

Radboud University Nijmegen

¡Pura Vida! Living the good life in Costa Rica?

A research concerning work permits and migration strategies of female Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica



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Master Thesis Human Geography

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NOTE: Picture on front page taken by Kirian Baggerman. A Nicaraguan woman with a child during the mass at Park La Merced.

Preface

¡Pura Vida! A remark you hear on a daily base when you visit Costa Rica, it is used to say hello, to say goodbye, as an answer to “how are you?”, and most importantly: it is a way of life. However, is living in Costa Rica as Pura Vida as the Ticos¹ make it seem? Or does Costa Rica also have another side?

I came across the case of Costa Rica while reading newspapers and articles in search for a topic for my thesis, and what intrigued me the most, was the argument made that the Costa Rican government decided that they need Nicaraguan migrants for their economy, resulting in changes in their migration policy to regulate the migration between Nicaragua and Costa Rica (Sandoval-García 2015). This immediately grabbed my attention because at the same time, here in the Netherlands we were struggling with the arrival of many migrants, for whom we had no homes and a part of the Dutch people, media and some politicians responded quite negatively to these arrivals. And right now, almost 1,5 years later after I started with my orientation for a topic, it is Donald Trump who wants to ban migrants from the United States even though there are many who argue that the American economy would not be the same without these migrants.² Keeping the relationship between migrants and the economy highly discussed.

After my bachelor in Anthropology I wanted to broaden my perspective and chose for a master in Human Geography, with a specialization in Migration, Globalization and Development, because this relates the closest to my interested in people and other cultures. These interests gave me an easily made choice when I came into contact with the Costa Rican organisation CIDEHUM who wanted to know more about the Nicaraguan migrants and about their situation after the changes in the law. However, doing the research for both males and females at the same time would have been too much, so I asked a fellow student, Daniëlle³, whether she wanted to join this research, which she did and a temporary partnership was born.

Before going to Costa Rica, we prepared ourselves by reading about the context, however, you are never fully prepared and the factual situation in the field differed from some on beforehand perceived parameters. One example is that we asked all the migrants where they lived at that moment. No exact directions, but to get some insights in whether they live nearby or travel from another city every day. One day, in park La Merced, we asked a migrant: do you live here? And with here, we implied San José. But the answer was: no, I live over there (while pointing over his shoulder). We did not understand and thought he meant another city close to San José, so we asked him: in another city? And he said: no, I stay in the park over there. At that moment, I realized that he pointed in the direction of another park, one block away from park La Merced. But that was also the only reasonable thought that came to my mind at moment, both me and Daniëlle did not exactly know what to say, I was flabbergasted. Before coming there, I never had imagined that we would actually speak with people who do not have a home. Or better

¹ The Costa Rican population calls itself Ticos. For them this is a very positive word and they are proud to say “soy Tico” (I am Tico). On the other hand, they call Nicaraguans ‘Nicas’, but although the words seem the same (an abbreviation for the country of origin), this word has a negative connotation and is used to emphasize the differences between the two people from the two countries.

² <http://fortune.com/2017/01/30/visa-ban-foreign-entrepreneurs/>

<http://www.marketwatch.com/story/this-is-why-the-us-workforce-needs-immigrants-more-than-ever-2017-03-09>

³ Daniëlle has written her own thesis “Pura Vida o Vida Dura?”, but more information on this partnership follows in chapter 3.

said, they do have a home, but they choose to leave that place and to migrate to another country, to work and live under very unstable and insecure conditions to offer their families a chance on a better life, not so very Pura Vida...

The women that I spoke to during this research shared aspects of their lives with me that were emotionally very important to them. For example, the topic of children which initially made many women sad when they spoke about their children living with family in Nicaragua. But when asking them more about their children, their emotions changed into pride because they work very hard for them and they are happy that their children go to school. So I would like to thank all the respondents who were willing to participate in my research, to spend time with me and who trusted me enough to tell their stories, even though some of them were working without having the necessary papers. Special thanks goes to Javier López Castro, who did not only agreed to do an interview, but also helped me and Daniëlle with some translations and with meeting new Nicaraguan migrants. Without him and all the other respondents it would not have been possible to collect the data we needed.

Secondly, I would like to thank Arabela and Didier for making us feel at home in Garza during our language course and who welcomed us again at the end of our time in Costa Rica to help when we were looking for more respondents. The same goes for tía Patricia, who became our host in Puntarenas and helped us with meeting new respondents.

Then I would like to say *muchas gracias a* José Antonio Ramírez López, who spend many hours together with Daniëlle and me in La Merced to help out with the questionnaires, and for whom no question was too much when I was writing and came across new things about which I wanted to know more.

Special thanks goes to my supervisor Lothar Smith, who guided me in the right direction, gave me new inspiration and the discussions we had led to new useful insights. His help and support while writing this thesis, lessened the struggle of writing and helped me to push through.

Also, I would like to thank CIDEHUM for offering me and Daniëlle the opportunity of doing an internship with them. They really helped us on our way during our first weeks and their door was always open for any question.

Then, I would like to thank my mother for always supporting me in my decisions. And last, but not least, my co-researcher Daniëlle, for the amazing time we have experienced together and the manner in which we helped each other during our time in the field.

Afterwards, I can say that I have enjoyed doing this research very much, it was an amazing experience and I sincerely hope that you will enjoy reading this thesis.

Irene Bremer

April 2017

Executive Summary

Cross-border labour migration is a common feature in Central America, but when thinking about this, it is probably the Mexican – United States migration route that first comes to mind, including the rejecting attitude from the United States towards these migrants. The migration route between Nicaragua and Costa Rica is a lot less famous, but at least just as interesting. Because some years ago, Costa Rica chose to change its migration policy, with the plan to simplify labour migration between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. This contrasts with the migration policies from most other countries who receive a lot of migrants looking for better employment opportunities.

The purpose of this thesis is to gain more insight in the implementation of the current Costa Rican migration law, from the perspective of female Nicaraguan migrants. The following research question will serve as a guide-line through this thesis: *What are the social, economic and political factors influencing the decision-making process of female Nicaraguan migrants during their (re-)application for a temporary work permit and how should these factors be changed to reach the migrant's preferred future migration strategy?*

The first chapter of this thesis will set the scene by explaining the context of the research, and the motive and relevance will be addressed. This is followed by the second chapter which elaborates further on the topics mentioned in the first chapter, but from a theoretical perspective. This chapter starts with explaining some traditional approaches to labour migration and how discussions on labour migration led to a change in opinion, stating that traditional approaches with a mainly economic focus do not do justice to the actual situation. There are more factors of influence on migratory movements and how this fits into the Costa Rican case.

The third paragraph of the second chapter deals with female migration. For many years, from a scientific perspective, the movements of female migrants did not receive much attention. Right now, it is argued that the migration experience is different for women and men, resulting in more interest for the female migrant. The same counts for the Costa Rican case, there is not much information available on the female Nicaraguan migrant, even though their situation differs from that of a male Nicaraguan migrant. With the exception of the paragraph which focusses on female migration, the other paragraphs dive deeper into possible motives for migration and a theoretical approach on how to address these motives and at what part of the migratory movement they are of influence. Respectively, a culture of migration will be discussed, because social networks can facilitate migration and belonging. This motive is in part related to the paragraph on female migration, because family and children influence a women's decision possibilities on migration. The last paragraph explains the thresholds approach, arguing for a different take on migration motives and showing its relevance for this research.

My co-researcher and I started our fieldwork in San José, later expanding the research to two other cities: Puntarenas and Garza. San José and Puntarenas are larger cities and Garza is smaller on a remote location. Starting our research with interviews to give us a general idea of the situation, this research existed of mixed methods and the interviews were followed by

questionnaires to reach more migrants. San José offered an easy access to meet the first respondents, as the large urban area around San José has many employment possibilities, attracting labour migrants. However, approaching female migrants on the street of a busy city appeared to be more difficult, leading to the decision to search for respondents in other places, resulting in some interesting insights.

The data of this research is presented in chapter 4 to 7. Chapter 4 introduces four female Nicaraguan migrants who showcase the variety among the Nicaraguan migrants and how their specific situations have affected their choices on migration. In chapter 5 to 7, different dimensions of migration motivations are discussed and these women return to illustrate some of the findings.

Chapter 5 focusses on the dealings with the law, so the political factors. This chapter explains the ins and outs of the Costa Rican law and migration policy, and how the female Nicaraguan migrants' experiences with this policy differ from its purposes. The difficulties with the applications for a visa leads to the next paragraphs which discuss what implications this has had on their migration strategies and how it influences their future aspirations, using the thresholds approach.

Central to chapter 6 are the economic factors that have an influence on the migratory decisions. In this chapter, the previous situation in Nicaragua is outlined, including educational and employment opportunities. The next paragraph moves onwards to the current work possibilities and limitations in Costa Rica and future strategies related to employment. In the last paragraph, it is argued that the troubles experienced during the visa applications are related to employment, resulting in a close relationship between the political and economic factors.

Chapter 7 deals with the social factors concerning the decisions made and those that will be made by the female Nicaraguan migrants. This chapter begins with explaining the importance of family and how they cannot only support the decision to migrate, but also be the reason to migrate. This is followed by a section on a small part of the family: children. They are highlighted because children affect the decisions made by these female migrants in a specific manner. The next paragraph of this chapter focusses on an entirely different social factor; discrimination and the final paragraph discusses how both family and discrimination affect the future aspirations of these migrants.

Analysing this data with relation to the threshold leads in the conclusion to a number of key findings; the threshold of indifference is in many ways influenced by the social factors. Initially, before migrating, these factors can form a motive to leave, but later they can increase the threshold, through home sickness and/or the wish to live with their children. Another important aspect in this threshold, is the finding that discrimination appeared to be of minor influence.

The locational threshold is the closest related to the theories related to labour migration. The push and pull factors from Nicaragua and Costa Rica lead to a preference for Costa Rica.

However, once a migrant is in Costa Rica, accessing work is more difficult than expected and applying for a visa to work legally is even more difficult.

Lastly, the trajectory threshold is related to the locational threshold and likewise influenced by both economic and political factors. The distance between Nicaraguan and Costa Rica is relatively short and with a tourist visa a migrant has easy access to the country. However, in a later stage, the distance seems to increase, when a migrant is forced to return home when a visa expires or when a migrant cannot encounter employment, making travelling in ratio more expensive.

When comparing these findings to the purpose of the current Costa Rican migration law, which is to improve the application process for migrants, to make it easier to apply for a visa which allows migrants to work, regularizing the migratory flow. It can be concluded that at this moment the opposite seems to be the case, putting these female Nicaraguan migrants in a position that can pose a threat to their human rights, as migrants who work illegally have no rights to social services and can be deported from Costa Rica.

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Chapter 1 – Introduction

“¿Un permiso de trabajo? Ya te dije que no lo tengo. Yo quiero uno, pero es muy difícil conseguir un permiso. Necesito unos papeles, pero estos son caros y complicadas, yo no sé cómo hago, todo es muy duro.”⁴

Patricia, interview 03 May 2016

1.1 Migration in the context of Costa Rica

Patricia is one of the many Nicaraguans who chose to migrate from Nicaragua to Costa Rica. A phenomenon which is nothing new, because migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica goes back for at least a hundred years. It all begun with migration for economic motives, Nicaraguans came to Costa Rica looking for seasonal labour or for work on plantations. Later in the 20th century, migration from Nicaraguans to Costa Rica took a more political turn, when many Nicaraguans fled the country because of the Somoza dictatorship and after that the Sandinista revolution. When the Nicaraguan government changed, in the beginning of the 1990s, many of those who fled returned home to rebuild their lives. However, only a few years later, a new migration wave emerged. This wave mostly consists of (temporary) labour migrants, although the motives for migration and the factors contributing to the decision to migrate are more diverse (Cortés Ramos 2006; Otterstrom 2008).

From a global perspective, one could argue that the migration route between Costa Rica and Nicaragua is a clear example of South-South migration, a process which is rapidly gaining more scientific attention and at least became 36% of the total migration flow⁵, and considering that this number does not cover daily non-recorded commuters (Collinson, Tollman, Kahn and Clark 2006), the number is likely to be much higher, so one could argue that this process should be considered important for the effects it has on developing countries (Bakewell 2009; Ratha and Shaw 2007; Gindling 2008). However, there are still several ambiguities to this term⁶ and therefore I would like to look at the Nicaraguan migration to Costa Rica as translocal migration. Translocality is used to describe socio-spatial dynamics, it considers processes of identity formation that extend beyond state boundaries, it looks at an integration of both mobility and

⁴ A work permit? I already told you that I do not have one, I want one, but it is difficult to get one. I need certain papers, but they are expensive and complicated, I do not know what to do, everything is very hard.

⁵ <http://www.oecd.org/dev/migration-development/south-south-migration.htm>

⁶ There are still several issues with this term; there is a certain discordance on what constitutes the global south, what these countries have in common, besides being in the ‘South’, and lastly the differences within the phenomenon of migration between South-South and North-South migration are not yet clear, as temporary migration shows resemblances within both forms of migration (Bakewell 2009; Campillo-Carrete 2013; Ratha and Shaw 2007).

fixity (Greiner and Sakdapolrak 2013). These are aspects central to this thesis, the relationship between the state (boundaries), the migrant and the surrounding society, how these influences each other in the decision to stay or leave.

The seasonal and temporary migration between Nicaragua and Costa Rica is part of the global phenomenon which characterizes the increased mobility of this era (Skeldon 2016). Temporary migration is most evident as economically motivated and it could both be part of legal, and of irregular migration. Also circular migration is related to the process of temporary migration, as migrants can move back and forth between origin and destination (Hugo 2013; Skeldon 2016). However, this is only when the situation allows for it, because the majority of the people have the right to leave their home country, but only a minority has the freedom to enter any another country of their own choice (Pécoud and de Guchteneire 2007). This situation is where the influence from the state begins, as state migration policies try to control the influx of temporary migrants, because they feel the urge to protect their national security, threatened by migrants (Castles, de Haas and Miller, 2014; Aksakal and Schmidt-Verkerk 2015). The need to protect national security also occurred in Costa Rica, where the long history of (unauthorized) migration led to a very strict migration policy, in which the Costa Rican government dealt with migration through a policy of constraint and prosecution. National security was used as a guideline for these policies, leaving employers with the possibility to exploit those migrants who did not possess the right papers and therefore are unable to claim their rights because they find themselves in an irregular situation (Cortés Ramos 2006).

However, in Costa Rica, quite recently, the state changed its mind about national security and state protection in relation to the Nicaraguan migrants. This change in opinion led to a reconsideration of the migrant policies which had existed for years. The main reason behind this reconsideration was that, even though neither NGOs or academic research have been able to calculate the exact economic contribution of migrants to the Costa Rican economy and the media mainly describes Nicaraguan migrants as a cost, draining Costa Rican resources, the Costa Rican government chose to acknowledge that migrants (mostly Nicaraguan migrants) are important for their economy, because they fill the economic niches in which Costa Ricans do not like to work, like construction, seasonal agricultural and domestic work. Implying that a decline in Nicaraguan migration would instigate a negative effect on Costa Rica's social, economic and cultural development (Cortés Ramos 2006; Sandoval-García 2015).

This realization induced a change in the Costa Rican migration policy, leading to the current *Ley de migración y extranjería*, N° 8764 (DGME 2009), which went into effect in March 2010. In this law, the focus on national security becomes replaced by a human rights discourse and it is supposed to facilitate regularization for the unauthorized, working migrants. Nicaraguans can legalize their status by applying

for employment-based, temporary residence permits, these permits can be extended and this enables Nicaraguans to stay in Costa Rica. To emphasize the legalization process, the law contains information on the sanctions established for both the employers who hire unauthorized migrant workers and for those migrants who choose stay in Costa Rica illegally (Sandoval-García 2015)

However, research on the effects of the changed law has shown that this current law does pose some obstacles, fundamental to the formation of this research. Firstly, the costs are very high for the migrants, to renew a temporary work permit, they would have to pay US\$200 and for each month that they remain in Costa Rica irregularly, it costs them a US\$100 fine (DGME 2009). Secondly, this regularization is based on work permits, so migrants need the support from an employer. But also for employers the procedure is difficult, costly, the acceptance rate is very low and the fines for hiring irregular migrants were postponed until 2015. All these aspects contributed to a very low number of issued permits.⁷ Then, to simplify the application process, the Costa Rican government made it possible to obtain application documents in Nicaragua, show these at the border and when these are approved, the workers become assigned to an employer before travelling to Costa Rica (DMGE 2009). Also, to gain more insight into the migrant population, the Costa Rican government promotes the use of a tourist visa by migrants to enter Costa Rica to search for work.⁸

This regularization of migration gives the Costa Rican government more insights in the actual number of migrants who enter and leave Costa Rica and provides the government with more detailed information about these migrants. Something which was considered to be of lesser importance before the current law, because until then, migrants in general used to be perceived as a threat to society (Montero Mora 2014). This new information showed that the number of female migrants coming to Costa Rica was increasing, a phenomenon central to the increased mobility of this era. On a global scale, as a result of economic transformations; male unemployment, a rising demand for feminized jobs and emancipation, more women enter the paid labour market and migrate independently from men. Global estimates are that almost half of all international migrants are female and although the so-called feminization of migration has led to an increase in attention for the role of female international migrants, female migration remains insufficiently inquired and very often falls outside of migration policy (Campillo-Carrete 2013; Davids and van Driel 2005; Momsen 2010; van Naerssen et al. 2015).

⁷ http://www.nacion.com/economia/empresarial/Migracion-cobrara-empleadas-domesticas-ilegales_0_1430456991.html
<http://www.laprensa.com.ni/2015/02/19/internacionales/1785662-empresarios-ticos-legalizan-poco-a-sus-trabajadores-extranjeros>

⁸ http://www.nacion.com/m/nacional/politica/Gobierno-visas-turismo-formalizan-inmigracion_0_1508049222.html

There are several factors influencing women to choose to migrate. Factors contributing in their country of origin include gender inequality, in the forms of lower wages than men and more difficulties in finding employment, but also violence, political and economic instability. By migrating and remitting money to family members who left behind, a woman can change her position in the family, her agency and contribute to the development of her household and/or community. However, many migrants end up working in sectors where there is little respect for basic labour rights, like in the caregiving and service sector. A lack of basic rights creates insecurity and migrants often pull the shortest end, effecting their ability to support themselves and their families (Robert 2015; van Naerssen et al. 2015).

Recent numbers in Costa Rica show that this country is no exception and that also here the number of female Nicaraguan migrants has increased over the years, because of the demand for low-skilled labour in Costa Rica. Nicaraguans tend to make more hours for less money, which makes them more attractive to employ as Costa Ricans (Marquette 2006). According to the 2011 National Census, almost 300.000 Nicaraguans live in Costa Rica, forming 75% of the total migrant population. And where in 2000 the number of men and women was equal, in 2011 the sex-ratio proved to be 90 men for every 100 women, so even though unfortunately there are no numbers from before the year 2000, in ratio the number of Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica seems to have increased (INEC 2000, 2011). Most women migrate to the region of San Jose, because San José is the largest urban area and has the highest demand for domestic workers, making this the region with proportionally the most Nicaraguan women. In total these women make up for a significant proportion of the Costa Rican labour force, in 2006 for example they formed 30% of the workforce in the domestic service (Marquette 2006).

Besides the omnipresence of Nicaraguan women in the migration flows to Costa Rica, overall, in the literature there is not much information available on the actual situation of female Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica (Otterstrom 2008). This is related to the fact that the Costa Rican government has only quite recently changed its mind and started to collect more data about the immigrant population in the country (Montero Mora 2014). But as said before, migrants in Costa Rica experience troubles with obtaining a work permit and the number of issued permits remains low, making it interesting to dive deeper in this relationship between the state and female Nicaraguan migrants. Because, although the Costa Rican government, unlike many other countries, has acknowledged the importance of immigrant workers and tries to improve the regularization process to better the situation of migrants and improve their integration in Costa Rican society, it seems that they have not yet achieved their goals. And for those migrants who *have* taken the effort to obtain a temporary work permit, they are still limited in their options, as these permits are only for one specific job and for a limited time frame. When the permit

expires or the migrant is no longer needed for that specific job, the migrant is left without a legal status and has three options. Return to Nicaragua, stay in Costa Rica to work irregularly or start all over again with the application process for a permit. It is this group of migrants who form the focus in this thesis, female Nicaraguan labour migrants in Costa Rica, working with or without a permit and who always need to think about their future decisions and aspirations.

1. 2 Significance

Scientific relevance

Seasonal migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica is not different from seasonal migration around the world, already hundreds of years old and mostly focussed on agricultural seasons. Seasonal migration is part of temporary migration, a labour migrant moves from one region or country to another, to search for season related employment and send money back home. There are many factors influencing the decision to remain in a country temporarily or permanently, aspects like the legal framework, integration, discrimination and labour market conditions in both the destination and origin country all play a role in the decision (Aksakal and Schmidt-Verkerk 2015). Most destination countries have similar perspectives on (temporary) migrants, they have to possess the 'right' documents to enter and when they do not, or when their permit is expired, they are expected to leave the country. Migration policy is mainly based on national security, to keep migrants out of the country (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Koser 2007). This is what makes Costa Rica an interesting country, certainly from a scientific perspective, as the current law differs from other countries, who in many cases have more repressive migration policies and this law is supposed to make it attractive for labour migrants to choose to come to Costa Rica (DGME 2009). This progressive law forms an interesting counter case to those other countries.

This research also has some affinity with gender studies, as already mentioned in the introduction, there are many Nicaraguan female migrants in Costa Rica, yet there has not been done much research on their situation (Sandoval-García 2015; Otterstrom 2008). In scientific literature, women are often perceived as immobile, they reach a certain age, become married and after that they are dependent on their husband. However, there are also scientists who emphasize the important role women can play in globalization or in development, they advocate the agency of women (Davids and van Driel 2005; Momsen 2010). A family can decide that it is best for the family when one person, and this can be a woman, migrates to work abroad, to maximize income and for the wellbeing of the whole family. This family then chooses a country where the wages are higher than that of their own, making the sending back of money one of the main motives (Stark 1991; De Haas 2010; Stark and Bloom 1985). Likewise, there are many Nicaraguan

women who have migrated to Costa Rica to work and remit, showing their independence and mobility (DGME 2012; Vandegrift 2008; Otterstrom 2008). Scientific research on both international as regional movements have shown that gender plays a key role in migration experiences and decisions, women can play an integral part in economic development (Chant 1991; Chant and Craske 2003; Boyle 2002; Elson and Gideon 1997). But these women also encounter several difficult situations, like a research on the tourism industry in Costa Rica (Vandegrift 2008) has shown that for a single mother, it is more difficult to live alone because there must be someone to take care of her children and she needs to earn more money for food and education. Therefore, it is important to know more about the perspectives and situation of migrant women, because it is not only most likely that they experience and think in other ways than men, but also they live under different conditions (Sandoval-García 2015; DGME 2012).

Hence, this research builds on migration literature about the debates on seasonal and temporary migration, with a special focus on the decision-making of female Nicaraguan migrants who have a temporary work permit or are looking to apply for one. These different fields will not only be brought together, but also discussed, to bring new insights in migration theory. This also offers governments and non-governmental organisations the opportunity to firstly learn more about the factors that influence the decision-making process of migrants who already migrated and how they picture their future scenarios, and secondly how they can adapt policy according to these new insights.

Societal relevance

As mentioned in the introduction, previous Costa Rican migration policies have had a long history of migration constraint and prosecution, resulting in the exploitation of migrants. However, since the government acknowledged the importance of migrants, both the government and interested organizations have tried to reform the situation of migrants in Costa Rica, and although the government has improved its policy, the current policy is not yet achieving its goals. Right now, the law is active for several years, but the positive effect of the (temporary) work permits for migrants seems to be lacking. Firstly, as said before, many migrants are still left without legal papers to work, because the application process appears to be complicated. Secondly, when a migrant *does* have a work permit, this is bound to an expiration date, which keeps the future uncertain (DGME 2012; Sandoval-García 2015; Marquette 2006; Azofeifa Ramos, Caamaño Morúa and Wo Ching 2015).

