and actors they measure and provide knowledge. To explore such thing, I engaged with Erkkila and Pirrone's (2018) theoretical model about the governing functions of global indicators in higher education and global policy. Even though those authors do not discuss gender nor global indicators of gender, I found their theoretical model useful for my analysis, as it proposed four social processes that would describe the governing functions at play in discourses produced by global indicators: subjectification, objectification, arena-shifting and legitimation. Moreover, doing justice to the poststructural feminist political economy discussions carried out by True (2015), Cornwall et al. (2008), True (2015), Peterson and Runyan (2014) and Roberts (2014), I presented feminist perspectives about the interactions of gender equality, neoliberalism and international institutions. In the association of the triad "gender" (intricate panorama of the neoliberal economic framework), "woman" (object/social subject - generally from the Global South - disciplined as an economic citizen by the governmentalized identity) and "empowerment" (as a field of action governmentalized by financial institutions around marketed ideas), I explained the concepts of neoliberalisation of feminism and neoliberal governmentality of gender.

The discussions from this dissertation disclose important points in the development of scholarship between multiple fields: International Relations and perspectives about science and knowledge production (see MERRY, 2015; ERKKILA and PIRRONE, 2018; DAVIS et al, 2015), Gender Studies in feminist political economy (IPE) (ELIAS and ROBERTS, 2018) and, to some extent, some of the findings raised

new questions about the nature of gender relations in Latin and Central America, including how little feminist scholarship and IR scholarship discuss *the effects* of informal governance of gender to social actors from the Global South, as well social change that takes place in those contexts. This dissertation suggests that theoretical assessments of gender equality and the production of global indicators of gender in international affairs have been too focused in highlight and reward 'role model experiences' in the Global North (Nordic countries). In other words, experiences of Nordic countries - European role models (policy entrepreneurs) - engaged with trends in 'feminist foreign policy' become what any other country concerned with gender equality should strive to be. While the GGI points out to this new trend of countries seen as policy entrepreneurs in gender equality, it also raises questions about the mismatch produced by the neoliberalised forms of feminism to countries in the Global South. In Nicaragua, we see an environment of extreme suppression and regulation of women's movements, reproductive rights and health (control over feminized bodies and motherhood as the the Christian family), and women's economic self-sufficiency regardless of their well-being, all three central to the maintenance of

The results from my investigation on how *the political functions played by the Global Gender Gap Index help to foster an informal regime of governance of gender in world politics, based on the case study of Nicaragua's global leadership in gender equality portrayed the Global Gender Gap Index (GGGI) in contrast to the experiences of anti-gender politics and violence exercised at the local level* painted a somewhat different picture from our hypothesis exposed above. This research has confirmed that in many ways the GGI political functions are to govern the conduct of the conduct of states (and *not simply individuals nor populations*) on 'gender issues', where this global indicator of gender acts up as a device part of a technology of power (LEMKE) and knowledge in world affairs (MERRY, 2015). On that note, we demonstrate that the Global Gender Gap evaluates levels of a country's measured 'gender equality' between sexes rather than empowerment or development based on four parameters: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, Health and survival and Political empowerment, where 0 represents full inequality and 1 represents full equality. In this sense, those four criteria are the main boundaries around the issue of gender inequality at the global level. The measurements of the global gender gap index, in a way, carefully built the notion of gender equality around four boundaries of social reality in countries: economic participation and opportunity, educational attainment, Health and

survival and Political empowerment. The domain of what constitutes gender equality as a capability for a country is restricted by these four traits, making up what Foucault's work calls 'normalization'. In the normalization process at play within the GGI, we notice that the GGI disseminates a global standard view on 'gender disparities', where the discourses on the case of Nicaragua's world leadership portray 'gender equality' a capability of a country rather than a social justice goal to be pursued by a collective movement.

Nevertheless, in this dissertation we have learned that through the governing functions of the GGI 'gender equality' becomes a strategy to govern states (TRUE, 2015) through discursive strategies of depoliticization, objectification, subjectification, arena shifting and legitimation (ERKKILA and PIRONE, 2018) on the authority of the GGI as a technology of knowledge. More than that, we ended up with the conclusion that the GGI performs distinct but complementary political functions that target 'national gender projects' (CONWELL, 2002) of countries rather than simply 'gender' as a construct. In the GGI's political rationale, states become global leaders – best performers and certainly above the average – when they employ national gender projects aligned with the neoliberal rationale proposed and legitimated by the GGI. As such, the GGI's forms of measurement and quantification governs and normalizes standards for the global governance of gender (through neoliberal national gender projects) in countries through framings of neoliberal governmentality and the governing functions of GGI's numbers. From this initial assessment on the Global Gender Gap Index' role in fostering an informal global governance of gender in world affairs regarding the evaluation of Nicaragua's ranking and status in global gender disparities, we can draw many conclusions: First, Nicaragua's national identity in gender issues is created, altered, and rewarded as a world leader and top performer by the GGI's governing functions, depoliticizing the meaning of gender equality by its newly reinforced connection with governments, markets and national competitiveness.