Therefore, it is important that both the government and those organisations concerned with migrants know what exact aspects of the current policy are lacking and what difficulties migrants encounter when they (re-)apply for a temporary work permit, as the current *ley de migración* has already

been active since 2010 and this information is not yet available on many aspects of the application process. Especially on the situation from female Nicaraguan migrants there is much left to explore and considering that at this moment more than half of the Nicaraguan migrants are female, it is relevant to pay more attention to the effects of the current policy on their livelihoods (Mok et al 2001; Otterstrom 2008; Montero Mora 2014; Cortés Ramos 2006) and through this research, this thesis aims to provide some more information.

This research has been executed in association with Centro Internacional para los Derechos Humanos de los Migrantes (CIDEHUM). CIDEHUM is an international organisation, which organizes programs to protect the rights of migrants, already since 2000. Their special focus lays with gender equality and the assistance of women, children and adolescents in vulnerable conditions. In recent years, CIDEHUM developed as a central meeting point for dialogue between governmental and nongovernmental players and currently some of their specific objectives are to contribute to programs that help migrants with their migration routes, to participate in the decision-making processes and creation of policies related to migration and to support actions taken to prevent irregular migration. In all the objectives, they lay a special emphasis on the situation of female migrants. Central to all the goals CIDEHUM likes to achieve, are basic human rights, which they want to improve for all migrants, to lessen their exploitation and vulnerability, and that governmental institutions take their responsibilities on this aspect.⁹ However, to be able to reach their objectives and goals, CIDEHUM needs to improve and deepen their knowledge on these topics. Therefore, this research is particularly important, as the results from this thesis will also be communicated with CIDEHUM, thereby strengthening CIDEHUM's knowledge and assist in achieving their goals. In this way, they can help migrants in a better organized manner and contribute to the improvement of migration policies in Costa Rica.

1.3 Research objective and questions

This thesis aims to contribute to the knowledge on the relationship between the current Costa Rican migration law (DGME 2009) and strategies used by female Nicaraguan migrants to support their livelihoods while working in Costa Rica with (or without) a work permit. To achieve this goal, I will not only look at the influencing factors and strategies employed by the female migrants, but also make a comparison between the different household situations of female Nicaraguan migrants, whether they are single or married, have children or not, and whether their family lives in Nicaragua, Costa Rica or both. These aspects have

⁹ cidehum.org

an influence on the decision making process, the risks someone is willing to take and the responsibilities a woman can feel towards others, and therefore influence her decision on applying for a permit which allows her to work, or searching for other opportunities to support her livelihood. The research question addressed in this thesis is:

What are the social, economic and political factors influencing the decision-making process of female Nicaraguan migrants during their (re-)application for a temporary work permit and how should these factors be changed to reach the migrant's preferred future migration strategy?

To answer this question, I have discerned four sub-questions:

- What social factors are of influence on the decision-making process of female Nicaraguan migrants during their (re-)application for a temporary work permit?

When a female migrant lives in Costa Rica, the location of her family and children could affect her decision on whether she applies for a permit again. Her health, residency and ties with Nicaragua could play a role in this, but also the feeling of being welcome in the new host society, making aspects like belonging and discrimination of influence on the decisions made.

- What economic factors are of influence on the decision-making process of female Nicaraguan migrants during their (re-)application for a temporary work permit?

The economic aspects are important to look at because these factors are more based on rationality. The earnings of the migrant influence the manner in which they are able to support their livelihoods and the choice to become mobile to look for better economic options. Is there (still) a market for the profession of the migrant, does she have debts, how much money will the job produce and is that enough to meet her goals, are all aspects that could have consequences on the decisions to migrate or not.

- What political factors are of influence on the decision-making process of female Nicaraguan migrants during their (re-)application for a temporary work permit?

The current migration law imposes several fines on migrants when they remain in Costa Rica irregularly, but there are also costs attached when a migrant chooses to re-apply for a (temporary) work permit or residency. Beside this, the political situation in Nicaragua could have an effect on the decision, e.g. when it is politically stable and the government intends to improve the situation in Nicaragua, it could be attractive to return.

- How do these social, economic and political factors affect the future migration strategies which these female Nicaraguan migrants pursue?

Because there are several strategies the women could choose: do they want to stay in Costa Rica and, if necessary, apply for a new temporary work permit, would they like to return to Nicaragua or maybe some would rather migrate to another country like the USA. Also will be considered that it is possible that the migrants can have different scenarios in mind, a short term perspective for the near future and a different long term perspective for the distant future. It is likely that the factors from the first three questions have an influence on the strategy preferred by the migrant.

1.4 Structure of this thesis

In the upcoming chapter, based on the above introduced research objective and questions, the theoretical framework is set. This chapter elaborates on theoretical ideas about (labour) migration, a culture of migration, female migration, belonging and motives for migration. Next, in the third chapter, it is explained how this research was conducted, which methods I have used and why. Continuing, in chapter 4, I will introduce four Nicaraguan women who have migrated to Costa Rica and will be used as cases during the analysis which follows in chapter 5, 6 and 7. These respectively leave room for an analysis of the data collected on the political, economic and social factors influencing the migration choices of the female Nicaraguan migrants. Finally, chapter 7 will present the conclusions, reflections and recommendations for further research.

Chapter 2 – Theories on migratory motivations

“En Nicaragua yo trabajé en una fábrica de maní, pero yo necesité más plata para cuidar a mis hijos, entonces mi mamá me dijo que tuve que ir a Costa Rica para ganar más y yo fui..”
“Tuve que seguir por cuatro años para obtener un permiso de trabajo, me costó mucho tiempo y mucha plata, pero ya tengo uno y puedo trabajar por un adulto mayor. Él necesito mi apoyo con todo, así me quedo en su casa. Eso es mejor porque ahora no pago por un lugar para vivir y tengo más plata por mis hijos.”¹⁰

Respondent 7, interview 08 May 2016

The focus of this research is on the migration trajectory of the female Nicaraguan migrants, related to their market and social integration in Costa Rica, with an emphasis on this trajectory because most migrants are forced to continue their trajectories as they find themselves in a sort of transit status without the legal papers to work and thus integrate in the Costa Rican society. To conceptualize this migration process, this research builds on the relation between labour migration, gender and migration policy, and the above-mentioned quote made during one of the interviews shows exactly how these concepts are part of these migrants' everyday reality. So, this chapter will discuss these theories behind these concepts and explain why they are of importance to this research. I will start with some thoughts on labour migration, as this forms foundation of this research. Then an explanation of the culture of migration, because no society remains unchanged by the effects of (labour) migration. Thirdly, as Nicaraguan female migrants are central to my research, I dive a bit deeper in female migration, followed by an outline of belonging. Then, a theory on motives will be discussed: the thresholds approach. This approach offers the possibility to not only look at motives from a social, political or economic perspective, but to see how they affect the decision-making process and at what moment during the trajectory of decisions. Therefore, later in this thesis, this approach will be used to explain the factors why the female Nicaraguan migrants chose to come to Costa Rica and how these factors affect their future choices. The chapter end with a conceptual model of the aspects discussed in this chapter and how they will come to practice.

¹⁰ “In Nicaragua I worked in a factory, but I needed more money to take care of my children, so my mother told me to go to Costa Rica to earn more, and I did... “

“It took me four years to get a work visa, it costed a lot of time and money, but now I have a permit and work for an elderly man. He needs my help with everything, so I stay at his house, which is better because now I do not have to pay for a place to live, so I have more money for my family.”

2.1 Labour migration

To start with some general aspects of migration; it is a movement from one place to another, which does not necessarily have to cross a border. Migration can arise out of many reasons; economic, political and social, affecting both the society of origin and of destination, socially and economically. In the end, the migration experience changes original plans, which can make a migrant return home early or stay much longer than originally intended (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014). Through time, many approaches to migration developed, primarily mainly based on separate disciplines. Some of the most well-known economic approaches are based on push and pull theories, arguing that the poor conditions in the society of origin push migrants to societies with more appealing conditions; pull factors (Cohen 1987: 34-35; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014). But these theories are also criticised for being incapable of explaining actual movements or predicting future ones as it does not explain why it are not the poorest of the poorest who migrate, but the middleclass and why migrants choose one society rather than another (Sassen 1988; Boyd 1989; Portes and Rumbout 2006: 16-17).

Therefore, other economic theories became introduced: among which the dual labour market theory, which shows the importance of institutional factors as well as race and gender in causing labour market segmentation (Piore 1979). And the new economics of labour migration (Taylor 1987; Stark 1991), which argues that migration decisions are not solely made by the individual. It can also be part of household strategies and be a collective decision. Other well-known labour migration theories are the dependency theory of Karl Marx and the world system theory (Wallerstein 1984). However, more recently it has become important to look closer at the relationship between the different disciplinarians, leading to interdisciplinary approaches, to emphasize that there are more factors of influence on migration than just economic or just historical factors and that these factors are interdependent, which will also become visible in this research (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014).

When a migrant chooses to engage in labour migration and starts to look for employment in another place, there are various possibilities within this migration; temporary, permanent, circular migration. In the case of Costa Rica, the effects of the migration policy (DGME 2009) are rife, but the emphasis in this thesis will be on temporary labour migration. Temporary migration is mostly perceived from the opinion of the destination country. Migrants can leave their country of origin with the intention to migrate permanently, but the destination country perceives this migratory move as a one-time only stay and limits the time of a migrant's stay and employment possibilities in this particular country (UNESCO 2015; Dustmann 2000; EMN 2011:21).

In the case of Costa Rica, this kind of migration is as well part of a more general category of migration; cross-border labour migration. This phenomenon refers to those people who migrate to another country to look for employment. There are many reasons for migrants to choose for this particular option, and therefore also differing theories concerning this decision-making process. One of the theories mostly mentioned on labour migration is the rational-choice theory, which emphasizes that humans search for the highest profit possible. However, this theory is also highly criticized, as for this research, and for many other cases, it is important to note that there are also other decision determining factors involved, like family and legal policies (Brettell 2003; Van Houtum and Van der Velde 2003; Mok et al 2001). This latter aspect is not only influenced by the country of departure, but as well by the destination country. When looking at Costa Rica, their migration policy has been heavily affected by their perception towards migration. First it was mainly based on a negative perception, leading to policies that reject and strongly restrict migration. Now the Costa Rican government has realized that Nicaraguan migrants have a positive influence on the economy, because they are cheaper and willing to take those jobs which Costa Ricans rather do not have, they changed their migration policy, promoting regularization (Sandoval-García 2015; Marquette 2006).

In this migration policy, it is mostly temporary work permits which are promoted. This implies that the government of Costa Rica wants to emphasize the temporality of these migratory movements. For many countries, this kind of temporary permits involve a one-time only residency, with limits on the length of this stay, to find employment, send money back home and an inevitable end, with two options: returning home or migrating onwards to another country of destination (Aksakal and Schmidt-Verkerk 2015; Skeldon 2016). Although this also seems to be the case with Costa Rica, there is a slight difference. In Costa Rica, the temporary work permits are not a one-time only possibility. Migrants are able to keep coming back to apply for a new temporary permit, or try to apply for a new one while they are still in the possession of a valid permit. Because of permit limitations, family members who stay behind and the relative small size of both Nicaragua and Costa Rica, many migrants keep travelling back and forth between the two countries, thereby contributing to the economic development in both Nicaragua and Costa Rica (Finardi 2015). The temporal aspect from the permits is also geographically visible among the Nicaraguan migrant population in Costa Rica, most migrants live in San José or the counties north of the capital, relatively close to the Nicaraguan border (DMGE 2012).

The importance of this temporary labour migration in Costa Rica becomes clear when looking at the *informe nacional* (DGME 2012) which states that 12% of the Costa Rican workforce is born in another country. There are no exact numbers on how many of these 12% are Nicaraguan, but of the total migrant

population in Costa Rica, around 75% is born in Nicaragua. Also, the significance of Costa Rica as a destination country for employment is evident in this paper, 57% of the total migrant population in Costa Rica is officially employed. This number has not varied much through time, but it is a quite high percentage therewithal only the migrants with legal employment are counted.

2.2 A culture of migration

As mentioned in the previous paragraph, there are several different theories on the motives behind labour migration. However, analysis often solely looks at singular or specific causes of movements: an economic perspective, related to the push and pull models where migrants are viewed as laborers who are looking for higher wages and better economic opportunities. And a contrasting perspective, where tradition and geography determine the decision of a migrant to leave home (Cohen 2004). While considering both these perspectives, neither seems to be fully explanatory to the migrant's motives to leave; when the push and pull model should explain why a migrant moves, then why does a large percentage of the community remain immobile. And also the variations among migrants and their communities are not explained within this model (Massey et al. 1998). The second model overstates the importance of culture, the migrant's individual agency disappears and the decisions made are fully influenced by culture (Cohen 2004). The decision to migrate or not originates in both perspectives, influenced by the community, the household and the individual strengths of the migrant.

Because so many Nicaraguans choose to permanently migrate or travel back and forth between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, and the number of female Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica continues to increase (INEC 2000, 2011), it could be said that there exists a normativity on migration among the people of Nicaragua, leading to a culture of migration (Kandel and Massey 2002; Ali 2007; Massey et al. 1998). The term 'culture of migration' has been introduced by Massey et al. (1998), to describe the more frequent presence of migration in a community and an increase in the number of migration networks. The argument behind a culture of migration, is that non-migrants are able to see the lives of migrants to whom they are socially connected and these non-migrants also want to pursue a migratory life. This can lead to a change in cultural attitudes, increasing the preferability for young people to search for a better life abroad, rather than at home (Kandel and Massey 2002). Ali (2007) proposes a working conceptualisation for the culture of migration: "those ideas, practices and cultural artefacts that reinforce the celebration of migration and migrants. This includes beliefs, desire, symbols, myths, education, celebrations of migration in various media, and material goods" (39).

So, in a culture of migration, there are two aspects contributing to the decision to migrate: the economic and the cultural (Ali 2007). The economic aspect reflects the relationship between a developed country and/or community a less developed country/community. The lesser developed areas can be dependent on the developed areas, leading to a flow of migrants from the first to the latter. This relationship is also visible between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, where Costa Rica finds itself in a higher place on the list from the UNDP human development index than Nicaragua (UNDP 2015). Secondly, the cultural aspect can be of high influence. Migration goes hand in hand with remittances, which not only have an economic nature, but also a social. Hereby for example having an impact on traditional ideas of marriage and status, as Kandel and Massey (2002) describe in their study of Mexican migrants, the easiest way to increase one's marriage marketability or their value as a potential partner is by migration, because the status of a migrant is higher than the status of a non-migrant. This implies that migration can have an impact on a local culture, on both those families with a migrant network and those without, changing their perspectives on sending family members abroad and learning potential migrants why it is desirable to go abroad, before they *actually* go. A culture of migration influences the desire to migrate and thereby the decision-making processes of (potential) migrants; their educational choices, their attitudes towards work and their perspectives on migration (Ali 2007).

2.3 Female migration

As mentioned before in the introduction, the number of female migrants is growing as a result of economic transformations, more women choose to migrate independently from men, resulting in that women form a significant part in all sorts of migrations, in all regions, changing the attention for the role of female migrants (Campillo-Carretero 2013; Davids and van Driel 2005; Carling 2005; Momsen 2010; van Naerssen et al. 2015). In the past, most migrations were male dominated, both in refugee movements and in labour migration, and for the majority, women migrated as part of family reunion (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014). So, they became conceptualized as accompanying dependents of men and therefore, in theoretical accounts of migration they did not receive much attention. Later, when their independent migration was recognized, the attention for female migrants remained low, because the expectation was that women would mirror the independent economic migration movements and motivations of men (Kofman 1999; Boyd 1989). So, the consideration of women in theories on migration remained lacking, as they were perceived as either following men or showing likewise behaviour (Carling 2005).

However, more recent theoretical accounts have shown that there are differences in behaviour between male and female migrants, and the migration experience for men and women is different (Davids

and van Driel 2005; van Naerssen et al. 2015) and that being a man or a woman has an influence on migration (Carling 2005). Gender influences the degree of choice a migrant has, whether he or she migrates autonomous or as part of family strategies. Also, it has an effect on the desire to migrate and the ability to realize these migration aspirations. Lastly, migration influences gender relations, like family norms, a woman can change her position in the family and her agency when she migrates (van Naerssen et al. 2015; Carling 2005). But the difference in experiences also exists because women are more vulnerable for trafficking and sexual harassment (Carling 2005; Momsen 2010).

Looking at the case of Costa Rica, female migration from Nicaragua to Costa Rica is significantly and in ratio the number of Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica has increased over the last few years (INEC 2011). Likewise, the situation between male and female Nicaraguan migrants can be very different, as the socioeconomic niches of female migrants contrast profoundly with those of male migrants, in the economic roles they fulfil and their geographic locality. Many Nicaraguan migrants are not even unskilled, but when they migrate to Costa Rica they can earn more money by doing unskilled labour, compared to the salary they would receive in Nicaragua when performing the job they have learned the skills for. Unskilled labour often leads to becoming pushed into doing certain stereotyped, gender related jobs (Martin 2014). Many men do unskilled manual labour, like working in construction and many women become a cleaning lady or a nanny, but besides their regular job, a woman has to take care of children, elderly and other household related tasks (Davids and van Driel 2005; Martin 2014; Momsen 2010). Also Nicaraguan women are more likely to find employment in less stable and more informal modes of work, like tourism and domestic services. In these sectors, employers have the possibility to pay these women very little for the work they do, which results in women earning less than they should earn, for the work they do (Marquette 2006).

Another aspect, shortly mentioned before, which has an influence on the employment of female migrants, is their family. Research has shown that there are more women with their families in Costa Rica, than men and childcare has an effect on how much a woman is able to earn, because she has to spend time with her children (Otterstrom 2008; Vandegrift 2008). Lastly, the Costa Rican government has decided that migrant women do not have the right to healthcare services, which implies that they do not have access to anticonception, often leading to more children than they would have liked, and no access to health care when they are pregnant (Sandoval-García 2015).

2.4 Belonging

Even though we live in an era marked by increased mobility, where fewer and fewer people live in the place where they were born, the perception of home remains urgent (Jackson 1995). The concept of belonging refers to the important feeling of being at home in a specific place (to belong somewhere) which people experience. Belonging is a perception, an experienced feeling which could be explained through the notion of a space of belonging, this implies that there is a difference between both places on either side of the border. Someone feels at home on their own side of the border, feelings of belonging are conceptualized as comfort, ease, familiar, and this space is perceived as the here, we and us. The other side is unfamiliar, strange, the there, they and other. The differences between both sides of the border contribute to these feelings of belonging and when a migrant crosses a border he or she becomes more aware of home, which could result in feeling homesick (Van Houtum and Van der Velde 2003).

Feelings of belonging can influence the decision making process of a migrant, not only whether to migrate in the first place, but also and more importantly for this research, whether to stay or return. In this case: stay in Costa Rica, return home to Nicaragua, or migrate onwards to another country like Panama or the United States. However, the feeling of belonging somewhere can also be changed, as these feelings become influenced through varying social, political and economic factors, like migrant networks, transnational communities, through a change in the environment, employment possibilities and the location of their family. This last aspect is considered as very important by female migrants, to be together with children and other relatives is of great influence to their feeling of belonging (Van der Velde and Van Naersen 2011; Van Houtum and Van der Velde 2003; Otterstrom 2008).

Specific for the Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica, is the proximity of Nicaragua and the possibility to speak the same language. Being unable to communicate with the nationals from the country that a person migrates to, increases the perception of the other and influences the feeling of being at home.¹¹ The proximity of Nicaragua could make it less difficult for Nicaraguans to choose to stay in Costa Rica and overcome the idea of not feeling at home there, because for instance there is no difference in time zones to make a phone call home and it opens the possibility of circular migration, to return home for holidays like Christmas. On the other hand, this proximity might as well be a disadvantage, as many of the Nicaraguan migrants do not have a lot of money, making the journey home very costly and a luxury product like a mobile phone can also be too expensive (Skeldon 2016). Making the distance feel much larger than that it actually is.

¹¹ However, whether this holds true for the Costa Rican case, will be discussed in chapter 4.

Another aspect contributing to that it is not always easier to feel at home when being close to home or being able to speak the same language, is culture, which can have a major influence on belonging. Cultural identity derives from the rootedness to a certain place, a place where people think of themselves as being rooted at, or others perceive them to be rooted in that place. This thinking in roots leads to assumptions that connect places, nations and territories to people, naturalizing the connection between nation, people, identity and culture, creating a cultural identity (Malkki 1997). The same counts for Costa Rica and Nicaragua, Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans perceive themselves as having different cultures, even though they speak the same language and live relatively close to each other (Montero Mora 2014). This perception of having different cultures within different nations forms the foundation of the construction of immigrants as posing a threat to the national security, because strangers can threaten the idea of national identity. Resulting in a negative reputation of migrants and leading them to experience cultural discrimination and stigmatization based on their ethnicity, language and/or socioeconomic status (Stolcke 1995; Li et al. 2007).

2.5 Motives

For the consideration of the motives for the futures of these migrants, I will take a closer look at the thresholds approach (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015), because this approach enables me to give structure into the decisions that have to be taken by the migrants and shows the underlying relations between the factors influencing the decisions. As argued in the beginning of this chapter, research on the migration labour market takes on a rational, choice based view, which means that migrants make their migration choices based on rational decisions concerning economic profit. However, other authors (Piore 1979; Taylor 1987; Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Van der Velde and Van Naerssen) disagree with this perspective, as they argue that migrants are not always able to engage in a fully informed decision process because there are more factors of influence than just economic ones. Thus, they advocate for different perspectives and one of these alternatives is the thresholds approach. For my thesis, I want to use this approach, because contrary to the economic approaches, the thresholds approach considers the context which affects the decision-making process to become mobile. This approach uses three thresholds as moments within the decision-making process, these thresholds are part of a repetitious process, as their migration trajectory is influenced by individual and contextual aspects and therefore people can change the plan they initially had in mind.

The threshold of indifference is based on the idea that it is important for people to belong somewhere. The differences between here and there create a space that influences the decision of a

migrant to cross a border, this threshold is mentally (consciously or unconsciously) created and first has to be overcome, otherwise a migrant will never become mobile. After the mental threshold, a locational threshold follows, this an active search process, where the push and pull factors are considered. When a migrant has overcome this threshold, the trajectory threshold, the actual journey, forms the last threshold to take. This is the part of the migration where the migrant is already mobile, because the decision to go has been made, but there are still several factors which can influence this mobility and eventually might even lead to immobility (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2011; Vvan Houtum and Van der Velde 2003; Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015).

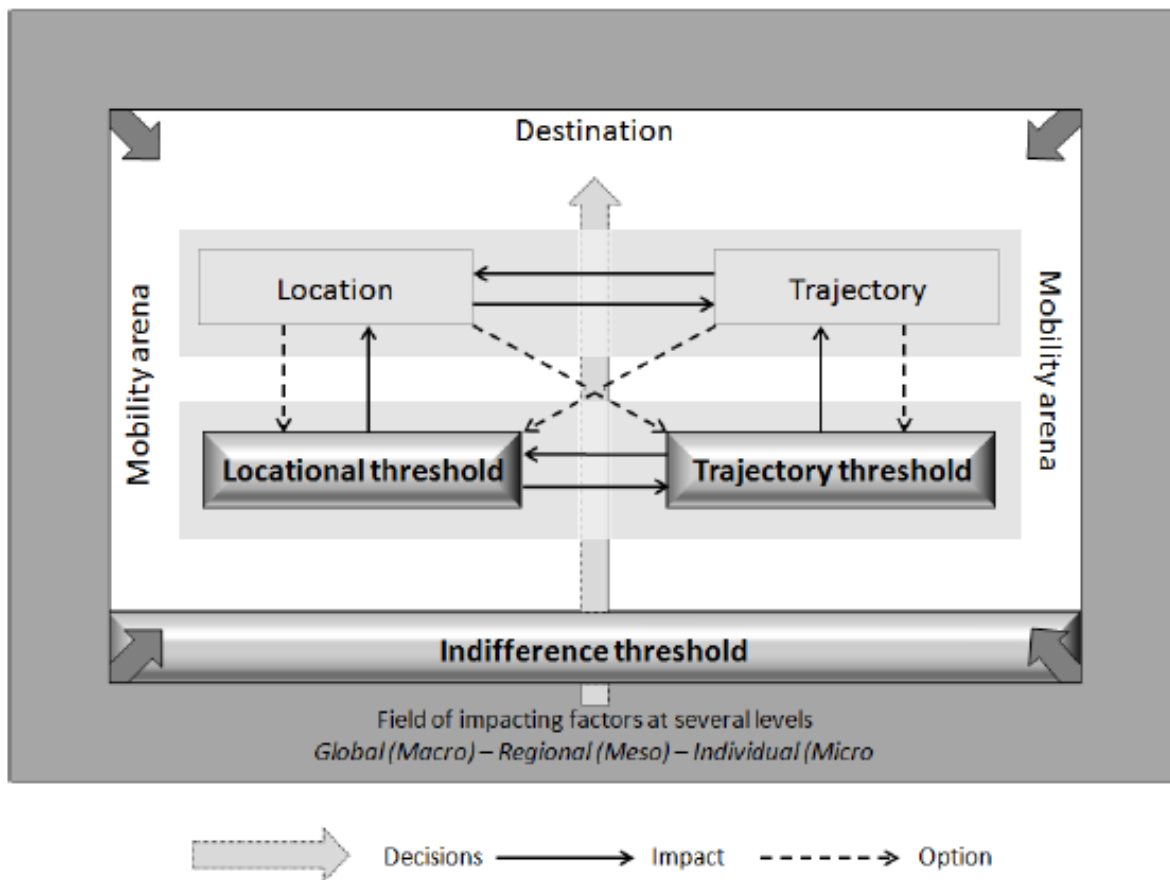


Figure 2.1 – The extended threshold model (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015: 274)

Figure 2.1 represents the thresholds approach. The lower half shows the mental process with the indifference threshold, here should be considered that this mental process is of continuous influence on the migration process. The higher half represents the active process of movement or staying (locational and trajectory threshold). Below, the three thresholds are explained in further detail. The aspect of studying both the flow of the migration and the area of the decision-making process, is also visible in the graphic by the darker area which enfolds the mobility arena, demonstrating the space for the influencing

factors. In the four corners, there are four thick arrows which symbolize the permanent impact of those factors during the migrant trajectory (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015).

- Indifference threshold

This part of the thresholds approach is very closely related to the concept of belonging. How the feeling of being at home somewhere creates a threshold that influences the decision to cross a border, it forms the mental step between mobility and immobility which has to be overcome before someone considers the search for employment in another country. The female Nicaraguan migrants already live in Costa Rica; however, this threshold could still affect their decision to remain in Costa Rica or migrate to somewhere else. Differences and similarities on both sides of the border, social networks and transnational communities all have an influence on the height of the threshold of indifference (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015). An aspect of similarity is for instance language, in Nicaragua and in Costa Rica the population speaks Spanish and in the United States of America the population speaks English, this may cause a preference for Costa Rica. Also the presence of a large Nicaraguan community in Costa Rica could add to this preference (DGME 2012; Otterstrom 2008).

- Locational threshold

This part of the approach is the closest to rational decision-making. The migrant is looking at the push and pull factors from both the place of origin and the place of destination. This is an active search process, which eventually will determine whether the migrant becomes mobile or stay put (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015). For the female Nicaraguan migrants, there are several push and pull factors related to this threshold. How much money it costs to renew a permit, how much money they will earn, are they eligible for a permit, the location of family members and so on, all affect the decision to stay put in Costa Rica or move back to Nicaragua or another country. So, this is a threshold which is closely related to the state; the having or not having of a work permit and therefore influenced by both political and economic factors

- Trajectory threshold

The trajectory is the route that the migrant will have to travel to reach the destination. Migration is a dynamic and unpredictable mobility process, not just a straight line between origin and destination, because there are several factors that either prevent migration or influence the journey. And even when a migrant reaches its destination, their mobility can change, because they can become immobile at the place of destination, when they have no money to return or move forward when the destination appears to be less appealing than estimated in advance (Van der

Velde and Van Naerssen 2015). The female Nicaraguan migrants in this research already live on a certain place in Costa Rica, some with a valid work permit and some without, however, both groups have to decide on their future plans, as also the permits eventually expire and it is possible that they have to leave their temporary homes in Costa Rica. Factors like the presence of children, the availability of money and a transnational network could all influence the trajectory after an expired work permit.

Although the focus of my research will mostly be on the factors influencing the decision-making process related to the (re-)application of a new temporary work permit and migrating to Costa Rica in the first place, the trajectory threshold is of relevance. This threshold can not only be important in a future strategy when a migrant decides not to renew their work permit and thinks about migrating back to Nicaragua or another country. But this is also the part of the threshold where the Costa Rican and Nicaraguan governments play an important role. Because the journey is not solely influenced by the individual, but also by migration policy and economic opportunities.

From the concepts discussed in this chapter, a conceptual model can be drawn. This model (figure 2.2) functions as a framework for it gives structure to the different motives which have been explained and how these relate to the stages of migration. It shows how in this case of the Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica, there was a 'before' situation in Nicaragua with several factors which lead to the consideration between the benefits and the costs of migrating to Costa Rica. When the outcome from the consideration is that the costs do not outweigh the benefits, then a possible migrant will stay where she is. However, when the benefits are higher, a possible migrant develops the intention to migrate and if everything goes as planned, this person becomes mobile and migrates to her destination. In this case: Costa Rica, which in this model forms the 'current situation'.

This, however, is not where a migration trajectory stops. The migration trajectory is a journey which starts at the moment a person decides to migrate, it goes on when that person arrives and it will continue in the future. Which is why migration is a repetitious process and during the whole trajectory, the same factors which influenced the initial decision to migrate, continue to affect the migrant's decisions: to stay, or to become mobile again by returning or migrating onwards. Gender is named as a separate factor, influencing all other factors because, as explained in this chapter, male and female migrants have a different experience of migration. For example, because they take up different positions in the household and different positions on the labour market.

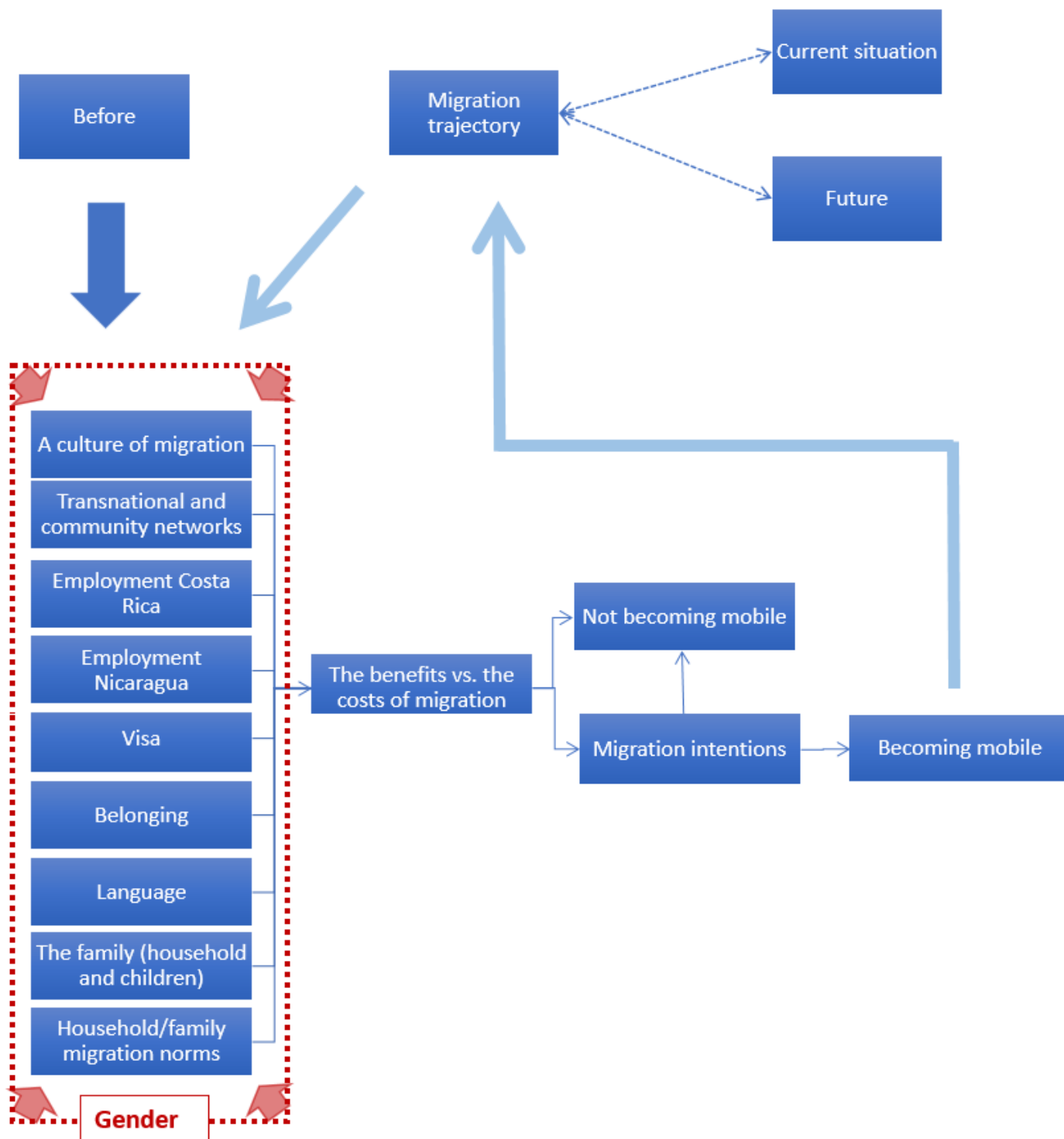


Figure 2.2 – Conceptual model of migration decision making

Chapter 3 – Methods

“04-06-2016: I begin to worry, by now we are approaching the end of our stay in the field and I have not nearly reached enough female respondents with our survey. Daniëlle is doing fine with hers, males are much easier to convince to fill out the survey, while many women say that it is better when their husband or partner does it and/or that she herself does not like to cooperate. Maybe it is better to start approaching females in another manner, but how? We have only a couple of weeks left and CIDEHUM said that La Merced was the best option to encounter respondents...”

Fieldnotes 04 June 2016

At this moment during my research, I decided to think outside the box and I made the choice to leave San José and travel to other towns to encounter more female Nicaraguan migrants. Looking back at this decision, it has been a choice contributing to new insights. It made me reconsider the mobility of these migrants and the differences that exist between a rural and urban context. Also, it helps to explain how research requires an open perspective to the dynamics which are being studied and that a researcher needs to be practical, and if necessary, ready to make certain shifts.

This chapter will explain this and other methodological choices made for this thesis, including why I have made certain decisions, what has been done and how this research is analysed. In the course of this chapter, I will often refer to my co-researcher or use ‘we’ to refer to something that has been done, because most of this research has been carried out together. Just like me, Daniëlle ter Brake has a bachelor in Cultural Anthropology and Development Studies and, also for her, this research formed the foundations for her master thesis in Human Geography: *Pura vida o vida dura?* (2017). As the title and quote already might suggest, we have done the same research, but hers explores the male perception. Our similar educational background made it easier to be on the same page regarding this research. However, the reasons for doing this fieldwork together, were not only a matter of convenience, because of our background, or because we worked together for the same internship organisation, or a matter of our shared interests. Our two most important arguments for doing our fieldwork together were, firstly for a practical reason, not like costs and time, but for the Spanish language and impossibility of using recordings, two people are able to hear and understand more than one. The second reason was safety, many locals (both Costa Ricans and Nicaraguans) warned us that we should not go alone to places where there were a lot of Nicaraguans, because it could be dangerous. We decided not to risk anything and to keep us to this advice.

In this chapter, the first section will focus on the methodological choices that were made and why. The second paragraph discusses the research strategy that we followed and how we analysed our data.

The sources my co-researcher and I used to collect the information we needed are discussed in the third paragraph and the fourth and final paragraph reflects on the choices that were made during this research and the limitations of it.

3.1 Methodological choices

As has emerged from the introduction, the focus of this thesis lies with female Nicaraguan migrants who have come to Costa Rica to find employment. Thereby, I agree with Brettell (2003) who in her book entitled “Anthropology and Migration” explains that migration is a social and cultural phenomenon that should be studied by listening to the stories of migrants themselves, what meaning they give and the choices they make. However, for our internship at CIDEHUM it was very important that we could offer more than just the opinions of a few people, and because of time limits it was not possible to interview a large number of respondents. A questionnaire could offer an answer to this, were it not that we felt like we missed the necessary information to immediately develop a questionnaire and a questionnaire would limit the possible answers for the respondents. This made us decide to use mixed methods for this research, to start with qualitative methods and use quantitative methods later on during our time in the field.

Another aspect contributing to the decision to use mixed methods is the unit of analysis. In this thesis, the unit of analysis is a process, the freedom of choice of these female migrants, their choice to become mobile or not. However, this process cannot be analysed as a whole, so to be able to look at this, I focussed on smaller parts of this process: the units of observation. Which for example are the laws of the Costa Rican state, the motives, perspectives and ideologies from these women and the acts performed by them. These differing aspects required various approaches to encounter answers and also determined the different sub-questions from this research, as the units of observation can be divided among social, economic and political factors that influence these female migrants.

For the first, qualitative phase, we had planned to use small talk, semi-structured interviews and observations. The focus of this part lays with the motives, strategies, feelings and perspectives of the respondents. Therefore, it is best to use these qualitative methods, as the investigated concepts are topics that should be discussed. Also, it is difficult to exactly determine these topics and transfer these into a questionnaire. Another argument for choosing interviews was the limit in answering possibilities of a questionnaire and the intention of this part of the research was to learn more about the migrants and deepen the understanding of the motivations behind the choices these migrants make (Clifford, French and Valentine 2010).

Using short and semi-structured interviews, gives respondents a chance to open up and respond in their own words, as these interviews can be informal in tone. While doing these interviews, it is important to listen carefully, without interrupting the participant in her story. Choosing for semi-structured interviews was also preferable for me to keep a certain structure within my interviews, so afterwards this would give me an organized overview when comparing my interview data and starting my analysis. Using semi-structured interviews gives a better structured opportunity to obtain the same data from every respondent, as compared to using open interviews. Yet, it does offer more possibilities and freedom to explore the answers of my respondents than with a questionnaire, which is exactly the intention of this first part of this research (Clifford, French and Valentine 2010). The shortness of the interviews was also important, as the respondents could have a job and I did not have the intention to keep them off their work.

The second, quantitative phase, developed by means of a short analysis of the information from the first phase. Using both my interviews with female migrants and Daniëlle's interviews with male migrants, we determined which questions would be included in the questionnaire and which possible answers the respondents could choose. This questionnaire opened the possibility to see whether the opinions vary and which factors are of more influence on the decision-making process when the group of respondents is larger (te Grotenhuis and van der Weegen 2011).

In my research proposal (Bremer 2016), I argued that it would be useful to conduct focus group discussions when I was not able to reach enough respondents. To approach other agents, like policy makers or employers from organizations and let them have a conversation with migrants, to talk about the problems that either party faces, what solutions could be thought of and develop a better understanding of each other (Theis and Grady 1991; Mikkelsen 2005). However, as we found ourselves in a right here, right now situation, it became irrelevant to ask migrants whether they would like to meet with us another time at another place. So, we have travelled to other regions to reach a larger group of respondents. Other participatory appraisal techniques, like observation, rankings, mappings and diagrams (Theis and Grady 1991; Mikkelsen 2005), which I thought to be less suitable for my research because of the focus on feelings of risk, strategies and perceptions which are not only difficult to express in diagrams and maps, but also not observable, partially appeared to be otherwise. In the first phase, observations have been very useful to set the right context and become familiar with the situation in which my research was set. Understanding the context is very important, as the specific characteristics of a place can influence decision possibilities and impose certain limits (Clifford, French and Valentine 2010). Also, we have used a

map to determine where Nicaraguan migrants live in and around San José and where they spend most of their time.

Lastly, there are some critiques on the use of qualitative methods. One of these critiques is that by doing a research based on interviews, and using solely anecdotes to formulate arguments, there is the danger of becoming a monograph without any structure and the actual relevance of the research is lost in the story of just a few people. Making this sort of researches meaningless to read besides for those few who are interested Baxter and Eyles (1997). The situation from migrants all over the world has become a more important topic the last few years and right now, for Costa Rica, it is necessary to gain more insight into the Nicaraguan migrant community, as it forms the largest groups of migrants in this country. It is only possible to obtain enough information, when speaking with the people about what concerns them; in other words, by doing interviews and then determine whether this applies for a larger group of migrants. This was one of the main goals from this research and therefore, in this thesis, I will use anecdotes to support my arguments, however, it will mostly be used as illustrations by the qualitative data from the questionnaire.

Another critique is the use of language (Ritchie and Lewis 2003), when the interviewer does not speak the same native language as the respondent, this could cause misunderstandings, miscommunications or other problems, which can all be prevented when someone would use a questionnaire. This is a valid critique; language is very important when you interview someone, however, these problems can also be overcome. By taking intensive language classes, someone can quickly learn the basics of a language. Also, as mentioned before, we have conducted our interviews together, for a better understanding and the initial plan was to find a native speaker, willing to help us understand when we did not and to record the interviews. Recording opens the possibility to check the interviews afterwards, whether all topics have been sufficiently discussed and which specific terms from the original language can be used, to avoid losing specific meanings in translation.

3.2 Research strategy

The strategy for this research is based on a mixed method approach we used and the choice to divide our time in the field in two phases. The first phase was of a more explorative perspective (Stebbins 2001), because there was not yet much information available on this topic and we needed to gain some more insights in the situation from the Nicaraguan migrants before we could begin with checking the opinions among more Nicaraguan migrants. This formed the second phase, where we also travelled to other parts

of Costa Rica, to find a greater variation of migrants, for it is in the best interest of this research and CIDEHUM when we reached a larger number of respondents.

Before this research, I have done some extensive reading on migration in general, specific topics related to migration, like gender and Costa Rica in general. However, every case is specific, making listening to the migrant important (Brettell 2003). Therefore, I decided that it was better to start our research with qualitative methods. As stated in my research proposal (Bremer 2016), I expected that CIDEHUM could provide us with some first contacts with Nicaraguan migrants and that we could snowball sample from there (Valentine 2005, 117). However, the opposite seemed to be the case and when we were there, we were merely told that we could start in Park La Merced and the migrants we spoke there were not willing to refer us to someone else who they knew. So, we decided to speak with anyone who wanted to speak with us and during the conversation we discovered if someone was indeed a Nicaraguan migrant or not, and if he or she was willing to do an interview with us or have a more general conversation on migration and Costa Rica. Later, in our second phase, we travelled to Puntarenas and Garza. There we choose to go from door to door, introducing ourselves, explaining the goals of our research and asking if someone was interested in filling out our questionnaire.

In the previous paragraph, I already explained that the research consisted of two phases and, from a methodological perspective, why this was the case. In this paragraph, these two phases return, to explain which choices were made in order to put the implementation to practice. In the first, explorative phase, the most important part was keeping an open mind and gain some insight in the context we were working in (Clifford, French and Valentine 2010). To do so, we have chosen to not only speak with Nicaraguan migrants, but also to have conversations with Costa Ricans and migrants from other countries, do observations around the city, read newspapers, follow social media and have discussions with employees of CIDEHUM, in order to gain a better understanding of the context and be able to place our data in the right context.

During this phase, we started with observations, to gain a general idea of park La Merced. Leading us to believe that, even though many Costa Ricans said that it was not a safe place to be, it was the perfect place to start, as especially during the weekends, when most do not work, there are many people in the park, chatting with each other, giving us the possibility to start a conversation. The small talk, not only with people in the park, but also at restaurants where we ate and places where we slept, mostly led to people asking us how long we were staying and why we were there. When we explained what we were doing, most Costa Ricans had their opinion on the research (and sometimes as well on Nicaraguan migrants) ready and were not too shy to share it with us, giving us some interesting insights in how the Costa Rican

population perceives the presence of the Nicaraguan migrants. And as said before, sometimes this small talk evolved into an interview and this way we interviewed 11 women and 15 men in San José, with different ages, work situations and visa statuses (attachment A). However, in the interest of CIDEHUM, it was important to explore whether the findings we discovered during this phase were also present among a larger population of Nicaraguan migrants, forming our phase two.

Because the aim of this research is to enlarge the knowledge about the decision-making process of female Nicaraguan migrants, there should be a greater variety among the group of respondents. To achieve this variety, we created a survey and reached 153 respondents and 50 of them were women (attachment A). The variation among the female migrants who filled out the survey, mostly exists because I made the decision to go to other places instead of just focussing on San José as a research area. More on this decision follows below in the reflections, but the greater variation led me to discover some interesting links between location, visas and length of stay, as already partly shows in the graphic.

Lastly, my fieldwork was set up as an iterative process, so I have alternated the collection of data and the analysis of that data. The data from the interviews have been analysed with the use of coding techniques; from open coding, to axial (focused) coding, to selective (theoretical) coding. To keep an oversight of my codes I have used the computer program Atlas.ti, because of this clear overview it enabled me to see the overlapping or differing answers from the respondents, order them among the differing sub-questions of my research, see which questions were relevant to include in the questionnaire and eventually formulate the answers to my questions (Clifford, French and Valentine 2010). For the analyses of the survey I have used SPSS: this program gives an overview of the data and it offers the possibility to make graphics to support the data. Also the variety of options offered by SPSS make it possible to show the relation between different variables, by testing on averages and evaluate the differences between them (te Grotenhuis and van der Weegen 2011).

All this combined, the results from SPSS, the codes from the interviews and the observations done, showed me which parts were relevant to answer which sub-question. In other words, which motives belonged to the social, economic and political factors contributing to the decisions made by the females and in which order of importance they see these motives. It offered me the opportunity to place these motives into the thresholds approach as well, because some motives appeared to link closely to this approach. I compared my cases with each other, searched for similarities and exceptions, to explain the factors influencing the decisions made by these female Nicaraguan migrants and then looked whether these were comparable to the literature I have read and discussed or whether it could form a counter case to this.

3.3 Research material

The sources we used to acquire the data (our empirical findings), mainly consisted out of people. First of all, because a person always possesses a great amount of information which he or she could share, but secondly also because the research object from this thesis is female Nicaraguan migrants, in other words: persons. In order to gain all the information I needed to answer the main question of this thesis, my co-researcher and I have not only spoken with Nicaraguan migrants who have given us information about their own situation. We also spoke with many other informants about persons and topics related to this research, these persons could provide us with additional information on matters we saw or matters brought to our attention by the migrants themselves. The interviews are written down in our fieldnotes and although most interviews were unstructured conversations, we used an interview guide to check whether we had indeed talked about all the relevant topics. However, in the end, the data gathered through the interviews became more extensive as time progressed. Because for my co-researcher and I the first phase was more explorative, we learned on the go that some questions were more relevant to ask and how it was easier to gain the trust from a respondent.

Trust appeared to be one of the major obstacles in the field and it is important for a respondent to feel comfortable with the interviewee, in order to have a good ongoing conversation and gain as much information as possible. Especially since some of the topics we wanted to discuss could be sensitive for the respondent, like their migration status, finances and family issues. So these topics were discussed later in the interview and by using our own experiences, with family and migration problems here in Europe, it was for some respondents easier to discuss their own stories.