To illustrate that, my data collection and data analysis show that *the GGI gives rise to two different political narratives about gender affairs in Nicaragua across time: (1) at first, Nicaragua is portrayed as a country whose performance situates 'below the average standards of gender equality' (2006 – 2011), therefore passive of self-optimization to achieve the 'norm' in four areas of gender affairs established by the GGI and (2) second, with sufficient institutional change, Nicaragua is represented as a 'world leader in gender equity' above the standards of gender equality*

*abroad (2012 – 2019), outperforming most countries in the world ranking and being showcased as a ‘role model’ in the region of Latin America, as well as presenting similar traits of world-leadership in gender equality (‘top 10 most gender equal country’) along with nordic states, with fast-paced predictions to achieve gender equality in the world race to become a gender-equal country. In these two temporal intervals (2006 – 2011, 2012-2019), it is possible to notice precisely how the objectification, subjectification and arenashifting processes occur at the GGI’s forms of evaluation, as the GGI’s is successful in recreating boundaries of quantification and representation used to reflect the social world of Nicaragua to the public opinion at the global level.*

*Beyond that, it possible to notice that Nicaragua’s representation and evaluation over the years through the GGI expands on the biopolitical functions performed by the GGI as well as its negative effects to enhance and properly represent Nicaragua’s gender gaps in women’s health and survival. In contrast to many outlets where Nicaragua is represented as having one of the most conservative legislations against women’s reproductive rights and health care access, as well as a historic of state repression against women’s political behaviour, feminist and women’s movements that has give rise to the creation of a network of Nicaraguan feminist diaspora in Costa Rica and Spain, the GGI’s recognize Nicaragua as a steady world-leader in gender equality regarding matters of health, women’s survival and women’s political empowerment in the country. During this dissertation’s data collection, literature review and qualitative analysis, I have found evidence that the there is a national political project of gender (Conwell, 2002) within Ortega’s administration at play in Nicaragua that help us understand the limitations of the GGI’s evaluations as well as the neoliberal logics shared by the GGI’s governing functions and Nicaragua’s own representation of its domestic affairs to pass along the government of its citizens. Such national project of power is gendered in four specific areas: women’s health, reproductive rights and survival (NEUMANN, 2014; 2011); women’s political participation and interests in state-civil society relations (KAMPWIRTH, 2011; 2016) and women’s economic participation. The method of data triangulation by levels allowed me to gather sufficient data to develop an alternative narrative of gender disparities in Nicaragua, one that is largely distinct from the positive evaluations provided by the GGI about Nicaragua as a world leader in gender equity.*

The alternative narrative built through my data collection has served to uncover the political functions of the GGI’s forms of evaluation concerning Nicaragua’s



national project of gender. For instance, I contrasted Nicaragua's evaluations from the GGI with alternative narrative based on the following key events in Nicaragua's gender politics: (a) gendered discourses within policies and speeches from Ortega's administration as well as adverse outcomes of policies that target women's health; (b) the outlawing of all forms of abortion, with the penal code reform based on law 641 and its implications to women's health in the country; (c) the investigation on the violation women's rights in matters of health and health care conducted by the International Amnesty; (d) when the state of Nicaragua was reported by women's movements to the Interamerican Commission of Human Rights, being later subjected to preventive measures. As for the political empowerment evaluated by the GGI, I contrast it in the case of Nicaragua by exploring an alternative perspective on Political Empowerment and feminist-state relations through the following elements: (a) gendered discourses that target women's political empowerment during Ortega's administration; (b) Ortega's actions of repression and political discourses against activists and women's movements; (c) law reforms for gender parity. Furthermore, I discuss gender-based violence in Nicaragua based on law reforms, such as (a) the launching of the Integral Law 779 against gender-based violence towards women (2012), (b) the reform of Law 779 to 'safeguard the family unit' in Nicaragua (2013); (c) the creation of 'Gabinetes de la Familia (state institutions for family counselling and state mediation in cases of gender-based violence); (d) the discontinuation of the social program 'Comísarias de la Mujer y niñez' (2016); finally, in the account of gender disparities in the economic domain, I bring attention to the discursive and material implications from national campaigns about "women's empowerment", discourses from the vice-president Rosario-Murillo and laws to enhance gender parity in the economic sector.