Also we decided to do the interviews and surveys in Park La Merced, or at the respondent's home. CIDEHUM offered us some of their office space for conducting interviews, as they expected some of the respondents to have trouble with believing that we were not part of the government, but doing this research as part of an organization that wants to help migrants. However, we noticed that many respondents did not have that much time and that by being present in the park and gaining the trust from some Nicaraguans already helped convincing others. A downside of doing interviews in the park was the inability to record our conversations, because the traffic in San José is very noisy.

As mentioned before, next to trying to speak with as much Nicaraguan migrants as possible, we also obtained a lot of information from the Costa Ricans. We have not conducted any interviews with Costa Rican nationals, although small talk and discussing our research with Costa Ricans already proved to be very interesting as many had their own opinions on talking with Nicaraguans. Also reading some newspapers, following social media and the legal documents that Nicaraguans showed us, provided us

with additional information on the context we were working in. Unfortunately, beside the expert knowledge the workers of CIDEHUM shared with us, we were not able to speak with any other experts on migration in Costa Rica, like for instance professors at the universities. Time and communication issues kept us from making an appointment or when we had an appointment the person we were supposed to meet did not show up.

3.4 Methodological reflections

Every research has its limits and has to deal with problems that emerge through influences of the actual situation in the field. Some of these issues were foreseen, others were not and this part will reflect on what has been done and how this effects the validity of this research.

The first issue my co-researcher and I had to deal with, was making choices about our respondents. We were advised to begin in Park La Merced, to find our first contacts and continue our search from there, because it would be too dangerous for us to go to towns where a lot of Nicaraguan migrants live. This park turned out to be a great starting point, however it did have its limits. First of all, because we were only able to speak with those who were present in the park at that time. No one was willing to help us by introducing us to other people they know and many female migrants refused to speak with us. In general, in this park, every time we went there, there were more men than women and a few of these women were there every day to sell their food or other goods. The women selling goods (and also some other women) refused to talk to us because they were afraid that we were part of the government, or that the police would come when they were talking to us and they would lose their merchandise. Making trust and time some of the major limits from this park.

Another limit that surfaced in La Merced, was that most of the respondents seemed to be in the same situation. San José is the main destination for busses from Nicaragua and there are busses between La Carpio, a suburb of San José where a lot of Nicaraguan migrants live, and Park La Merced in San José. So, in our opinion, it appeared that many migrants in San José arrived there on just their passports and have been there for a relatively short time. At the beginning, so during the first phase of this research, this observation was not perceived as an issue because “the aim of an interview is not to be representative (a common mistaken criticism of this technique) but to understand how individual people experience and make sense of their own lives” (Valentine 2005, 111).

However, the aim of this research was to enlarge the knowledge about female Nicaraguan migrants and therefore there should be a greater variety among the group of respondents during the second phase of the research. As there was no available list of Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica, I first

wrote some e-mails to organisations located in the Central Valley, which is the urban area surrounding San José, who are working with Nicaraguan migrants, to ask whether they were open to meeting me and my co-researcher, if they thought they could introduce us or help in any other way. Most organizations did not respond and when they did, they said they could not help us. When the organizations turned out to be a dead end, we reached out to some of the friends we made during our stay and to the host family we stayed at while learning Spanish. One friend told us that we could come to his city, Puntarenas, because his aunt had some contacts in the Nicaraguan community there and also our host family, who lives in rural Garza, said they knew a lot of Nicaraguans that they could introduce us to. The door to door approach applied there led to sampling through accessibility and one of the mayor critiques on this kind of sampling is that it yields a biased sample (Clifford, French and Valentine 2010). But by doing the questionnaires at three different locations; the capital, another city and a rural village, the variety among the respondents did increase, enlarging the group of female migrants with a permit.

The second issue during this research, was language and although this was foreseen, we thought we could prevent this problem from emerging by taking intensive language lessons in advance. However, Costa Rican Spanish is different from Nicaraguan Spanish and because most of the interviews were done in the park (many respondents did not have the time to go to a place where it was more quiet), it was impossible to record them. So for most of them we had the help of a Nicaraguan migrant who spoke fluently German and translated everything we did not understand. A downside of translations is that the translator uses his own words to create a normal sentence in German and then my co-researcher and I again had to translate this in to our own words to form a proper sentence in English. But because we were able to speak Spanish, we asked the questions ourselves and we could notice it when the translator forgot to translate a certain part and we would ask him or the respondent about it.

While performing the questionnaires, we again encountered some problems with language. At first many respondents seemed to be unwilling to fill out the questionnaire, so we asked a Costa Rican friend to come with us because we thought that we might have explained some things wrongly or misunderstood some reactions. It turned out that a lot of Nicaraguans were willing to do the questionnaire, but they had problems with reading it. Something we should have considered in advance, because many have not completed a proper education. After this discovery, we offered to read the questionnaire out loud and fill out the answers for the respondents. This helped and although it costed much more time because we could only do on survey at the time, the benefit of doing them this way were that not many questions were forgotten or left blank, neither the open questions.

Lastly some notes on the choices we made during the development of the interview guide and survey. In advance I knew we were going to discuss some sensitive and personal issues like salaries, visa statuses and family. When writing the interview guide and survey we had to consider that although there were certain aspects that we would very much like to know, the respondent might not be ready to share this information. Therefore, for example, we chose to not directly ask about salaries, but whether a respondent earned enough to support their livelihoods (and that of their family) (attachment B). Also, we always gave respondents the opportunity to ask us things about ourselves too, to give them the feeling that it is a process of sharing and interaction, not just us asking and not giving anything in return.

Chapter 4 – Defining the female migrant: 4 portraits

“A concern with the particulars of individuals’ lives need not imply disregard for forces and dynamics that are not locally based. On the contrary, the effects of extralocal and long-term processes are only manifested locally and specifically, produced in the actions of individuals living their particular lives, inscribed in their bodies and their words.”
Abu-Lughod 1991, 150

Stories of individuals and on the personal decisions that are made in relation to their migrations, so looking at the lives of particular individuals, can tell us something about migration as a general process. During this research, I have spoken with many women, from various ages and living under different conditions. To show the diffuseness among these women, I will introduce four of them in this chapter. They will return regularly during the coming chapters, illustrating how they have dealt differently with the situation in which they find themselves: being a female Nicaraguan migrant in Costa Rica.¹²

Maria

Maria is an elderly lady of 52 years old and who currently lives in San José. It is her first time in Costa Rica and at that moment she was there for 2 months. She has 6 children, who all live in Nicaragua, her only family in Costa Rica are a sister and a niece. She does not have a husband.

She came alone, on advice from her sister and niece. They told her it would be a good idea to come, but her situation is different from the one of her sister and niece because they both have a residency permit and Maria does not. *La vida aquí es caro y duro*: at that moment, Maria considered her situation as difficult. The two months in Costa Rica have been hard, it is difficult to find a patron who wants to help her to get a work permit and housing is expensive. She firstly lived in Cartago, then she shared a room with another woman to live less expensive and now she lives with her niece, also to share the costs.

Even though she does not have a permit to work, she is currently working as a housekeeper for two days during the week. Before this job, she worked more days a week for another woman, but she treated her badly and because she was working illegally she had no contract, therefore no rights and was unable to ask for help when the woman refused to pay her the right amount for all the work she had done. This was not the only bad experience she has had in the past two months and that is why she would not recommend other Nicaraguans to come to Costa Rica. You can have family to help you, but it remains difficult, especially when your family in Nicaragua pushes you to send money back home. Maria is not sure

¹² All of the names used are pseudonyms.

whether she wants to return to Costa Rica after her first three months, when she is not able to find a patron to help her with a work visa.

Patricia

Patricia is 33 years old and has been in Costa Rica for the past three years. She lives in Desemparedados, which is close to San José, together with her husband and her oldest two children of 15 and 13 years old. Her youngest two children are 8 and 4 years old and are in Nicaragua to go to school. Her husband works without a permit, currently in the construction business. Patricia is looking for new employment, before she worked as a housekeeper in San Ramon, this is also the reason why she came to San José. Someone knew someone for who she could work, but now she stopped working there (she did not want to share the reasons for this) and came to San José to find a new job.

Before coming to Costa Rica, she only did 2 years of high school in Nicaragua and after that she worked in the clothing industry. Patricia left school because it was more important to earn more money than to go to school, therefore her family also supported her decision to go to Costa Rica to work, even though this means that they do not see her



Image 1. Picture of a Nicaraguan housekeeper. La Nacion: A. Ávalos 2012

very often any more. She does not want to return much to Nicaragua, because it costs a lot of money and she is scared that the migration officers will ask her difficult questions and figure out that she works or has worked illegally.

Obtaining a work permit is also for Patricia very important. Because to work legally would make her life more secure: having the right papers puts her in a better position to earn more money and not be scammed by an employer, but she experiences the procedure as difficult and costly. For the time being she would like to remain in Costa Rica and earn more money. Later she likes to return to Nicaragua, because her family is there.

Antonia

Just like Maria, Antonia has been in Costa Rica for two months now and likewise it is her first time. But different is that she followed her husband, who went two months before her and she is a lot younger, being 25 years old. Another aspect different from Patricia and Maria, is that Antonia did not have a place to live. When I met her, she carried all her possessions with her in some plastic bags and all the money she and her husband earned, was send back to Nicaragua.

Antonia explained that there is no employment in Nicaragua that pays enough, it is a large country and the people are exploited, so many Nicaraguans feel the need to leave, they feel like they have no choice but to migrate and look for better employment abroad. Costa Rica is the easiest accessible and the closest to Nicaragua, so that is why they came here.

She misses her two children who remained in Nicaragua, but she keeps saying that it is better that they are there, because life here in Costa Rica is more expensive and now they have the money to send them to school and have a better future. On the other hand, she worries about how they are treated, because they do not know if all the money they sent ends up with their children.

Her husband has worked the entire time her. He is a cook, and because he has studied for an employment, it was easier for him to find a job in Costa Rica. She did not study and she beliefs that this is the reason why it is more difficult for her to find a job, because in the two months that she has been in San José she did not find any employment yet.

Likewise to Patricia and Maria, Antonia came to Costa Rica on a passport and wishes to have a work permit because that would give her more possibilities and more money, but it is very difficult to find the right information. Their future plan is to stay here in Costa Rica for 5 years, to earn enough money to open a restaurant in Nicaragua, so her husband can continue working as a cook and they can be with their family again.

Rebecca

Rebecca's story is different from the other three women. She was young when her mother said she had to come to Costa Rica, so she could work here. And she was still young when she fell in love and married a Costa Rican man, who she later divorced because he discriminated her. Her family disagreed with her decision to leave her husband and did not help her when she lived alone with her two children, worked to take care of them all and at the same time decided that she wanted to be different, so she went back to school.

Now she is 35, has finished university, does not ever want to stop studying and currently works as a social worker. She wanted to work as a social worker to help other Nicaraguan women who find themselves in the same situation as she did some years ago. She claims that there are many Nicaraguan women that fall in love with a Costa Rican man, but when the Costa Rican family does not accept this choice, the man eventually starts to discriminate his wife and treats her very badly. The Costa Rican government does not do enough to help these women. They can get sanctuary for a while, but this is very short and afterwards the women are left by themselves, without support from their families.

She tries to be a different example for her children. Her oldest daughter is 17 years old now and says that she wants to study and that she does not want to marry a man who discriminates her or treats her badly. She hopes that there comes a generation that is able to change the current situation, like her son, that he never treats his future wife the way she has been treated and how she sees many men around her treat their wives. Another aspect where she thinks the government could help women in an improved manner, is when looking for employment. She has heard of a lot of women who had to sell their bodies to get a job or become promoted. A male chef tries to take advantage of the situation and he is never punished. This should change, to improve the position of migrant women in Costa Rica.

In the future, Rebecca wants to stay here, because she has been in Costa Rica since she was very young and her life is here. She left her family behind and only has her children, who also have their lives here in Costa Rica. She hopes that she can help more women, better the overall situation in Costa Rica and see her children have a better life than that she has had.

These portraits showcase that, on the one hand, the group of female Nicaraguan migrants is diffuse, like Antonia and Maria, who were both in Costa Rica for the first time, but Antonia is 25 years old and Maria 52. Related to the secureness of employment and living in Costa Rica, the portraits also illustrate the different circumstances between Rebecca, who has a residency visa and the other three women who have a tourist visa. However, on the other hand, the portraits also show that there are similarities. Like for example all four women came to Costa Rica through family relations and working to offer their children a better life is very important for them. Lastly, Maria, Patricia and Antonia, who only have a tourist visa and experience difficulties with finding employment, emphasize the importance of a work visa.

Chapter 5 – A matter of (temporary) citizenship

Many Nicaraguans miss out on the right information, they should be better informed about how to access the right papers. Finding that information is almost impossible at this moment, you need to look all over the internet and that is difficult. It costs a lot of time and money to figure out what information you need. You can also go to the consulate in Costa Rica, but they just tell you to go somewhere else.

So, what could be done differently?

Maybe they could hand out flyers or something in places where a lot of Nicaraguan migrants live, or hang posters in certain places where people pass by so they can see them: mejor accesibilidad y información

Antonia, interview 22 May 2016

What Antonia describes, is the lived reality for many of the female Nicaraguan migrants. They find themselves in a situation where they are unable to encounter the right information to apply for a visa which allows them to legally work in Costa Rica. In this chapter I will show how these dealings with the law have influenced the decision to migrate to Costa Rica, how it affects their current situation and their future aspirations. I will argue that even though these women find themselves in different situation from a legal perspective (with regard to their visa statuses) their experiences with the law and their perspectives on the Costa Rican government remain the same. However, their visa status *does* have an influence on how they see their futures. I will also argue that, although the Costa Rican government in its current law promises improved application options and better integration possibilities, the lived experiences from the migrants are different. Before diving deeper into the personal experiences from these migrants with the Costa Rican migration law, it is important to explain the law in a more detailed way. To do so, I will start with a close look at the ins and outs of the current Costa Rican migration law and other legally arranged aspects like patrons, social security systems and permits. After this, the experiences of the migrants with regard to this law and the application process will follow.

5.1 La ley N° 8764

Although the focus of this thesis lays with Nicaraguan female migrants, it should be clear that Costa Rica is an important destination country for migrants from various directly indirectly neighboring countries. In total, there are currently around 400.000 registered migrants in Costa Rica (INEC 2011), but estimates are that the numbers should be higher, as there are many unregistered migrants who do not have the funds or lack the knowledge and remain irregular (Sandoval-García 2015). Therefore, the Costa Rican state has been forced to carry out various strategies to deal with the foreigners who have been migrating to Costa Rica for economic motives, because in their own countries of origin, they lack economic opportunities

(MTSS 2016). So, for years the theme of migration has hold a central position and the phenomenon has been widely covered in binational meetings (especially with neighboring countries) and discussed within the Costa Rican government. Two Costa Rican ministries who, among others, are concerned with the phenomenon of labor migration towards Costa Rica, are the ministry of work and social security (*Ministerio de Trabajo y Seguridad Social*, MTSS) and the ministry of migration (*Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería*, DGME).

The legal mandate of the MTSS is to participate with other institutions in the regulation of labor migratory flows towards Costa Rica, to promote an orderly and equal integration of the migrants into the Costa Rican labor market. To be able to do this in the best possible way, the MTSS coordinates technical investigations, which are carried out among various sectors of economic and/or occupational activities. These investigations are to determine the labor situation of the country and the working conditions, to eventually give advice on the granting of migration applications, because the Costa Rican government considers it important that foreign workers do not perform any form of paid work, resulting in the displacement of the national labor force, or foreign labor force, already regularized present in Costa Rica (MTSS 2016).

Where the MTSS plays a more advisory role, the *Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería* (DGME) develops the migration policies of Costa Rica and shortly said, determines the conditions for the entry of non-residents into the country. So, the migration department establishes the criteria for the classification of visa; being restricted, consular or entry without visa (DGME 2009, 1). The DGME is also concerned with the integration of migrants within Costa Rican society, so they changed some aspects in this law to let migrants become part of society. Firstly, they decided that migrants do not have to pay for their integration, it is for the costs of the Costa Rican state. Secondly children from migrants, born in Costa Rica have the Costa Rican citizenship to be able to go to school there and integrate in the educational system. Therefore, there are special integration projects financed by two funds introduced and explained in the current migration law: the Special Migration Fund and the Social Migration Fund. The latter is not solely for migration goals, this fund shares a part of its incomes with other ministries like the one for education and the one for construction (DGME 2009). But Costa Rica does not offer an integration course and exam, what does exist in other countries, like for example the Netherlands

As mentioned before in the first chapter, the difference between this law and the previous migration policies relates to the shift towards a discourse of integration and equality. This is visible in the funds explained above, but also in the language used in the law itself. The law starts with an introduction, which shortly explains the aims and goals of this act; the control of migrants and the encouragement of

the integration of migrants into Costa Rican society, with respect for cultural diversity, human life, solidarity, equality and human rights (DGME 2009, 1). This returns in article 5, saying that the integration of migrants should be regulated with respect to their culture and should promote the social, economic and cultural development of Costa Rica, in accordance with public security, integration should also ensure social cohesion and legal security for foreigners living in Costa Rica (DGME 2009, 2).

A bit further on in the document, it states that foreign persons for the largest part enjoy the same individual and social rights, and guarantees as recognized for Costa Rican nationals in the Costa Rican Constitution. Which, for example, implies that foreigners have the right to access justice,¹³ the right of defence and authorized foreigners have the right to move freely through the country, for as long as their visa indicates. The law also declares that no discrimination can be made regarding wages, benefits and conditions of work between Costa Ricans and foreigners. So, where do the rights differ? The law states that under equal conditions, the Costa Rican worker should be preferred over a foreign worker. Also, the free movement of foreign people can be restricted: when the DGME has any reasons to doubt the migratory status of a foreign person, the law gives them the right to detain this person, to a maximum of two weeks, to confirm their migratory status,¹⁴ and even deport them if they are illegally in Costa Rica. Lastly, irregular migrants do not have the same rights to healthcare as legal migrants and nationals have (DGME 2009, MTSS 2016). A regular migrant has the right to the same salary as Costa Rican nationals and they are also obliged to pay the same tax or social security charges as Costa Ricans do, according to the legal norms applicable in the kind of work the foreign person does. Adding to this, the law states that foreign persons are obliged to make the certain migratory related deposits, of which the amounts are indicated by this law. More on this topic will follow below.

Lastly, the law includes articles on the perspective that foreign persons are obliged to leave the country when their period of authorization expires, unless their application for a change of migration category or an extension of their stay is granted by the DGME. The repercussions for when a foreign person fails to leave Costa Rica before the expiration date, is that this person is in the country for an irregular stay, meaning (s)he will have to pay a migratory fine of 100 US dollars, or the equivalent in Colones, for each month of irregular stay in the country. When the foreign person fails to pay the fine, the DGME will prohibit them from entering the country for a period equivalent to three times the time of the irregular stay. As

¹³ Which implies for example that when a migrant has been paid less than he or she should, they can go to the police, report this and receive help from them.

¹⁴ This explains the arrests observed by police officers in the different parks, that the people who failed to show their papers, were taken to another place to confirm their identity/migration status, over which more in the next chapter.

well it names several reasons for not being allowed to enter the country, like when their entry implies a proven risk to public health or compromises public safety, when they have served a felony conviction in the last ten years or are linked to groups linked to organized crimes (DGME 2009; MTSS 2016). These aspects can have an influence in the female Nicaraguan migrants, for example, when they do not know about these requirements, their application will not be granted, they have to pay a fine or they are not allowed to enter the country for a certain period of time.

5.2 Dealings with the law: entering Costa Rica

The law differentiates several different categories of migrants, those who have residency, those who do not have residency, like tourists and transits, and these are followed by the ‘special categories’. Foreign persons who are subject to one of these categories are for example: students, investigators, refugees, but also those who temporarily want to work in Costa Rica. Foreign persons admitted under the special categories may change their category while in the country, provided they meet the pre-set requirements from the DGME (DGME 2009). While reading the law, it becomes clear that there are three possible manners for a Nicaraguan migrant to legally cross the border between Nicaragua and Costa Rica: a tourist visa, a temporary work permit and a temporary residency permit (which can allow a foreign person to work and eventually, later on, when this person wants this, expanded to a permanent residency visa). And although the law itself does name some of the details on how to obtain these visas and what they exactly include, for further information and for the forms they will have to fill out, a migrant is obliged to search on the website of the DGME.¹⁵ A part of the application process where, like Antonia, many female Nicaraguan migrants encounter problems, but before more about these personal experiences, an outline of the application process for a tourist visa.

The tourist visa

For Costa Rica, Nicaragua is part of the of the third migration group when it comes to tourist visa. They are allowed to enter the country with a *visa consular*: which implies that this visa has to be consulted by the DGME. Their stay in Costa Rica is allowed for somewhere between 30-90 days. The name of Nicaragua has a * behind it, indicating that there follows more information below in the document, which counts for more countries who are perceived as ‘special’ when it comes to the application of a visa. In this part, the

¹⁵ <http://www.migracion.go.cr/>

document states that when Nicaraguans apply for a transit visa for Costa Rica, to for example travel through to Panama, this visa will be valid for 180 days, to be able to go and return on the same visa.¹⁶

To receive a *visa consular*,¹⁷ a Nicaraguan can do an application through the internet, or go to the Costa Rican consulate in Nicaragua. There are several aspects they have to take into account:

- Fill out a form with their name, nationality, passport number, where they live, why they want to travel to Costa Rica, exactly to where and when they would like to travel, profession, day and place of birth, a fax number to receive notifications and finally sign the form with a date and signature.
- A prerequisite is that the passport should be valid for at least 6 months
- Be able to show a travel reservation for exact dates, when to enter and when to leave Costa Rica.
- A paper which shows the economic means necessary to stay in Costa Rica.
- Provide a criminal record.
- When the consulate deems it necessary, they can ask for additional documents, to approve or deny an application. However, it is not included whichever those documents might be.

To outline the differences within migration groups, a short comparison between a Nicaraguan who had a passport out of the third category and a person who has a passport from the first category. A passport from the first migration category allows a person to enter Costa Rica with a passport which can be valid until the day that person is obliged to leave the country after the expiration of a 90 days' tourist visa. A traveller from the first migration category only needs a return ticket, to show when they will leave



Image 2: Picture of a visa consular. Author's picture.

¹⁶ http://www.migracion.go.cr/extranjeros/visas/directrices_ingreso/DIRECTRIZ%20DE%20INGRESO%20PARA%20NO%20RESIDENTES%202016.pdf

¹⁷ http://www.migracion.go.cr/extranjeros/visas/visa_consular/Visa%20consular.pdf

the country again and (when asked) be able to show that they possess the funds of 100 US dollars for every month of tourism. So, the Costa Rican migration office asks for a lot more information from those who belong to the third migration group, as from those who belong to the first.

But the problem for the group of migrants central to this investigation, is that a tourist visa is not enough. A tourist visa will get them across the border, but it is not valid when they legally want to work in Costa Rica. When migrants *do* choose to illegally work when they have a tourist visa, they have no rights and can be subject to exploitation by an employer. Also, when they are caught by the police for working irregularly, this limits their possibilities for applying for a work permit or residency in the future. Because a tourist in Costa Rica can change his or her migrant category from tourist to a visa which allows him or her to work, although changing this category will cost a deposit of 200 US dollars, or the equivalent in Colones (DGME 2009). Around half of the respondents find themselves in this situation, they entered Costa Rica as they themselves say: on their passports (meaning: on a tourist visa) and are trying to change their migration status while being (and working) in Costa Rica.

Among the respondents in this research, around half of them is in Costa Rica on a tourist visa and their ages and the length of their stay in Costa Rica vary strongly. One respondent was in Costa Rica for her first day, another already for 24 years, but the age of the respondents did not get lower when their time in Costa Rica became shorter, like for example Maria, who was introduced in chapter 4, she was in Costa Rica for the first time and is already 52 years old. Some of the women are currently employed, others are not, but the two most important desires from these women at this moment is finding employment (or keeping it) and completing the application for a visa which allows them to work legally.

But, this last aspect, is where they encounter the most difficulties. Many spend a lot of time on looking for a patron, to help them with obtaining a work permit, like Maria, her sister and niece got their work permits through a patron, so the two months that she has been in Costa Rica, she mostly spent looking to find a patron who wants to offer her a job. The tourist visa forces these women to return to Nicaragua every three months, making the migration more expensive and applying for another visa is not only expensive, but also perceived as complicated. According to Maria, travelling back and forth, and assembling the right papers costs around 200 dollars and adding to this, all the respondents with just a tourist visa agree that the requirements are unclear and the paperwork is too difficult.

This group of respondents is the most vulnerable to discrimination and exploitation because they are working or want to work illegally and therefore have no rights. Then, on the other hand, there is also another group of respondents. Those who did manage to file the right papers and obtain a work permit or residency. These women find themselves in a more secure position, as their visa offers them protection

from exploitation by employers and better salaries. But the application process is more complicated than the process for a tourist visa.

The temporary work permit

The DGME (2009) has a separate part in the law for those who want to apply for a temporary work permit. In article 98, temporary workers are defined as those who are authorized by the DGME to enter and stay in the country, and to remain in it for the purpose of carrying out temporary economic activities at the request of an interested party in the country, or in that of the worker him/herself. Temporary workers may stay in the country for a period of time, determined by the DGME.

The Ministry of Labour and Social Security defines which temporary activities require authorization and the temporary worker is only allowed to perform the work activities authorized by the DGME, who base their authorization on the recommendations of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security. This authorization includes work conditions, the working zone, the employer and the timeframe. The Ministry of Labour and Social Security is involved because, as said before, they have technical and market studies that can determine the contingent of necessary temporary workers. However, a foreign person can also develop a request, saying why his/her work is important for Costa Rica in another manner as his authorization states and the DGME can determine whether this work should be extended to other patrons, zones or to a longer period of stay (MTSS 2016, DGME 2009, 19).

For Nicaraguans who try to enter Costa Rica to find temporary employment, the law has incorporated some additional requirements in a document named *categoría especial como trabajador temporal* (Special migration category as a temporary worker).¹⁸ In this document, some quite important conditions are mentioned, which influence the probability of receiving a work permit. These are:

- A filled out application form (attachment C), printed and signed
- A letter from a patron¹⁹ or legal representative from the company which wants to hire you, explaining the activities that the foreign person will perform, the season, the area in which (s)he will work and the salary.
- A letter issued by the MTSS, which authorizes the company in question to contract foreign labour. The letter of authorization must include the areas of work or activities, and the quantity of work authorized.
- A photocopy of the passport, which has to be certified by a government official or lawyer.

¹⁸ http://www.migracion.go.cr/extranjeros/permisos/trabajadores_temporales/Trabajador%20Temporal.pdf

¹⁹ A migrant worker in Costa Rica needs a patron, which will be further explained in 5.3

- Two recent passport size photographs.
- Proof of consular registration.

But lastly, the document also lists a few aspects named as important notes, like for example that those who try to submit an application for a work permit while being in Costa Rica should be present in Costa Rica on a valid visa and they are not allowed to overstay this visa, while waiting for the results of an application. The notes also include that a temporary work permit cannot be for a longer period as one year.

Then there are some payments that the Nicaraguans have to take into account. When a foreign person enters Costa Rica under the non-resident immigration category (i.e. as a tourist) and requests an extension of the period of authorized legal stay in Costa Rica, this person shall deposit the sum of US \$ 100, or its equivalent in Colones. Without verification of this payment, the application will not be processed. Also for the request of a new visa (i.e. a new work visa), a deposit of US \$ 100 should be made to have the application considered. Lastly as well the granting of a legal status in Costa Rica costs money. When a foreign person is granted a legal stay, they have to pay 25 US dollars, at the time of granting the regularization, and at the time of renewal of permanence in the country (DGME 2009, 38). So shortly said, this means: 100 US dollars to have an application considered, and other 25 US dollars, when an application is approved.

The temporary residence permit

*Residencia*²⁰ is a way to eventually have the possibility to permanently stay in Costa Rica, with the liberty to work. Those who have the right to apply for permanent residency, are those whose parents or children are Costa Rican, but also those who have lived in Costa Rica with a temporary residency for three consecutive years, have the right to apply.

The website of the DGME offers several different temporary residency permits, like for example for foreigners who want to stay for a longer period because they are married or perform a certain sport in Costa Rica. There is also one for those who want to stay for a longer period to work: *Residencia Temporal Empleados Especializados en Relación de Dependencia y sus Dependientes*.²¹ In this document some requirements are named, which are needed to apply for this kind of residency:

- A filled out application form (attachment C).

²⁰ http://www.migracion.go.cr/extranjeros/residencias.html#HERMES_TABS_1_0

²¹ http://migracion.go.cr/extranjeros/residencias/residencia_temporal/residencia_temporal_trabajador_relacion_dependencia/Residencia%20Temporal%20en%20Relacion%20de%20Dependencia.pdf

- A letter which indicate the reasons for soliciting for this temporal residence and personal information about the applicant, signed and confirmed by a lawyer.
- Two recent passport size pictures.
- Proof of registration of fingerprints, which is obliged for everyone older than 12 years, issued by the ministry of security.
- Proof of consular registration.
- Birth certificate, authenticated.
- Criminal record.
- Copies of every page of the passport. Every copy page needs official stamps to prove their authenticity.
- A labour contract conform the rules set by the law.
- This contract should also include a sworn declaration from the employer clarifying the migrant's knowledge of this position and his/her specialties, in order to explain why this worker is best qualified for this job.
- Some documents from the government that describe that the employer has a valid license to have his company, and that he owns the right certificates to assure the quality of the products sold and/or used.
- A document which proves that the company has paid its taxes or exemption from payment through the ministry of finances or from a collecting entity.

If a migrant chooses to apply for residency in Costa Rica, (s)he has to pay 50 US dollars for an application and the receipt should be added to the application. They also need a receipt of the payment of 125 Colones and 2.50 Colones for every page submitted with the residency application. However, likewise as with a work permit, when a migrant firstly enters Costa Rica on a tourist visa, he or she has to change their migration category from tourist to possible resident and this costs 200 US dollars, excluding the 50 US dollars for the application itself, and the 25 US dollars which need to be payed when the application is approved.

Compared to the temporary work permit, the DGME asks for much more information, not only from the migrant, but also from the company where he/she would like to work, when it comes to a residency as for just a work permit. Which is their right, as it clearly is stated in the law, that the whole idea behind a temporary work permit is for a foreign person to leave Costa Rica when his temporary permit is expired. Where a temporary residency permit is a manner to eventually, legally, stay permanently in

Costa Rica, so the request for more information and registrations (the same which are required for Costa Rican nationals), is only natural. However, this does imply that the (Nicaraguan) migrants who want to choose for this option of migration, need to obtain more formal documents about themselves, which sometimes could be difficult.

From the four women from chapter 4, only Rebecca has a residency permit. But she was very young when this happened and did not remember much about it. In total, among the interviewees, three women had a residency and two a work permit, forming almost half of the group. However, among the respondents from the survey, only three women had a work permit and 50% a residency. Which shows that there are much less female migrants with a work permit, as with a residency. This is an interesting result, as the plan from the DGME is to have more migrants work legally with a work permit. But this can be explained, because there is only one manner to apply for a work permit and a migrant firstly needs to find a patron who wants to offer her a job. But, as said before, there are several manners of applying for a residency visa. One of these, is for a mother of Costa Rican nationals; and children from migrants, who are born in Costa Rica, receive a Costa Rican citizenship. Another is for migrants who are married or plan to marry a Costa Rican national. So, this can be a reason that there more female migrants with a residency visa than with a work permit.

The interviewees who do have a residency or work permit, describe to have experienced the same troubles with applying as the women who only have a tourist visa. Only those with a work permit managed to find a patron who was willing to employ them and help them with their visa. The two other women who have residency, besides Rebecca, have a husband who did all the paperwork and who figured out the application process. Although these five women managed to obtain these visas, they still experienced it as costly and complicated. Then, the fact that they have to renew their permits is something that they do not like. They all talk about how they are happy that they have these visas, but it remains costly, every year or every three years, depending on the visa, they have to pay more money for a renewal and show the right papers again. However, contrary to the women who only have a tourist visa, these women have in common that they feel more secure about their situation. Four of them have their children living with them in Costa Rica and they are earning sufficient money to support their families.

5.3 Finding employment

As became clear from the previous paragraphs, employment is closely linked to the permits. The migrants who only have a tourist visa have different possibilities and opportunities when it comes from to finding employment than those who have a work permit or residency. An aspect which already showed in the

previous paragraph; the interviewees with a work or residency visa are employed and feel more secure about their situation as those with only a tourist visa.

The women who are in Costa Rica with only a tourist visa can find employment, but it is illegal and therefore the conditions are much poorer and the salaries lower. Generally spoken, they can apply for a job in any place which allows for working off the books; like selling things on the streets and housekeeping. But these women mostly try to encounter employment through a patron, who they need for a work permit application, as showed in the stories of Maria and Antonia, who have spent all of their time in Costa Rica on finding a patron. However, finding an employer who is willing to become a patron is difficult, because the DGME has not only developed strict requirements for labour migrants who want to enter Costa Rica, they also did this for a possible patron to be. Employers who want to hire migrants have to meet certain requirements and perform an application process. For an employer to be a patron, he or she should fill out a form, also available on the website of the DGME,²² indicating the specifics of his company, his personal information and for which activities he or she would like to hire a foreign person to perform these activities for the company. The company or employer needs to be registered at the social security system of Costa Rica and at the municipality. All the necessary documents should be send to the DGME office to complete the application.

Those who want to hire a foreign worker, are obliged to do this in consultation with the DGME, because they are not allowed to hire a foreign person who is in Costa Rica under irregular conditions, so they should confirm the legal status of a foreign person with the DGME before hiring him or her. Individuals or representatives of legal entities, public or private, providing work or occupation to a foreign person who is not qualified to work in the country or allow a foreign person to perform activities other than those authorized in his/her contract, will be sanctioned by the DGME with a fine that will variate between two to twelve times the amount of a base salary, defined in article 2 of Law No. 7337, of May 5, 1993. The amount of the fine will as well be determined according to the seriousness of the facts and the number of foreign persons who are granted work in an irregular condition. Also, the money gained by these fines will be integrated into the Special Migration Fund (DGME 2009, 29-30).

However, the DGME not only checks whether the employers hiring foreign workers let them do the work that they are hired for, they also verify if the workers have social securities, whether salaries are paid and if there are any abnormalities in the hiring and recruitment of foreign workers (DGME 2009).

²² <http://migracion.go.cr/extranjeros/permisos/transitorio/Carta%20de%20inscripcion%20registro%20regularizacion%20agricola%20patrono%20fisico.doc>

Contrary to the respondents with only a tourist visa, are those with a residency or work permit. The women with a residency can find employment in any manner, they do not need the help of a patron. Those with a work permit did need the help from a patron to receive their visa. One of them described how it took her four years to get her work permit. In the meantime, she was forced to travel back and forth between Costa

CAJA COSTARRICENSE DE SEGURO SOCIAL	
SECTOR TULLITAS	
CARNÉ ASEGURADO DIRECTO	
No. Seguro Social:	1-74-25312
Válido hasta:	14/07/2016
Nombre:	[REDACTED]
Fecha Nacimiento:	27/11/1974
Cód. Aseg.:	111
Clínica Adscripción:	ÁREA DE SALUD SANTA CRUZ-GTE
Fecha Emisión:	14/04/2016
	00/01/1900
SELLO	
KATTY GUEVARA M.	
4-70-07-0760 - 10/09	

Image 3. This paper proves that this migrant has a health security. He had just received this paper because of his work permit. Author's picture.

Rica and Nicaragua, because of her tourist visa, which is why in the end, she has paid around 400 dollars for her visa application process. So, in her opinion, it costed a lot of money to get her application right. She needed three letters of recommendation, a contract with a patron, and some other papers from Nicaragua like her criminal record (clean or not). It took a lot of time to get the right papers and the first time she got denied, the second time her application got approved. Now she has to renew her permit every year and has a chance on residency in April next year, but all of this is costing her more money (Respondent 7, interview 08 May 2016).

The relationship between the migrant, the patron and the visa does create a relationship of dependency for the migrant. Without the help of a patron, they can never get a work permit and because the permit is related to this specific job, for this specific employer, the options for a migrant are limited. The sister from one of the interviewees with residency had a patron who died. This made her situation very uncertain. Her contract and permit were still valid, but she could not work anymore at the job where the permit was for. Nobody wanted to help her sister and she did not know what to do, as her patron was no longer there (Respondent 6, interview 08 May 2016). Also, the other interviewee with a work permit said that she knows many migrants who are treated badly by their employers (Respondent 11, interview 24 May 2016).

A last key aspect with regard to employment and visas which occurs while looking at the stories from these migrants, is that the time these female migrants have spent in Costa Rica seems to have no effect on whether she has a passport, a work permit or residency. There are a lot of variations among these groups; an interviewee with residency who have been in Costa Rica for a year and others who have

been there for more than 10 years on a tourist visa. But something that *does* seem to affect their visa statuses was location. In Puntarenas (urban), I have almost only encountered women who have residency, the period of living in Costa Rica varies between 6 to 33 years and almost half of these women were unemployed. In San José (urban) and in Garza (rural) the time of being in Costa Rica varied between a day and 20 years, most women I spoke to in these places migrated on their passports and also approximately half of them were unemployed. These differences are notable and can be explained because San José is the destination city for busses arriving from Nicaragua and in this large urban area there are many employers who can be approached for a work permit, or houses that are looking for a housekeeper. In rural areas, it is more complicated for the government to perform controls on migrants and more possibilities for Nicaraguans to work without a permit on coffee or pineapple plantations, or on farms performing other sorts of labour. And those Nicaraguans with a residency visa who do not want to live in San José are free spread to other cities in the country, like Puntarenas, to find work and cheaper housing.

5.4 Accessing governmental services

So, now there is a clear overview of the law, what exactly is asked from the migrants who want to come to Costa Rica to look for a job and how some of the female Nicaraguan migrants are experiencing or have experienced their visa application process, let's have a closer look at how these women think about the application process in relation to the Costa Rican government. It should be noted that from all the respondents, only three women are in possession of a work permit, almost all others said to be in Costa Rica on their passports (a tourist visa) or with a residency permit, these groups are around 50/50. But although these women find themselves in different positions regarding their visas, they all agreed that it is better to work when you have a permit, because this gives more security, the right to insurance, a better payment and the right to health care. Also, they all agree that it is difficult and costly to go through the application procedure, it also costs a lot of time and overall those who do not have a permit all claim that the procedure is too complicated.

When asking whether the respondents think that the government can change something about the difficulties they encounter while applying for a permit, 93% of the respondents think that they can. Those four respondents who disagreed with the statement and thought that the government cannot change anything because the relationship between Nicaraguans and Costa Ricans is too bad, do hope for changes in the migration policy to better their situation. However, most *do* think that the governments can change something. They argue that the two governments should come to an agreement, they should talk more with each other. Costa Rica needs to accept that they need the migrants and should pay them

better, create more help for people without papers and make it more easily accessible to gain information about those papers. And when it is the case that Costa Rica wants less migrants, than the Nicaraguan government should create better work opportunities in Nicaragua.

So, overall, the respondents agree that both governments can and should change things, independent of their age, marital status, length of stay in Costa Rica and visa status. Likewise do Patricia, Rebecca, Antonia and Maria. Both Patricia and Antonia mention the Nicaraguan government, that it does not stand up for its own people. There are a few rich politicians and the president is very rich, but they are unwilling to invest in their own economy and help their own people who are underpaid and working under poor conditions. All four talk about the Costa Rican government, that it can change/simplify the application process, improve the available information and help from institutions, as the consulate does not want to help. Respondent 7, who was one of the three women who *do* have a work permit, likewise thinks that work and permits should be easier accessible. Nicaraguan migrants who work in Costa Rica contribute to the Costa Rican economy and many times work in jobs that Costa Ricans do not want to do, therefore they should receive some appreciation and better access to a visa which allows them to work. Lastly, that visa status has no influence on the opinion of these women on this matter also shows among the four women who claimed that the government cannot change their situation. Of them, three have a residency permit and one a tourist visa.

As already shortly mentioned before, most women identify themselves with the feeling of being sent from one institution to another without getting the right answers. As Patricia, claiming that nobody prepares them for integration in Costa Rica, some say that they should go to the consulate when they want to improve their integration, but the consulate does nothing and sends you to another place, where they send you to another and then they send you back to the consulate. Nobody wants to give a clear answer on how and where they should find the right papers to complete a permit application and become part of the Costa Rican society. Another aspect emphasized that the government could change is the length of a visa, because right now all the visas are for a few months or maybe at the most a couple of years and every time it costs a lot of money to request the right papers again and arrange every legal step in the right way.

While looking at these stories from the respondents, a few key issues emerge. One of these is that all of the respondents seem to know about the benefits of having a permit, that they are in a stronger legal position when working legally. This is an aspect mentioned by almost all of the interviewees, indicating that this aspect is very important for them. Adding to this, even though more than 90% claim that the costs for a permit are too high, they are prepared to pay these costs, when it results in having a permit and being

able to work legally. Therefore, it is not strange that they all hope for changes in the future and that the government will step up to help them to make permits better accessible, as right now, in their opinion the application process is overcomplicated.

Some other key issues related to the experiences from the respondents and the government services are the differences in paid amounts by the respondents, the feeling of being left out in integration and their perception that the documents are unclear, because these are all topics which are discussed and determined by the DGME. Firstly, the differences in costs; as explained in the first part of this chapter, the DGME has clearly stated in the law what actions should be paid and how much it costs. So where do these differences come from and how can they be explained. It could be that some females have waited longer to apply for a permit, because for example they first filled an apply for their husbands and therefore they had to return to Nicaragua several times, costing them more money to travel and for the renewal of a visa. Or the lack of correct information among the migrants could for instance lead to forgetting to make the deposit of 200 US dollars to have their application taken into consideration. Another possible option are the instances that 'help' migrants in return for money. There are some male respondents who have made suggestions in this direction (ter Brake 2017). They said that they were told that the application process is very complicated and that it is almost impossible to apply for a visa in Costa Rica and therefore choose to pay another person to help them with the documents, for a bigger chance of success in obtaining a permit. Also at CIDEHUM they argued that there is the possibility that at this moment a migration industry is developing. People who try to benefit from the Nicaraguans by helping them with their visa applications (Rodríguez Pizarro, interview 14 April 2016)

Secondly the feeling of being left out in integration, something that according to the DGME, should be covered by the newly founded funds in the current law, but in the perception of the Nicaraguan female migrants is lacking. This law has been active since 2010, so at the time of this research 6 years have passed since the activation, so it is safe to assume that by now the funds have received sufficient money to begin with some projects to improve integration. At the website of the DGME it is difficult to encounter information on what kind of work exactly is done on this aspect, however, during my stay in Costa Rica and while speaking with Costa Rican nationals, one should wonder whether this aspect can be changed by a law, when it is mostly a perspective among Costa Rican nationals. When Costa Ricans speak about Nicaraguan migrants, they very often have a negative perception of their presence in the country, something which will be discussed in more detail in chapter 7, but this has a direct effect on the possible integration of a Nicaraguan migrant. If they are unwelcome or feel unwelcome, it becomes more difficult to feel at home in this new environment and try to integrate into society (Van der Velde and Van Naersen

2011; Van Houtum and Van der Velde 2003). Although this does not take away the fact that migrants feel like they are being send from pillar to post, and that is an aspect on which the Costa Rican government can improve, that it becomes clear for these migrants where they have to be for a visa application and not being send from one institution to another.

Lastly, the unclearness of the documents, as mentioned by the respondents, conflicts with the information that I encountered at the website of the DGME. When you know for what permit you want to apply, the document will tell you exactly what you have to do and what you have to pay. The difference, however, is that for these Nicaraguan migrants it is rather difficult to access the internet. The migrants we met in the field, in particular the ones with only a tourist visa, owned barely nothing, some did not even have a simple telephone to call to their homes, making them dependent of the institutions in Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Only one of the female interviewees mentioned that her husband found information on the internet and right now they both have a residency permit. From the other 10 interviewees, two others knew that there is information available on the internet, but both of them do not have a work permit or residency. Antonia is one of them, but she still perceives the application as difficult, the information is scattered and you have to do a lot of research to encounter all the right information. Comparing this, that many women do not know about the information on the internet or are unable to access it and official institutions, like the consulate are unwilling to help, creating the feeling of being send from pillar to post, it explains why these women have difficulties with obtaining the right documents to apply for a visa

So, all the respondents blame the government for the failure of obtaining the right papers, they perceive the lack of information as the government's fault and therefore the numbers of women who think that the government can and should change something about the situation are very high. But did this actually has an influence on the decision to come to Costa Rica and how does it affect their futures?

5.5 Politics in a threshold approach

Before looking at the future aspirations, first a short recap of the thresholds approach. This approach considers the context in which migrants find themselves during their decision-making processes. In this approach, three thresholds are discerned as moments within the decision-making process and these thresholds are a repetitious process, because migrants can encounter things they did not expected and change the plan they initially had in mind. The indifference threshold is the mental threshold and is affected by feelings of belonging. The second is the locational threshold, which considers the exact differences between country of origin and destination, the push and pull factors. The last threshold, the trajectory threshold is the route that has to be taken to reach the preferred destination. All thresholds are

continuously influenced by the social, economic and political factors that affect the decision-making processes of the migrant and eventually they can change the initial plan of a migrant, based on the lived experiences, resulting in other desires for the future (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015).

These dealings from these female migrants with the law mostly relate to the locational and trajectory thresholds. In the thresholds approach, these two thresholds are considered as two separate obstacles that have to be taken during the journey of migration. In the locational threshold, the migrant looks at the push and pull factors from both the place of origin and the place of destination. This part of the decision process comes closest to making a rational decision, because it is an active search process to determine if the place of destination is a better choice than the place of origin, making this part of the threshold the breakpoint for a migrant to become mobile or stay in her home country (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015). The trajectory threshold speaks for itself as the route that the migrant will travel to reach her preferred destination. But migration is never easy and there are several factors that can influence the journey or prevent a migrant from travelling in the first place. Making migration unpredictable and dynamic and resulting in a route that is never a straight line between A and B, but rather an iterative process of crossing borders (Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015).

In chapter 2 I identified several factors that could be of influence on these thresholds, for the locational threshold I assumed that for the female Nicaraguan migrants there are push and pull factors related to work and to belonging. For example; the costs for a permit, salaries and where their family members live have an effect on the decision to go. The same factors are of influence on the trajectory threshold, but in another way. For instance, for a woman it is different when she travels alone, with children or with a male partner. Also, it is easier to cross the border when having a valid work permit or residency than with a tourist visa, because a Nicaraguan migrant has to apply for a new one every time they want to cross the border.

The women central to this research have already overcome the locational and trajectory thresholds at least once; because at this moment they are in Costa Rica and all of them are travelling back and forth between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, some forced by migration rules, others not. For the locational threshold, these women chose Costa Rica over Nicaragua not only based on economic push and pull factors, but also because compared to other countries it is better accessible, as also claimed by Antonia. She and her husband perceived Costa Rica as the easiest accessible country for their migration. Later on, when the migrant is in Costa Rica and experiences difficulties with the application for a work visa, it changes the opinion about Costa Rica, making life there mostly *duro y caro* (hard and expensive).

The relation between the trajectory threshold and the law is more far going for these female migrants. At first, like Antonia and Maria, who are in Costa Rica for the first time, and for a relatively short time (both two months), the tourist visa seems to be enough, it makes Costa Rica relatively easy accessible and when you have entered the country, you can work. Even though it implies working illegally, it is better paid work than they had in Nicaragua. But once they arrive in Costa Rica, their experiences change their opinion and a work permit becomes more important; like Maria who has spent most of her two months in Costa Rica looking for a patron to help her with a permit. The trajectory becomes more expensive and more complicated, because the tourist visa ends after 3 months. Which shows in the story of Patricia, right now she has been in Costa Rica for three years, but she still does not have a work permit or residency. She expresses to feel insecure about travelling between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, because she is afraid that the migration officers are going to ask her difficult questions about why she travels so much between the two countries and that she has to admit to working illegally. Contrary to this, are those women who have a residency. They can travel freely between the two countries, only paying for the trip itself, not for additional visas. Although a work visa simplifies the trajectory, it does not take away the fact that a work permit or residency still makes the trajectory expensive, because of the amounts of money these migrants have to pay to change their migration status.