As established throughout our data analysis, in both the GGI's and the national gender project of Nicaragua, it is possible to identify the neo-liberalization of feminism (PRUGL, 2015) through the constitution of new rationalities about women at the global level (as 'economic solutions', 'assets', 'weapons' and 'resources' for the world economy) and Nicaraguan women (as 'proud entrepreneurial and empowered women' and 'mothers and comrades' essential to Nicaragua's economy, Nicaraguan nuclear and Christian family model and Orteguist nationalist project). In both processes of neoliberalisation of feminism – the GGI's and Nicaragua's national gender project, gender politics assumes a character of individual and productive accountability, in which the solution to inequality comes to be described by the capacity building, providing

resources to women and encouraging entrepreneurial identities, resulting in a marketized version of gender equality and women's empowerment. The patriarchal national project of gender observed at the domestic level in Nicaragua is not recognized in its anti-gender politics content by the GGI's forms of measurement and analysis, given that the national gender project in Nicaragua is aligned with practices of neoliberal self-government and female empowerment that render the GGI's forms of neoliberal governmentality of *national gender projects* operational. Granted, the GGI measures global disparities in gender and ranks countries, but its form of measurement and interpretation not only masks gender-based violence as something structural and therefore who requires systemic change, it is particularly unable to capture rates of gender inequality in non-eurocentered contexts such as Nicaragua. Instead, it conflates different national projects of gender among countries, which is problematic, as Nicaragua's government makes use of the national branding of world leader in gender equity established by the GGI to delegitimize alternate gendered mobilizations with feminist and human rights content at the domestic level.

As shown in this dissertation, even though the conservative 'national gender project' fostered during Ortega's government carries many legacies of hostility (against feminism and women's activists who do not identify with the political projects of the country) from the Somoza Era, Sandinist Revolution and Postrevolutionary Nicaragua, it is a fact that Ortega's government national gender project is structured around neoliberal logics of gender issues that way too often do not benefit women nor safeguard women's human rights. Evidence of that is shown in this dissertation, as grassroot organizations, protesters, NGOs, international agencies and public authorities demonstrate strong opposition to the 'national gender project' and its forms of violence against Nicaraguan women at play in Ortega's government. During Ortega's government, historical turns against 'feminist gender politics' and women's rights, as well as the proposal of a new model of empowerment for women's roles in Nicaragua society demonstrate the many events that engender women's well-being in comparison to their male peers that cannot be fully grasped by the GGI's evaluations of countries' gender gaps. Therefore, I argue that our analysis towards social processes that describe the governing functions of the GGI help us better understand the *informal regime of governance fostered by the index is one that relies not on the governance of gender, but at the governance of 'national projects of gender', which it makes it hard to take into account the localized version of patriarchal authority present within the*

*Ortega's government in gender issues. Where the GGI was developed to provide an universal and comparative account of gender gaps between countries, the case of Nicaragua illustrates that the absence of measurements of gender-based violence throughout each subcriteria (health and survival, educational attainment, women's political empowerment and economic opportunity) largely benefits the evaluation of countries with conservative national projects of gender with patriarchal authority whose nature makes use of neoliberalised versions of feminism.*

In particular, this dissertation advances the scholarship on gender, neoliberalism and international relations. Most studies have analyzed the intersections of gender, neoliberalism and international relations through either institutional analysis, or case-studies located within the Global North. Sydney Calkin and Sara Wallin (2018), for example, discuss the implications on the absorption of feminist language and gender mainstreaming as a governance strategy in financial institutions such as the World Bank and the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD), while True (2015) explores the notion of global governance of gender through the role transnational elites, gendered discourses and neoliberalisms. Elias (2013), on the other hand, considers the work of the World Economic Forum more broadly and Prügl (2015) analyzes the neoliberalisation of feminism at the implementation of international projects and campaigns from private companies. What sets this dissertation apart in this scholarship is, therefore, its ability to engage with discussions of gender, neoliberalism and IR by connecting three different puzzles: the production of knowledge (Global Gender Gap Index), its social and political processes regarding gender issues in global governance and its implications for Nicaragua as an understudied "role model" of national gender project from the Global South.

Finally, my critique at the Global Gender Gap Index Reports' politics of measurement and informal governance of national gender projects summarized through the case of Nicaragua is located in a broader transnational movement in interdisciplinary scholarship called data feminism. More than that, my dissertation is also situated within a broader call to bring the qualitative perspectives into quantitative objects ("datasets"). Quantitative data and quantitative forms of measurement can be intrinsically embodied, social and subjective, which is why quantitative data also deserves our careful examination as a social practice with broader implications and roles in world affairs. According to this perspective, we should expand IR's scholarship towards new forms of analyzing meaning and power relations within global and

statistical subjects than simply adjusting global indexes' criteria. Without doubt, more research needs to be done on the prevailing narratives within global indicators, global statistical measurements and global rankings of any sort, so we can learn new ways in which data and evaluations can benefit goals of social justice and praxis.

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