It is important to take into consideration that the factors that affect these two thresholds do not solely emanate from the migrant herself. The Costa Rican government influences the thresholds in some very important ways; through its migration policy, the permits issued by the DGME and the unwillingness to spread the information about the visas.

5.6 Changing plans: seeking to remain or not

Before looking at the relation between visas and the future aspirations of these female Nicaraguan migrants, I would like to take a closer look at what the migrants themselves actually said. In the questionnaire, we had questions on several social, economic and political factors, as well as a question on where the migrant sees herself in the future. This question first offered four answering options: in Costa Rica, in Nicaragua, in another country or travelling between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. Then they had the possibility to write down a motive, what for them the most important reason forms, for choosing that option and only five respondents chose not to fill in a motive.

In total, 35 respondents would rather see themselves living in Costa Rica in the future, of which 15 see travelling back to Nicaragua as very important, as they chose for this option. 11 Respondents want to return to Nicaragua and only two respondents would like to live in another country. One respondent chose for both the options of living in another country

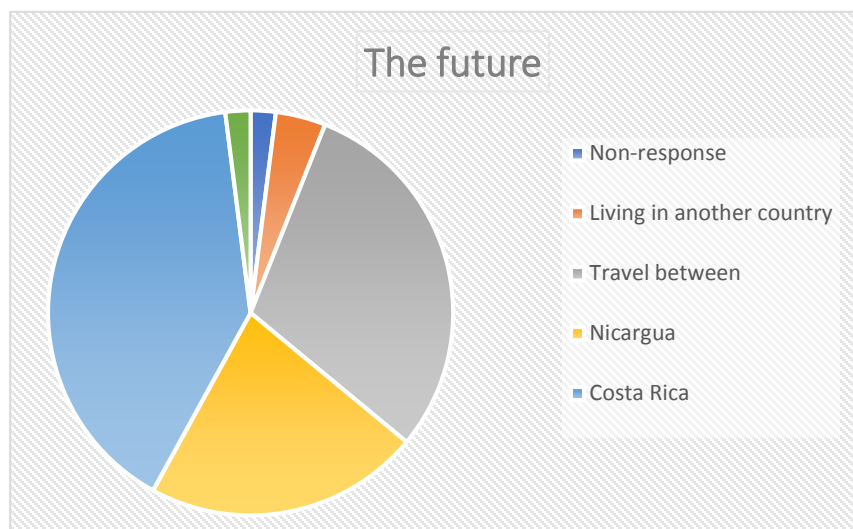


Figure 5.1 – General future aspirations of female Nicaraguan migrants

and travelling between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, because she thought that the best option would be living in another country, however, she believed that she would never be able to pay for this, so travelling between Nicaragua and Costa Rica formed the second-best option.

The motives stated by the females showed a lot of similarities. The two respondents who choose to live in another country see this option more as a dream than as a real possibility. They would love to go to another country because they believe to have even better opportunities there than in Costa Rica, however, migrating further is costlier and migration policies probably more complicated. So, for now they claimed to be happy in Costa Rica, but whenever they see an opportunity to migrate further, then they would take it. The motives from the other respondents for staying or leaving are based on family and economic motives, like for example better working conditions in Costa Rica, family that lives in Nicaragua or the difficult life in Costa Rica. Almost none of the respondents stated at this question that they want to stay or leave based on a motive related to their visa status or experiences with the government, only one women filled out that she wants to return to Nicaragua because it is difficult to find work in Costa Rica without the right papers. But, she only had a tourist visa and was almost three months in Costa Rica at the time of the survey, so she also had to leave soon based on her visa.

However, when looking close at the motives, four other women mentioned that their children have the Costa Rican nationality and therefore want to remain in Costa Rica in the future. At first sight, this does not seem to be a political motive, but indirectly it is. Foreign children who are born in in Costa Rica receive a Costa Rican citizenship. Giving these women the right to request child support and the law makes it easier to receive residency (DGME 2009).

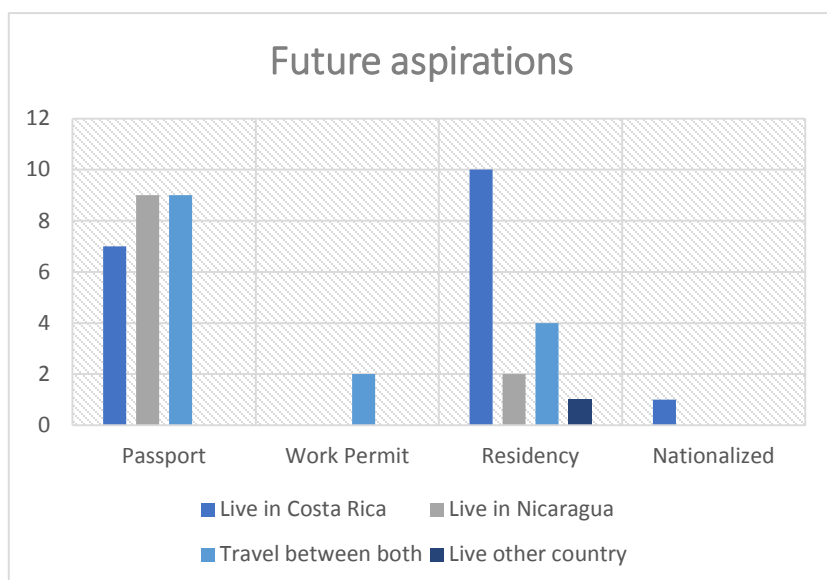


Figure 5.2 – Visa status compared to future desires

While only one out of 50 respondents claims to have a political motive to leave Costa Rica, a comparison between the question on where the respondent sees herself in the future and her visa status shows that it *does* have an influence. Looking at the graphic with visa conditions of the female Nicaraguan migrants in relation to their desires for the future, it is clear that those women who have

residency or are nationalized like to stay in Costa Rica in the future and that the two women who have a work permit want to keep travelling between Nicaragua and Costa Rica. However, a work permit also implies that these women are forced travel between the two countries, because a work permit eventually expires, resulting in the need to go back to Nicaragua to obtain the right papers again, for a new application. This also makes the prospects on having a stable life in Costa Rica less certain than with a residency permit, however, the legal position of these women is still more secure than of those women who have migrated on just a tourist visa. That these women feel less secure in their lives in Costa Rica originates from the economic uncertainty and the uncertainty of ever obtaining a valid visa for working and this also shows in their answers, visible in the graphic. As the opinion among those women with a tourist visa shows more variation than among those with a work permit or residency, and returning to Nicaragua scores the highest among this group. However, here should be taken into account that if these women would obtain a valid visa for working, it is possible that they change their mind about how they see their future.

So, the visa conditions affect the locational threshold in the manner that working with a permit is preferable, leading to higher salaries and better working conditions, increasing the pull-factors of Costa Rica and the push-factors from Nicaragua. But at the same time, it also influences the trajectory threshold, as those women with a residency or work permit are free to travel between Costa Rica and Nicaragua and those who do not have such a permit have to apply for a tourist visa every time they want to cross the border, making the trajectory more costly and complicated. It is clear that these aspects are also influenced by the Costa Rican government and not only determined through the migrant. It is the Costa Rican

migration policy which sets these rules to which the Nicaraguan migrants have to comply. However, as became clear during the course of this chapter, these visa rules are complicated for most Nicaraguan migrants and they experience troubles with governmental institutions. Therefore, many migrants believe that the government can change things, because they create the migration policies and control the institutions. Making the Costa Rican government the one who, in the perception of the migrants, can make their situation in Costa Rica less difficult and visas more accessible.

Chapter 6 – Being pushed to Costa Rica?

“Yo vine a Costa Rica porque conocí alguien quien me podría ayudar con trabajar como doméstica en San Ramón. Ellos dijeron que yo ganaría 400 dólares cada mes, pero ella no me pagó eso. Y yo no pude hacerla pagar, porque estaba trabajando sin permiso. Entonces me fui y vine a San José para encontrar un nuevo trabajo, pero todavía no encontré nada.”
Patricia, interview 03 May 2016

Many Nicaraguan women without a work permit find themselves in this situation, where they are negotiating between the necessity to have employment and the desire to work legally. This chapter will look closer at economic motivations for migration and closely relates to the theoretical economic approaches discussed in chapter 2. In this chapter, will be argued which economic push and pull factors have a major influence on the decisions made by these female migrants and the decisions they plan to make in the future. I will argue that education, employment and migration are intrinsically linked and that also gender has an influence on employment opportunities. Then there will be explained how the economic push and pull factors that contributed to the decision to migrate, fit within the thresholds approach and how these factors influence the future decision to leave or stay. Lastly, I will argue that through the current migration law, the political factors that have influenced the decision to migrate have become very closely linked to the economic factors and that also in future decisions they remain strongly related.

6.1 Taking a step back: education and employment in Nicaragua

Before discussing the current situation of these female Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica, it is necessary to firstly have a closer look at the access these migrants have had to both education and work in Nicaragua and why it for these women felt like a better choice to leave their homes and go to Costa Rica. Because one of the mayor factors contributing to a migrant’s decision to travel to Costa Rica for work is the current economic situation in Nicaragua. As, for example, Antonia points out that the people in Nicaragua are poor, because there is no employment that pays well enough. Nicaragua is a very large country, but the people are exploited, so that is why her husband and his friends felt like they needed to leave, it was impossible to stay in Nicaragua. For them, it felt like they had no other options. There was only one choice: they had to leave Nicaragua and then Costa Rica is the nearest country and, according to Antonia, the easiest accessible.

Firstly, the level of education among the respondents is relatively low, only two of the interviewees have finished high school, the other women dropped out of school after one or two years and only Rebecca has graduated from university. However, as explained in chapter 4, her story is different from the stories of the other women, as she migrated to Costa Rica on a younger age, she has residency in Costa Rica, which gave her the opportunity to work legally and pay for her own education. Also, Rebecca believes that many Nicaraguan women in Costa Rica are afraid to choose for their own future, they are studying, but then their boyfriends want to get married and they give in, drop out of school and become a mother. Later, when they are unhappy in their relationships, their parents do not want to support their daughters when they want to leave their husbands and they become stuck in their situation, because they depended on their husbands and have no education.

But also in Nicaragua many women do not finish their education. These women claim that in Nicaragua education is of lesser importance than finding a job and earning money, *“en este momento no puedo usar las cosas yo aprendí en el colegio, pero eso no me preocupe. Yo nunca pensé que aprender era muy interesante, trabajar y ganar plata para vivir siempre eran más importante”*.²³ Also, Antonia claims that those people who do go to university are unable to find a job because they lack experience. But for a student it is impossible to study, work and do internships to get experience at the same time, which makes it feel useless to follow any kind of education, because they eventually all end up doing labour which does not require any kind of education.

That education was not among the top priorities of these women becomes evident when looking at the labour performed by these female migrants prior to their migration to Costa Rica, these women were doing manual labour, for which no education is required, as shows in the graphic from the survey respondents. Another job, mentioned by the interviewees is performing

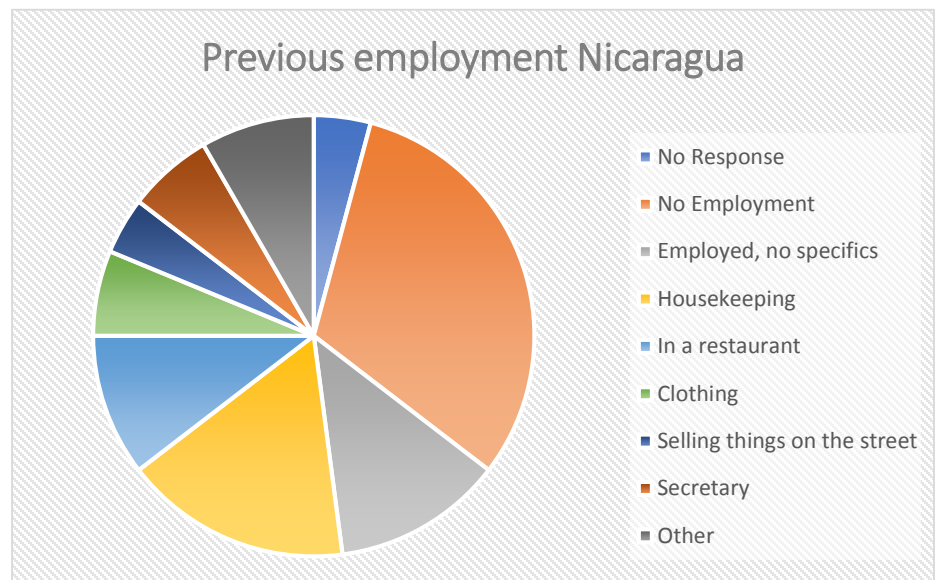


Figure 6.1

²³ Right now I cannot use the things that I learned in high school, but this does not bother me. I never thought that learning was very interesting. Working and earning money to live were always more important (Patricia, interview 03 May 2016).

manual labour in a factory. Antonia argued that there are many foreign companies with manufactories in Nicaragua, because the salaries are very low, Nicaragua pays the least of all countries in Latin America.

Looking at the stories of the migrants, it is important to note that they are not uneducated because of their intelligence, but because of a different set of priorities. Adding to this, we met three men, around their mid-twenties, who had just completed a study at a university, but were unable to encounter work in Nicaragua and who all three had just arrived at San José on a tourist visa to work. So, the argument that Antonia made about the relationship between education and employment in Nicaragua is actually happening, making it understandable for these migrants that they chose for migration and better employment instead of education. At this point, one could argue that Nicaragua has become part of a culture of migration (Massey et al. 1998; Ali 2007). Working abroad has become the norm and young people perceive working in Costa Rica is more important than following an education and staying in Nicaragua. This has also been mentioned by one of the interviewees, she would not recommend others to come to Costa Rica, because right now it becomes a norm for young people to migrate (Respondent 11, interview 24 May 2016).

However, even though neither of the interviewees (besides Rebecca) have finished a proper education and these women did not believe in the education system for themselves, because working was more important, they all think differently about this for their children. All interviewees send money back home for their children to go to school. They want them to go, follow a proper education, have



Image 4. A Nicaraguan woman selling vegetables on the street. La Nacion: A. Barrantes 2013.

a better future and improve the situation in Nicaragua. So, in the end, they want to break with the culture of migration which has emerged over the years, and like Antonia described, that their children no longer feel the need to leave as they themselves did. The following chapter will provide more on how they migrated, but they were usually following somebody else and therefore did not yet make any plans to work somewhere or arrange a work permit before leaving Nicaragua. The reason mostly given for not making any plans, was that they thought it to be unnecessary to make these arrangements prior to their

departure because at that moment their family members were also working in Costa Rica without a work permit or a residency, and they thought that they could do the same.

6.2 Living in Costa Rica

As discussed in chapter 5, all interviewees claim to have experienced problems with applying for a work or residency permit, and many are in Costa Rica on their passports with just a tourist visa. However, having the right papers or not, these women are still there and they are working, have worked or want to work in the future. From all of the women who participated in my research, in the interviews and surveys together, 28 are currently unemployed and the other 33 mostly do unskilled labour, comparable to the work they did in Nicaragua.

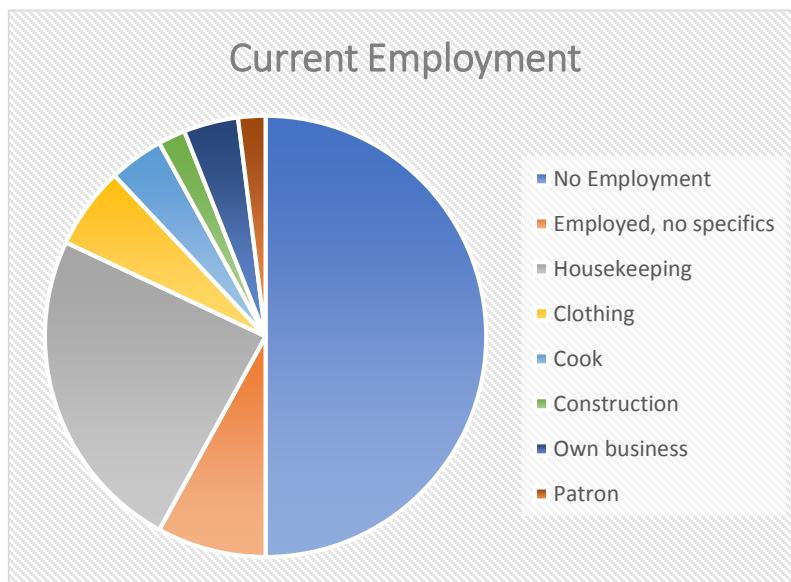


Figure 6.2

Looking at the graphic from the survey respondents, housekeeping is the employment which occurs the most, and often other jobs are related to the making and/or selling of things. As there are many women unemployed and some have even been unemployed since the moment they migrated to Costa Rica, Rebecca argues that there is a group of women that see no other way out than to sell their bodies, they need the

money but cannot find a job. In park La Merced, there always was a small group of women who did not want to talk with me, but who were said of to be working in the prostitution. They were standing at the side of the park where most cars passed by, with noticeable clothing and lots of makeup. At times one of them disappeared a while and then she returned to the others. The labour performed by Nicaraguan migrants shows a strong gender difference, as most of the male Nicaraguan migrants work in construction (Ter Brake 2017) and most females in housekeeping. This is consistent with the gendered and stereotyped jobs most migrants perform: men doing unskilled manual labour, like working in construction and many women become a cleaning lady or a nanny, but with the difference that a woman has to take care of children, elderly and other household related tasks (Davids and van Driel 2005; Martin 2014; Momsen 2010).

Related to gender, the possibility of finding employment for a female migrant is more influenced by the presence of children than for a male migrant (Davids and van Driel 2005; Martin 2014; Momsen 2010). Having a family and taking care of them is very often a job for the women, however, this disadvantages them in finding paid employment. Because it not only takes time to take care of young children and cook for the whole family, but also because from a certain stage onwards, being pregnant makes it impossible to work (Otterstrom 2008; Vandegrift 2008). As my first interviewee mentioned that she got pregnant again, for the second time after her first child and all she has done since she arrived is taking care of her household. She did not leave the house much and at that moment, she did not work. She has never worked in Costa Rica because of the children, her pregnancies and babies made working impossible. But she also has no permission to work here, neither does any of her sisters who also live in Costa Rica. The sister that is with her, works illegally through selling clothes. The husband of this sister is the only one in the family who does have a work permit, and she explains that it is difficult for her to find a job or a patron who wants to help with a permit with the children and baby. Nobody wants to spend money on a woman who is pregnant and in the nearby future won't be able to work for a while (Respondent 1, interview 29 April 2016).

Therefore, there are many women who send their children to relatives who still live in Nicaragua, an aspect which will be discussed in further detail in the coming chapter. They make this decision not only because life in Nicaragua is much cheaper, but mostly this makes it easier to leave the house for work. However, another aspect influencing the decision to send children to Nicaragua are the relative unstable housing options in Costa Rica. Housing in Costa Rica is very expensive and especially in San José many migrants live on the streets for they are unable to find an affordable home. The municipality has some night shelters and there are some pastors who provide shelter, but the demand is much larger than what they can offer, which leaves those who cannot sleep in one of these places with no other choice than



Image 5. Near park La Merced there are many companies offering the option to send money (like Western Union). This is the sign of a Nicaraguan restaurant, which also offers this option through Nica Envios. (your money fast and safe to anywhere in Nicaragua, until the gate of your house). Author's picture.

sleeping outside. Maria, who does have a place to sleep explained how difficult it was for her to find something. Despite having family in Costa Rica, she had one bad experience after another, when she just arrived here she hired a room together with another woman. This room smelled, it was

dirty and of a very bad quality and even though it only had one bed, it was very expensive. Because she shared the room, to share the costs, and it only had one bed, she worked at night and slept during the day and the women she shared it with, worked during the day and slept during the night. And Antonia claimed that, just like with education, sending money back home to Nicaragua so their children and other relatives who live there can have a better life, is more important than having a decent house for themselves in Costa Rica. Sending back money to support relatives back in Nicaragua is an aspect mentioned by all the interviewees who have the majority of their family living there. On the other hand, are those women who have a residency and most of their family living with them in Costa Rica, they have more stable living and housing conditions but still consider working for the benefit of their family, to offer them a better life as an important motive for working in Costa Rica.

However, for a female Nicaraguan migrant having a husband or boyfriend also influences their possibilities and opportunities. Families expect a woman to live together with a husband or a male/female companion and to have children is very important. When a woman chooses to leave her husband because he treats her bad, she loses the safety net of her husband and in many cases also that of her family, this is what happened to Rebecca and she claims to have friends who have experienced the same. It can even happen that the children turn against their mother, when they believe that she throws away many years of marriage and that they do not want to leave their father.

At this point, one could wonder why these women would rather choose for the difficulties they encounter in Costa Rica: while applying for a permit, while finding a job (which in most cases is similar to what they did in Nicaragua) and while finding decent housing, than to staying in Nicaragua. And this all goes back to the salary difference between Costa Rica and Nicaragua, even though life in Costa Rica is more expensive, in ratio the migrants are able to earn more in



Image 6. Nicaraguan women selling clothes on the streets of San José. La Prensa Libre: I. Grajales 2014

Costa Rica and make more money for their family. Although when asking whether these women earn enough to support their lives and the lives of their families it appears that out of the 30 women who have

a job, only 19 filled out that it is sufficient to support their lifestyle, and for 11 it appeared to be insufficient. This does explain why there are women who try to earn something more by working several jobs, like two of the women I interviewed and one of them explained her choice: *“yo soy doméstica, pero eso no es suficiente. No puedo pagar todo con este trabajo y por eso yo también vendo cosas. Pero la verdad es que no me gusta hablar de eso porque si el policía lo sabe voy a tener problemas”*.²⁴

The last remark she made is something that I have witnessed regularly when we would go to the park, everyone would be there, doing his or her thing and then all of the sudden, from all directions, police would arrive. While they rush in to the park, a complete chaos emerged, with people running in all directions, trying to get away. The police arrived by car, bike and motor, looking for people who were selling things and asking about their papers. The surprise invasion was to make sure that not many people could leave the park and occasionally we could see them arrest someone who could not show his or her papers or who had invalid papers for selling things (Fieldnotes 2016)²⁵. Also, in the park almost every day I could see around 15 women selling their foods to other people in the park. When I arrived and they were not there, other people would say that earlier that day the police came. These women never liked to talk to me, because they were afraid to become too distracted, that they would not see it when the police arrive in the park and risk losing their merchandise, a fine and presumably problems with their visa.

6.3 The future push or pull of Costa Rica

This chapter is concerned with the economic factors contributing to the decision to leave home in Nicaragua and come to Costa Rica. The most important economic factor is motivating these women to migrate is finding better employment and related to this are education, salaries, gendered aspects like children and family, and of course the visas. Just like the political factors in the previous chapter, these economic factors play a role in the locational and trajectory thresholds.

The locational trajectory is mostly based on rational decision-making, the consideration which situation is better, comparing the push and pull factors. For these female Nicaraguan migrants, there are some very strong push-factors in their country of origin. As they themselves argue, they feel the need to leave because there is a lack of employment, very low salaries and they live under poor conditions. That family stays behind and could form a pull-factor for Nicaragua becomes less relevant for these female

²⁴ I work as a housekeeper, but that is not enough. I cannot pay everything with this job and that's why I also sell stuff. But the truth is that I do not like to talk about that because when the police knows this I have problems (Respondent 3, interview 31 April 2016).

²⁵ An interesting note here, is that there were two different kind of polices working in San José. Only the *policía municipal* is concerned with the migrants, so when the other polices cross the park, nobody cared and continued to do what they were doing.

migrants, as they feel that they are unable to care for them when they stay. Costa Rica on the other hand does offer some interesting pull-factors for these migrants, as there are more jobs available, the salaries are higher and the working conditions less poor. These are the major factors contributing to the decision to leave Nicaragua, however, once these women arrive in Costa Rica, they experience the situation to be more complicated. For reasons like visa status or pregnancy/children, it is more complicated to encounter employment, the salaries earned are not always enough and sometimes there is no money for decent housing. Does this availability of employment and the problems experienced in Costa Rica affect their future desires?

When looking at the graphic, the migrants who do have employment at that moment were more likely to picture themselves staying in Costa Rica in the future. Those who choose for the option travelling between Costa Rica and Nicaragua often said that they like to return to their families for holidays, but continue working in

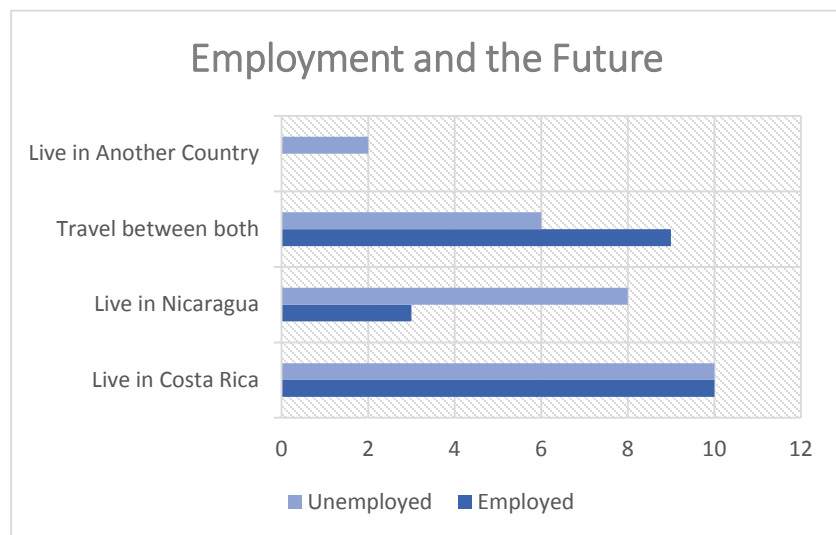


Figure 6.3

Costa Rica. As these women are able to earn higher salaries in Costa Rica as in Nicaragua it is logical that it is economically preferable to remain working in Costa Rica. However, also the migrants who at the time of the research said that they did not have a job more often choose for the option to live in Costa Rica in the future. Comparing their answers, shows that they perceive the *chances* on a higher salary as an important motive to stay. But here should be taken into account that these women could have filled out that they did not have employment, because they are not *legally* employed. Contrary to the interviews, where during the conversation I could gain a woman's trust and sometimes she would eventually admit to selling things illegally, the questionnaires did not offer this possibility and it could be that some respondents support their livelihoods by selling certain things on the street. This gives them a chance to earn more than in Nicaragua and increase the incentive to stay.

It is clear that employment forms a push or pull factor determining the best location to live. However, it also affects the trajectory and just like the political factors, it is influenced by the governments as well. There is only one route between Nicaragua and Costa Rica, which is relatively short and every day

several busses depart between several large cities in Costa Rica to some larger cities in Nicaragua, costing between 60 to 110 US dollars. The *TransNica* bus company is the cheapest and offers a 60 US dollars roundtrip from San José to Managua. For a tourist, this might not seem like a lot of money, but adding to this, a departure tax has to be paid at the border and a Nicaraguan migrant has to pay for a new, or for the renewal of a (tourist) visa.

At first, when a migrant chooses to come to Costa Rica for the first time, this might seem like an amount of money which can be overcome, certainly with the prospects on better employment and higher salaries. However, all of this adds up to a lot of money for a migrant who cannot find employment in Costa Rica, considering that those with a tourist visa have to return home every three months, an aspect often mentioned by the respondents. For example, one of the male respondents from Danielle (Ter Brake 2017) was forced to go home because his employer died and therefore he experienced troubles with his work permit, eventually he was unable to return to Costa Rica because one of his children became sick and he did not have any money left to pay for his trip and visa. So in the future, employment affects the journey which these migrants have to make, increasing or decreasing the trajectory threshold through the amounts earned.

Both the Nicaraguan and Costa Rican government have an influence on the available employment for these Nicaraguan migrants. As mentioned, these women were unable to find a job in Nicaragua which pays them sufficient to support their livelihoods and in their perception the Nicaraguan government does not do enough to help their own people with higher salaries or better working opportunities. But in their opinion, the Costa Rican government also does not do enough to help the migrants. The DGME determines which employers are allowed to hire migrant workers for which exactly determined job, the papers needed by the migrants and the communication between governmental institutions and the migrants. And, as also said before, they feel that especially the communication towards them could be better, to make visas and employment more accessible. But they also think that when Nicaragua offers better working opportunities, they do no longer feel the need to leave their homes, because living with your family, in your own country, that is where you belong, as being emphasized by Maria.

Yet, the culture of migration appears to return when asked whether these women would recommend others to come. Because despite the feeling that Nicaragua is their home country where they belong, the difficulties they encounter with governmental institutions, employment and discrimination, many respondents would recommend other Nicaraguans to migrate to Costa Rica. More than 60% of the respondents would recommend this because they believe that it is better to work in Costa Rica, so also here economic motivations surface. However, on the other hand, those who would not recommend other

Nicaraguans to migrate to Costa Rica did so based on economic motivations as well. In their opinion there is a lack of legal work for Nicaraguans in Costa Rica, working conditions are bad and life in Costa Rica is very expensive, implying that in the end there is no economic profit from a migration to Costa Rica.

6.4 Bringing the law, employment and migration together

The political factors from chapter 5 and the economic factors from this chapter, each have their own influences on the decision-making processes from these female Nicaraguan migrants. In their own ways, they affected the decision to go, their current situation and their future ambitions. But they are also intrinsically linked. When looking at visa status and employment among the respondents of the survey, there is a strong relationship visible. In ratio, among those with a passport the unemployment rate is much

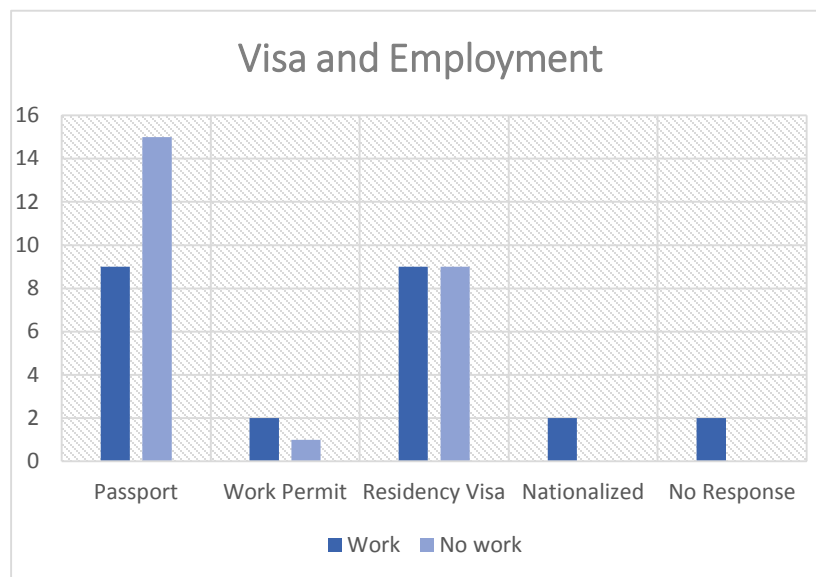


Figure 6.4

higher. At first sight it seems to be odd that a woman with a work permit, states to be unemployed, but she filled out the open question and explained that she was working, but her permit expired and has to be renewed. At that moment, it was unclear whether her patron wanted to rehire here. If he did not, she loses her job and her permit. Also, among the women who have a

residency visa the unemployment rate is relatively high. However, these women are middle-aged and have been in Costa Rica for many years. The shortest length of stay is 8 years and the youngest women with residency, without current employment is 27 years old and she came to Costa Rica when she was only one year old. All these women have in common that even though they are currently unemployed, they have worked in Costa Rica earlier. The same counts for those with only a tourist visa, from the 15 women who are currently unemployed, 10 have had an earlier job in Costa Rica. Independent from their length of stay, which varies from three months to several years. So, there is only a very small percentage of respondents who are in Costa Rica without ever being employed, irrelevant of their visa status.

There are more key connections between the economic and political factors influencing the decision-making process of female Nicaraguan migrants, to choose for migration to Costa Rica, because

most of the issues influencing their decisions raised by these migrants are related to money/costs, employment and to a lesser extent, gender, and all of these aspects are partly economic and partly political and therefore intertwined. Firstly, when looking at the financial aspects, one can argue that the high costs for a permit and the high costs of living in Costa Rica together form a push-factor of Costa Rica, a reason for these female migrants to leave, or to not migrate to Costa Rica in the first place. However, as salaries in Nicaragua are very low and, according to the respondents, insufficient to support the needs of a family. The higher salaries of Costa Rica, and the better social securities, especially when having a work or residency permit, out weight the costs in the perspective of most of the respondents.

Secondly, employment is dependent on many factors. There is a lack of employment in Nicaragua, pushing the working generation to look for other options. Costa Rica offers employment, however regulated by the Costa Rican government, leading to other problems for possible migrants to be. The DGME determines which jobs are allowed to employ foreign workers and which migrants receive a permit to legally work. A lack of communication between the Nicaraguan migrants and the DGME about the information needed to obtain a permit results in many female Nicaraguan migrants working illegally on a tourist visa, although the respondents indicated that they still want a permit and work legally because the benefits are higher.

Thirdly, there is a relationship between education, employment and the migration law. Most female Nicaraguan migrants did not complete their education in Nicaragua, because work was more important and in some ways, this complicates the application process for a visa which allows them to work in Costa Rica. Because we met some migrants who were illiterate and besides literacy, education teaches you certain ways of thinking and how to use a computer, which could make the documents easier understandable and easier accessible. Although there are respondents who did not finish high school, yet managed to complete the paperwork and have a residency visa, showing the likability that the unpreparedness prior to departure is of larger influence than education. Friends and family made many of these women believe that they would be fine on a tourist visa at first and start their application later. However, as the DGME asks for certain documents from Nicaragua when a migrant wants to apply for a visa (residency or work), a migrant can save costs and speed up the process when he or she gathers these papers prior to their departure and the Costa Rican government could assist in this matter by advocating that it is better to apply for a visa before departure. However, also the Nicaraguan government can change something on this matter, when they are willing to invest in education and employment, making the Nicaraguan population more interested in staying in school.

This relates to the fourth aspect, the overall situation in Nicaragua, with a lack of decent employment, low salaries and the disinterest in education led to a normativity on migration. As some of the respondents said, they went unprepared because family told them to go, working was more important than education and the working conditions in Nicaragua are very poorly. All of this, together with stories from other neighbours in Nicaragua who have more money because they have a relative sending money while working in Costa Rica, could make persons of working age aim for looking employment abroad, forming a culture of migration, which will be difficult to change (Kandel and Massey 2002; Ali 2007).

Lastly, all of these decisions are heavily influenced by gender when it comes to the liberty of making certain decisions as a female migrant. In some aspects, Nicaraguan women are restrained by the expectations of their families and/or husbands. Sometimes the family choses that it is better for a woman to migrate for the benefit of her children/family (van Naerssen et al. 2015; Carling 2005), one interviewee told how her mother convinced her that it would be better to work in Costa Rica for her children. And a mother has to take care of her children. Sometimes forcing her into not having a choice but to work and earn the most money possible to be able to send her children to school, making Costa Rica a more preferable option, because of the possibility to travel back to Nicaragua, relatively easily, more employment options and the chance on a higher salary. So, in some cases these female migrants in Costa Rica become trapped in a dilemma between working with a permit and having better social securities, but also higher costs and a difficult procedure, which can be detrimental for their children/family. Or working without a permit, with a higher salary as they can earn in Nicaragua, but with the danger of being exploited because there are no social securities and migrants who work illegally have no rights according to the Costa Rican migration law (DGME 2009).

Chapter 7 – Social Relations

“Tengo dos hijos, ellos viven con mi mamá en Nicaragua. Su padre no quiere pagar por sus hijos, por lo que ellos dependen a mí.

Mamá me motivó de irme, nosotras necesitábamos más dinero y una solución. Por eso mi mamá me dijo que fuera a Costa Rica, porque ella pensó que pude ganar más aquí. Ahora yo trato de trabajar tanto como sea posible, para mandar suficiente dinero a mi mamá, por mis hijos.”²⁶

Respondent 7, interview 08 May 2016

The previous two chapters have discussed the more tangible factors that have an influence on the migration choices of female Nicaragua migrants: the dealings with the law and employment, and how these two fit within the rational parts of the thresholds approach: the locational and trajectory thresholds. This chapter focusses on the first threshold distinguished by Van der Velde and Van Naerssen (2015), the indifference threshold and which social factors influence this threshold. The indifference threshold consists of the mental step which needs to be overcome, this threshold is based on the idea that it is important for people to belong somewhere. I will argue that children, husbands or partners, family and discrimination have had a crucial influence on this threshold, even though these women have already at least once overcome it. Lastly, I will show how these social factors are part of a repetitious process and can have a different effect on their decision about future migrations.

7.1 Family strategies

Several family members can have an influence on the decision to migrate. One of these members is the husband, some have come to Costa Rica because their husband already lived here or he wanted to go to Costa Rica to work, and she wanted to come with him, or maybe sometimes she did not have a choice and had to migrate together with her husband. But the major impact on a women’s decision possibilities lays in the dependency of women on men. Although 50% of the respondents did not have a husband, partner or boyfriend during the time of my fieldwork, they explained to me that living with a man can make life much easier. It is not only more secure, you can also share the costs, of housing for example. Family, however, should also here taken into account. Just like with the topic of children, many families believe that a woman should live with a husband and not on her own. A woman choosing to live alone, or to leave

²⁶ I have two children, they live with my mother in Nicaragua, their father does not pay me, so they depend on me. My mom motivated me to go, we needed more money, so we needed a solution. So my mom told me to go to Costa Rica, because she thought that I could earn more money here. Now I try to work as much as possible, to send my mom enough money for my children.

her husband or boyfriend could result in losing the support from the family and create a more difficult situation, which happened in the case of Rebecca.

So, when a woman has a husband, this can influence the decision to leave, but also when a woman does not have a husband, this can still influence the decision to migrate. When a father does not want to support his children, like in the case of respondent 7 in the beginning of this chapter, it can also become a motive. Here, the choice to migrate can become part of a family strategy (van Naerssen et al. 2015; Carling 2005). When a woman has children, she is unable to take care of them and the family does not have money enough to help them, they can decide as a family that it is better to look for employment in another place. Then the family can make the decision that it is best for the mother to migrate to that place, to work and remit money back home, to help her children, but also increase the wealth of the family. These family strategies were indirectly mentioned in the interviews, like for example in the case of respondent 7, whose mother decided that it was best if she migrated.

However, even when a woman is not forced to migrate out of a family strategy, the opinion of the family remains important when there are children who stay behind in Costa Rica. These women depend on the support of their families, have to trust that they take good care of their children and that they use the money they send back home in the right ways. An aspect which keeps these women occupied, like Antonia who expressed to be unsure about whether her children are treated right and whether they go to school. Only one interviewee said that her family did not support her decision that she wanted to migrate to Costa Rica alone, at that time she was 40 years old and she still decided to go. Other interviewees, mostly had the support of their family, probably because they migrated with a husband or because they already had other relatives living in Costa Rica.

7.2 Motherhood vs. migration

So, family plays an important role in the lives of the female Nicaraguan migrants, and for a woman, having children forms a mayor part of this family. When developing the interview guide, I decided to start the interviews with more general questions about family and San José, to have some small talk and share general information before I would ask any questions which could be sensitive. I figured that children could play a role in the decisions of these female migrants, but I did not consider children as a key influencing factor. However, relatively fast, during my first two interviews, I realised that children and family have profound effects on the decisions made.

The importance of children was first of all visible in the park, where I spend a lot of time to do interviews and surveys, because in the weekends there were lots of women with their children. Sometimes

with the company of a man, but many times just groups of women with children. Secondly, from all the female respondents that I have spoken, only ten of them did not have any children. Something which can change in the future, because eight of them are still young, being around their twenties, and three of them had a partner at the time of research. The two respondents are 29 and 34 years old and at that time they also did not have a partner.

For the women who do have children, they formed a key argument to leave Nicaragua and offer them a better life. This was mentioned in most interviews and as well formed one of the most important motivations for Maria and Antonia to go. Maria has six children, Antonia two and the lack of decent paying work and therefore the inability to support their families was a main reason to leave Nicaragua, because in Costa Rica they can work more, send money to their families, so their children can go to school and improve their futures.

One could argue, that when these women in Nicaragua live in a situation where they cannot afford children and they become a reason to migrate, it could be better when these women have less children (many have four children or more) or children on a later age. However, as said before, family is important and children form an important part of having and extending the family, an aspect which is visible because most respondents have children. Having children can be a choice, but it can also be a cultural obligation. The family has a mayor influence on these women and they grow up with the idea that having their own family is very important. Creating the possibility that the community and/or the family thinks negatively about a woman who chooses not to have children, or have them on a later age (Mok et al. 2001). Another aspect where some women might not have lot of influence on, or perhaps think negatively about themselves, is anticonception. Both Costa Rica and Nicaragua are religious countries and the general trend is that religion has a less open mind about anticonception and about abortion (Mok et al. 2001; Quesada Cordero 2012). Lastly, machismo can also be a determining factor, when a man says that he does not want to have sex with a condom, very often a woman does not have the power to go against this opinion (Davids and van Driel 2005; Quesada Cordero 2012).

So, on the one hand, there are migrants for whom children can form a factor influencing them to leave their homes and search for employment in another place, they are a reason for these females to become mobile. However, on the other hand conceiving children can also be a migration strategy. As mentioned in chapter 5, a child that is born in Costa Rica receives a Costa Rican citizenship and has a right to child support. This means that for this child it is easier to have a better future in Costa Rica, because it is free to stay there, follow an education, work in Costa Rica and because of the child support it also results in some more money for the mother than when the child has a Nicaraguan citizenship. The positive effects

of this aspect of the law shows in the case of Rebecca. Her children had the right on child support. Even though for her this was not a strategy, as she mostly grew up in Costa Rica and has a residency visa, it did help her. Because of the child support she was able to leave her husband, go to school and take care of her children. Her life and that of her children improved with the help of this support.

But, planned or unplanned, children have an influence on the decisions made by these female migrants. Children need care and therefore the mother and/or family needs money. Some respondents came to Costa Rica to be able to take care of their children, others became pregnant when they already were in Costa Rica and these women had to choose where their children were going to live. Where the children eventually grow up strongly depends on the situation of the mother. From the answers from the respondents, there are two factors influencing this decision, the visa and the location in Costa Rica. Having a husband or boyfriend seems to be of lesser importance, as the number of female migrants having their children live in Costa Rica with a husband, are almost equal to those without a husband. Also around half of the respondents did not have a husband and where their children live varied strongly. The women who are in Costa Rica for a short time (less than a year) were more likely to have their children living in Nicaragua. In almost all cases, this are also women who do not have a work permit or residency visa, making their situation in Costa Rica more insecure. These women say that, although they miss their children a lot, it is better for them to live there, because life in Nicaragua is cheaper so the chances of them going to school are higher and when they have to work all day, there is nobody to take care of the children. Maria supports this opinion, she said: *“Yo pienso que es mejor si mis hijos viven in Nicaragua, yo no tengo tiempo para cocinar por ellos, limpiar o lavar sus ropas y allá mi familia los cuidan muy bien. Y también es más barato si mis hijos viven allá porque la vida en Costa Rica es demasiado caro.”* (interview 24 May 2016).²⁷ When asked whether other family members want to take care of the children of these migrated women, the answer usually included that the family most of the time has no issues with taking care of the children from a member of the family who has migrated, because there is no work and no money in Nicaragua and the migrant can send money back home, which cannot just improve the life of those children, but of everyone.²⁸

²⁷ I think that it is better if my children live in Nicaragua, I do not have time to cook for them, to clean or to wash their clothes and there my family takes good care of them. And also it is cheaper if my children live there, because life in Costa Rica is too expensive.

²⁸ As this was a research on the situation of female Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica, there were no questions included in the interview guide on their previous situation in Nicaragua, whether their family lives rural or urban and whether they have enough place or not to take care of the children of migrating family members.

Among my respondents two other groups can be discovered, who have their children living in Costa Rica, with a more stable situation: the respondents in Garza and in Puntarenas. All of these respondents had a house, although it is unclear whether they rent or own it, but they had a secure place to live, in streets where many other Nicaraguans live. The difference between these groups, is that most respondents in Puntarenas have a residency permit and have been there for a long time, varying between 6 to 36 years. In Garza only one respondent had a residency, the others only a tourist visa, but also here some respondents have lived there for several years, one even 17 on just a tourist visa. Yet, most have their children living with them in Costa Rica, which is probably related to the rural setting, with less police and more work on the farms.



Image 7. Picture of a street in Garza where Nicaraguan families live. Author's picture.

The general trend of on the one hand having a residency visa and having their children live in Costa Rica and on the other hand having children live in Nicaragua and only a tourist visa, or a work permit, which both indicate that the time in Costa Rica is only temporary also showed among the interviewees. The three respondents with residency have their children living with them in Costa Rica, the others with a tourist visa or work permit have their children in Nicaragua. As said before, these women feel like they are unable to take good care of their children and contributing to that is the expensive housing in and around San José, which makes that for these women it is also cheaper to have their children living in Nicaragua. There are a few exceptions, women who have lived in Costa Rica for a long time, have a residency permit, yet their children still live in Nicaragua. These women are older than 40 and spent more than 10 years in Costa Rica. It could be that these children are old enough to make their own decisions and rather live in Nicaragua than in Costa Rica.

7.3 The social expel of Costa Rica: discrimination vs feeling welcome

From the past two paragraphs, it has not only become clear that the family has an influence on the decisions made by these female migrants, but also that the migration choices made are part of both individual and/or family strategies. The mobility of female migrants is set within the family context. Their options are affected by and sometimes even limited through family expectations and cultural obligations. However, where children, a husband and family form important reasons for these Nicaraguan women to leave Nicaragua, come to Costa Rica and stay there for a while, there are also repel factors that play a role, like discrimination and the feeling of being at home. The feeling of being at home in Costa Rica is strongly influenced by how these migrants are treated by their surroundings: the Costa Rican nationals. But people often identify themselves through their origins and the culture from Costa Rica is connected to the concept of nation. Costa Rica is a different nation from Nicaragua and therefore both countries believe to have a distinct culture within their own nation (Malkki 1997; Montero Mora 2014). When two nations strongly believe in their own cultures, this could lead to discrimination of the other (Van Houtum and Van der Velde 2003), in this case, the Nicaraguan migrant in Costa Rica.

Many respondents did not want to talk about their experiences with discrimination, however that there is discrimination from Costa Ricans towards Nicaraguans became very clear to me. My first experience was a remark of the mother from my guest family, that her oldest son drove like a drunk Nicaraguan. The following few occurred while being at the park for some observations; a friend made a joke about Nicaraguans, afterwards saying that he usually does not say these things, but that many people around him do. Also another man tried to tell us all the jokes he knew about Nicaraguan migrants and the more time I spend in the park, the more people tried to warn me about the dangers of spending time in this park: *“La Merced es peligroso y sucio porque hay Nicaragüenses allí”*²⁹ (observations 24 April 2016). And, as said in the previous chapters, I have regularly witnessed a police invasion happening in the park to look for migrants who are illegally selling their goods on the street. During my last weekend in the field, when I returned to my guest family, they tried to explain that it was very normal for them to say bad things about Nicaraguans because they are different. In the Costa Rican opinion, Nicaraguans have no norms or values and a different culture because life in Nicaragua is different: “they eat whatever they can find, it does not matter what” (Fieldnotes 18 June 2016).³⁰

²⁹ La Merced is dangerous and dirty because there are Nicaraguans there.

³⁰ also around that time a video of a Nicaraguan man tearing apart a poisonous frog and eating some of it to get high was circulating on the Costa Rican social media and in WhatsApp conversations.

Contrary to what the Costa Ricans argue, that there is a lot of discrimination towards Nicaraguans, only 32% of the respondents said that they have had experiences with offensive words, that they had trouble with being attended at a social institution like a hospital because of a lack of a *cedula* (Costa Rican social security number), or that they had negative experiences with Costa Ricans saying bad things about Nicaraguans. However, as mentioned before, a lot of respondents claimed that they did not want to discuss whether they have had experiences with discrimination and if they have had any negative experiences, many did not want to say what happened. The four women introduced in chapter 4 did and two of their stories were related to discrimination based on the relation between their visa status and employment.

Firstly Patricia, who when she came to Costa Rica, started as a maid in San Ramon, where she should be paid 400 dollars per month. When the women she worked for did not treat her very well, she decided to leave and look for a new job in San José where her husband also worked. When she left the woman was supposed to pay 25.000 Colones, but she only paid 20.000 and Patricia could not change this because she did not have a permit so legally she could not change anything. However, she also said that even though she was treated badly, this also happened in Nicaragua and now she at least earns more money than she did in Nicaragua.

Also Maria had a bad experience at work, when she just arrived she lived in Cartago and daily travelled to San José to work. One time when she had worked the whole day, they wanted her to stay longer and eventually she stayed so long that she missed the last buss back to Cartago. Nobody wanted to help her to get home and besides that she also had a discussion on the number of hours that she had worked. She ended spending the night out on the streets, with less money than she deserved, but just like Patricia she could not change anything because there was no contract and no insurances. This relation between the lack of a visa which allows these female migrants to work, employment and discrimination can be a reason why many migrants did not want to discuss their negative experiences. When they do, they admit to working without a valid visa.

Antonia was one of the few respondents who did speak about the verbal discrimination of Nicaraguans. She said: *“Un permiso vale mucho y muchas Nicas regresan cuando ellos no pueden encontrar un trabajo o ellos van a hacer cosas malas. Por ellos los Ticos dicen malas historias sobre Nicas y nos tratan malo, también porque hablamos diferente.”* (interview 22 May 2016)³¹.

³¹ A permit is very important and many Nicaraguans return when they cannot find a job or they are going to do bad things. Because of them the Costa Ricans tell bad stories about Nicaraguans and treat us badly, also because we talk differently.

From the testimonials from these interviewees, combined with the remarks I heard from some Costa Ricans, it should be taken into account that much more Nicaraguans encounter some form of discrimination during their time in Costa Rica as they want to discuss. However, as these migrants came to Costa Rica for economic motives, it is possible that they perceive these forms of discrimination not as something insuperable, because they believe that by working in Costa Rica they can offer a better future to their families, and eventually also themselves. Making discrimination an aspect which on beforehand was not considered very important by these female migrants in the decision to go to Costa Rica, because the well-being of the family is of higher importance.

Lastly, to return to an argument made in chapter 2, where I discussed a theory that it is easier to feel at home in a place where people speak the same language, because there is no language barrier between the migrant and the nationals (Otterstrom 2008). Costa Ricans, however, were very eager to emphasize that Nicaraguans speak a different Spanish as they do, or that Nicaraguans have another accent. Rebecca also described this. She lived with a Costa Rican, who at first was very positive about her, but (according to Rebecca) later on in their relation became influenced by his family to think negatively about her. She said that Nicaraguans speak differently from Costa Ricans and likewise, Antonia said in her interview that Nicaraguans are discriminated because they have a different Spanish accent. So, where language at first, before migrating, could have lowered the threshold and have been a reason to choose for a Spanish speaking country instead of, for example, the United States of America, in this case it contrasts with the theory and later on, language becomes a negative aspect of this migration. As Nicaraguans are being distinguished by their accent, leading to negative experiences.

7.4 Discrimination and the indifference threshold

One key element of choosing to stay in Costa Rica in the future, or return to Nicaragua is based on the idea of feeling at home in Costa Rica. These female migrants have overcome the threshold of indifference and from the stories from the migrants I discerned several social factors which have had an influence on the decision to migrate to Costa Rica: children, a husband, family and discrimination. However, the influence from this last factor, before coming to Costa Rica is not considered very high, even though the fact that Costa Ricans speak the same language could be a reason to make Costa Rica a more preferable destination country. An explanation can be that migrants consider other aspects as more important and take discrimination for granted, or that they do not like to discuss this negative experiences with their families, just like many did not like to discuss them with me.

Although discrimination is a factor which has the ability to have a strong effect on the feeling of being at home, in this case it appears that discrimination has a minor influence on the decision to stay in Costa Rica or leave. One aspect supporting this assumption, is that no respondent has given discrimination as a motive for choosing their future plans. Adding to this, for example Patricia said in her interview that even though the way she is treated in Costa Rica is not nicely, the money she earns is better than what she could earn in Nicaragua, where she was also discriminated.

Another reason why discrimination could be of less importance is because many Nicaraguans live together. In Puntarenas and Garza I encountered entire streets where almost only Nicaraguan families live, and near San José, in La Carpio also almost only Nicaraguans have their homes and in San José many Nicaraguans meet each other in Park La Merced, where also the final bus stop from the bus between La Carpio and San José is located. Through living together with or near other Nicaraguans and by spending their free time together, doing social or religious activities, could narrow down the possible moments for discrimination. Which, based on the stories from respondents like Patricia and Maria, already mostly occurs in work situations. This together could increase the feeling of being at home in Costa Rica, because most of the time, these migrants are still surrounded with people from their home country and do not need to worry about discrimination when they find themselves in these places.

Lastly, even though language gives Costa Ricans a reason to discriminate Nicaraguans, it still makes it possible to communicate. As appeared in the previous chapter, many respondents did not follow higher education and during the questionnaires I encountered many respondents who needed assistance with reading and writing. Making speaking another language as Spanish more complicated and migrating to other, Spanish speaking countries, like Costa Rica, more desirable.

7.5 The family's impact on the future

Where discrimination might not have a lot of influence on the feeling of being at home due to large Nicaraguan communities, children, a husband and family do. These aspects have contributed to the decision to leave, but they can also make it more difficult for these women to feel at home in Costa Rica. When the majority of the family lives in Nicaragua, the ties with Nicaragua remain very strong. This is an aspect which frequently occurs within the stories of the migrants, the trips they make to Nicaragua to spend time with their family and children. Also, those who have residency and are not forced to return to Nicaragua for visa requirements, still return as often as they can and they consider months like December an important month to be with their family, because of the Christmas holidays. However, the proximity of Nicaragua clearly makes these frequent travels less complicated as when a migrant has to fly to the other

side of the world. Likewise, communicating with the family members at home is easier for the Nicaraguan migrants in Costa Rica as for migrants who flew to the other side of the world, as there is no difference in time zones and there is a mobile service provider, *Claro*, which offers the same charges for making a domestic call or a call to Nicaragua or Panama, making the family feel less far away.

But is this enough to keep living with this distance in the future? Although very often the having of children leads to a higher stimulation for these women to migrate and to work in Costa Rica to offer their children a better future. Through the expensive living conditions in Costa Rica, most women are not able to live with their children and they leave them with family in Nicaragua. But a mother ideally wants to live with her children, so even though these women are currently in Costa Rica and the distance is relatively short, their children will have an influence on where they want to live in the future. The same counts for family, as argued before, family is very important and living close to their family is eventually very important for these women. Looking back at chapter 4, this also shows in the cases of those four women. Antonia and Patricia want to stay some time longer in Costa Rica to earn and save more money and then return to Nicaragua, to their families and children. Rebecca on the other hand wants to stay in Costa Rica, her life is there, her children are Costa Rican and have grown up in Costa Rica. There is no family for her to return to in Nicaragua. Lastly Maria, she has only been in Costa Rica for two months and with her 52 years old she did not know if she was going to return after her first three months, because it was difficult to find employment and in Nicaragua she would at least be with her family. Under more secure conditions, she would stay and want her family to come live with her.

The wish to live near family and children also appears to be important when comparing the question from the survey on the country where the children live, with the question about the future.

Making family a determining factor on where these women see themselves living in the future. Those respondents who have most of their important family members living in Costa Rica, are more intended to stay there.

However, those who have more family in Nicaragua are in ratio not more intended to go back to Nicaragua, most of

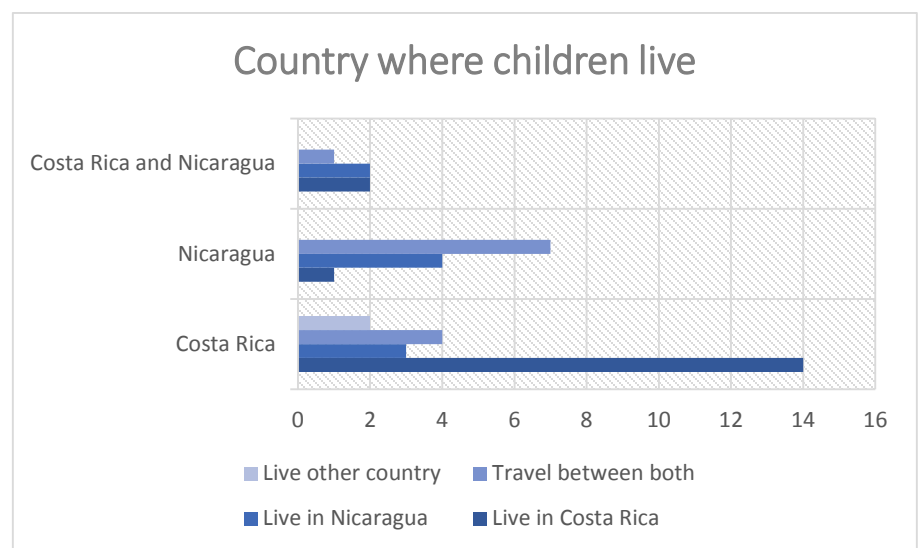


Figure 7.1

them chose the option that they would rather travel between Nicaragua and Costa Rica because in their perception they are able to earn more money in Costa Rica. Again, making family the most important reason for this decision, because they need the better earnings for their family, but at the same time consider it important to be at home at holidays and to see their loved-ones.

Although from these numbers and the graphic it seems like most female migrants are more likely to choose for a life in Costa Rica, it should be noted that many only want to live there when their children can also live there. Like Maria, who has her six children living in Nicaragua, she would like to stay in Costa Rica, but then she would also like to have her children with her. Likewise, in the questionnaire, when the respondents choose for the option of living in Costa Rica, many of them gave a note that they only wanted this when their children could also live in Costa Rica, because they believe that their children can have a better life in Costa Rica as they can in Nicaragua, making children a determining factor. When in the future, it appears that these women are not able to have their children live with them, it is possible that they go back to Nicaragua to live with them or they continue travelling back and forth as much as possible.

Chapter 8 – Conclusions

“Ellos no saben los canales”

Male respondent 1, interview 31 April 2016

“They do not know the canals”: a returning aspect for all the migrants who encounter difficulties with the application for a work permit, they do not exactly understand how to apply. In chapter 2 the main research question of this thesis was presented: What are the social, economic and political factors influencing the decision-making process of female Nicaraguan migrants during their (re-)application for a temporary work permit and how should these factors be changed to reach the migrant’s preferred future migration strategy?

In this chapter, I will come to an answer to this question, but firstly I will go through the trajectories of the four women from the cases, to summarize the key findings of this research. After this, I will bring these findings together in more abstract conclusions from a legal perspective. Finally, the last paragraph will reflect on this research and formulate some interesting windows for future research.

8.1 The trajectory of the female Nicaraguan migrant

To summarize the key findings of this research, I will follow the trajectories of the four women from the case studies through the thresholds approach. In the three thresholds, I will discuss the three phases of migration; before, right now in Costa Rica and the thoughts about the future. That the trajectories are part of a repetitious process will become clear in these trajectories. Also, the thresholds are closely related to the social, economic and political factors discerned in the sub questions of this thesis, with social factors mostly affecting the threshold of indifference and both political and economic factors influencing the locational and trajectory thresholds. Therefore, this approach will also show that in this case, the economic and political factors are intertwined.

Firstly the threshold of indifference, before migrating in Costa Rica, these female Nicaraguan migrants had to decide whether they were ready to leave their homes and go to a different country with a different culture and different circumstances. For many women, leaving home also means leaving family and children, especially leaving children forms a big step for a mother. The family has to be ready to take care of the children who stay behind, which can be a family favour because migration is the best option for the family, but it can also be part of a family strategy when the family decides that someone must go abroad to work, to benefit the family. A woman can leave with the initial plan to send for their children later, as

was the case with Rebecca, whose mother took her to Costa Rica on an early age. But they can also leave with the plan to work some time and then return to their children and families. The threshold of indifference can be decreased when a woman already had family living in Costa Rica, or when they follow their husband, as many times was the case, likewise for Patricia, Antonia and Maria.

When these women are in Costa Rica, their experiences with discrimination and homesickness can affect how they feel about Costa Rica. Although there were not many respondents who wanted to discuss the topic of discrimination, it is safe to say that it happens and both Patricia and Maria have experienced discrimination at their respective jobs. Regarding children there is a strong division among these migrants, those who find themselves in the more secure situation of having a residency visa were more likely to have their children living with them in Costa Rica and those with an insecure perspective of a future in Costa Rica, who have a tourist visa or a work permit, mostly had their children living in Nicaragua. As was the case for Maria, Antonia and Patricia, and rural Garza being the exception to this. The overall opinion among the group of women who have children living in Nicaragua, is that even though they miss them, it is better that they are in Nicaragua, because they would not be able to take care of them in Costa Rica.

In the future, the experiences with discrimination do not seem to increase the threshold of indifference, even though language, country of origin and visa status can become sources of discrimination. The availability of areas where many Nicaraguans can come together and/or live together can lower the effects of experiences of discrimination. Children and family on the other hand can both increase and decrease the threshold. Rebecca, like most women with a residency, who have built their lives in Costa Rica and have their children living there with them, want to stay. Contrary to this are the women with a tourist visa or work permit, they have a more varying opinion. Like Patricia and Antonia, who want to stay a while longer to work and then return to their children and family in Nicaragua. Others, however, who are initially intended to return, also indicate that when they can secure a more stable future in Costa Rica and they can have their children living with them, they are intended to stay. But only, if their children can come.

Secondly, the locational threshold. On beforehand, the rational decision between Costa Rica and Nicaragua was easily made for these women. The prospect on more employment and higher salaries is preferable to the situation in Nicaragua where many women, like Patricia and Antonia leave school early to work and support the family. They also lose faith in following higher education, because those who study, continue to be unemployed, like Antonia's husband. Furthermore, according to the respondents, employment in Nicaragua is underpaid, foreign companies come to Nicaragua for cheap labour and the

Nicaraguan government does nothing to change this. Two other aspects which make Costa Rica preferable are its proximity and it is relatively easy accessible. Also, when a woman has family or a husband who already work in Costa Rica, they can help with housing and finding employment.

The second part of the migration, when these women are in Costa Rica, the push and pull factors can change and the relation between economic and political factors becomes closer. Although the opinion about Nicaragua does not change, the difficulties encountered when looking for employment and applying for another visa can change their perspectives on Costa Rica. Because once in Costa Rica, finding a job is complicated, finding one with a patron who wants to help to obtain a work permit, even more so. Most female Nicaraguan migrants work in the service sector and those without a residency visa or work permit spend a lot of time and money on obtaining such a visa. They find themselves in a position where it is difficult to find decent housing, because it is expensive and the sharing of apartments, like Maria did is common. Although some choose (or are forced by their circumstances) to save the money from housing for their families and sleep outside in a park, like Antonia. With a residency visa or work permit, both working and housing is easier, but the application process for such a visa is experienced as complicated and expensive, both by the respondents who *do* have such a visa and the respondents who do not, like Patricia, Antonia and Maria.

The current experiences influence the locational threshold in the future, the wish to obtain a work permit or residency visa is very high, but the journey is difficult. Like Patricia, Antonia and Maria, the women who are in this application process are looking to get their visa arranged to be able to stay and work in the future. But when they cannot, it is possible that it becomes too costly to stay or too costly to return from Nicaragua. Making respondents with a tourist visa more intended to return to Nicaragua than those with a residency visa, but this opinion can change when their visa status changes. But at this moment, the uncertainty of a tourist visa contributes to increasing this threshold, as working without a residency visa or work permit includes lower salaries and poorer conditions. However, many respondents did want to stay in Costa Rica, even though they were currently unemployed, because the chances on a higher salary still exceed the salaries in Nicaragua. Respondents with employment were overall more intended to stay in Costa Rica in the future to work, which is an economically preferable situation.

Lastly, the trajectory threshold. This part of the threshold is also influenced by both economic and political factors. Before coming to Costa Rica, the trajectory threshold is relatively low, because of the proximity of Costa Rica and with a tourist visa a migrant can enter and work (even though this is illegal). Many women are told by their husbands or family that it is easy to come to Costa Rica and work on a tourist visa, as was

the case for all four women; Patricia and Antonia who followed their husbands, Rebecca who was sent for by her mother and Maria, whose sister and cousin said that it was easy like this.

Although the first step perhaps is relatively easy, the trajectory threshold becomes more complicated when these women are in Costa Rica for a longer time (at least 3 months when a tourist visa expires) and encounter the problems discussed at the locational threshold. Both employment and dealings with the law are of influence, because when a woman cannot work, the expenses for the journey back and forth increase and women who travel on a tourist visa can become afraid for the authorities because they can ask unwanted questions, as is the case with Patricia, who in the past three years has travelled as less as possible. On the other hand, there are the migrants who have a residency visa, for whom the trajectory threshold is very low, their visa allows them to travel freely between the two countries, although they do have to pay for the renewals of their visa and the journey itself.

In the future, the trajectory threshold can be simplified if someone finds work when they first were unemployed, but it can only be changed when these female migrants obtain a residency visa or work permit. Which, as said before, is experienced as rather difficult. Adding to this, is the fact that in the future a visa also continues to cost money. A residency visa has to be renewed every few years and a work permit expires when a migrant loses her job, forcing her to return to Nicaragua and start the application process all over again.

8.2 Pura Vida? Conclusions with regard to the law and its migration policy

Traditionally, labour migration has mostly been considered from a push and pull perspective and decisions made based on rational choices (Cohen 1987). However, this approach has been criticized for not being capable of explaining actual movements (Sassen 1988; Boyd 1989) and that there are more factors of influence on migration than just economic factors and that these factors are interdependent (Castles, de Haas and Miller 2014; Van der Velde and Van Naerssen 2015). Looking at the factors influencing the decision-making process from the female Nicaraguan migrant through the thresholds approach, showed that there is a number of key factors affecting the decision to migrate. Although the decision is partly based on rational choices grounded in push and pull factors originating from Costa Rica and Nicaragua, there is more to this decision. The thresholds approach did not just bring other, non-economic, factors to the surface and how these factors influence migration decisions. This approach also showed that all of the factors are inextricably linked; what can be the most rational choice (i.e. leaving Costa Rica when a migrant does not receive a work permit), becomes affected by other factors (i.e. children who depend on the money sent back home) and this changes the outcome of a migration decision.

However, even though the afore mentioned social and economic factors are of importance and all of the factors are linked, I would like to have a closer look at the political factors. Because this research was executed in the interest of CIDEHUM and their concern is mostly focussed on knowing more about the current Costa Rican migration law, related to the situation of the female Nicaraguan migrants. The current law advocates for improved integration and better visa opportunities, the possibility of a work permit being one of them, to better the migrant's situation in Costa Rica and diminish the illegal employment of migrants.

Contrary to the current law's intentions, the results from this research have shown that the number of female Nicaraguan migrants who have a work permit is low. The number of women who have a residency visa is higher, but this was not the intention of the law and many female migrants are left without the legal papers to work. These women migrated to find better employment opportunities, but working without a valid visa puts these women in a high-risk situation. According to the law, a migrant who works without papers has no rights, making access to health care difficult and causing exploitation in work situations, posing a possible threat to the migrant's human rights. This current situation does not add up with the motto of *Pura Vida* from the Costa Ricans, which emphasizes the living of the good life in Costa Rica.

Can this be changed? Or rather, should this be changed? As explained in the beginning of this thesis, the Costa Rican government argues for the need of Nicaraguan migrants, for the economic benefit of Costa Rica, initiating the incentive to change migration policy. So, the goal from the Costa Rican government is to improve the visas for migrants and indirectly the working conditions of migrants. However, as long as the migrants experience the application procedures from this current policy as too difficult and related to this, too costly, the current situation cannot be changed.

Going back to the thresholds approach, the purpose of the Costa Rican government was to lower the thresholds between Costa Rica and Nicaragua. The locational threshold by offering work permits to work under better conditions and the trajectory threshold through making travelling back and forth easier with a permit and opening the possibility for visa applications in Nicaragua, before migrating to Costa Rica. At this moment, the female Nicaraguan migrants appear to experience the opposite, so how can their lives also become more *Pura Vida*? When taking the preferred future migration strategies into account, there are two possible scenarios for them, the threshold between Costa Rica and Nicaragua can be lowered or heightened. The threshold can be heightened, either by the Costa Rican government, when they return to a prior migration policy and try to make it more difficult to cross the border. Probably causing an increase in irregular labour migration, because what can be concluded from this research is that migrants from

Nicaragua will keep coming, as long as the situation in Nicaragua does not improve and these migrants believe that working in Costa Rica offers them a better future. Which is the second manner in which the threshold can be heightened, when the Nicaraguan government *does* improve the economic opportunities in Nicaragua, lessening the incentive to leave, by changing the push and pull factors.

Another scenario, is lowering the threshold for the Nicaraguan migrants, if Costa Rica really wants to include the migrant into Costa Rican society, with a legal permit to work and lessen exploitation. To lower the threshold, the communication between the government and the migrants should be improved, because the results of this research have shown that this is an aspect where many migrants find themselves struggling with. Related to this, is the experience that government officials seem to be unwilling to help migrants, although this not only contributes to the lack of communication. The Nicaraguan migrants feel themselves abandoned by and distrustful towards their own government, as in their opinion it does nothing to economically improve Nicaragua. Combining this with the feeling of being sent from pillar to stone in Costa Rica, can lead to feelings of distrust towards the Costa Rican government. Both communication and trust are aspects in which organisations like CIDEHUM could play a key role: as a mediator between the migrants and the government. When there is a better understanding of the ins and outs of the application process and no distrust between the Costa Rican government and the migrants, it is likely that the number of migrants with a work permit will rise.

8.3 Reflections and recommendations

The objective of this research was to contribute to the knowledge about the relationship between the current Costa Rican migration law and the migration strategies of female Nicaraguan migrants, taking their different situations into account (i.e. age, the having of children or a husband and where they and the rest of their families live). Reflecting on this objective, it can be concluded that the findings from this thesis have led to some interesting insights, not only regarding the relationship between the current law and the female Nicaraguan migrants, but also related to the social factors that have an influence on the migration strategies. Nevertheless, some reflection on the prior chapters is essential, because every research has its shortcomings and often the results of a research generate more questions than answers (Clifford, French and Valentine 2010).

The first aspect is related the above mentioned social factors. This research was developed from the perspective of CIDEHUM, which had as its primary concern to know more about the relation between the current law and employment nowadays in Costa Rica. In this thesis, this resulted in a focus on the politics

and economics, and less on the social. On the go, I learned that these social factors are more important than initially thought and should have received more attention. Creating space for the consideration of cultural limits, like the status of a female and machismo. Not only in Costa Rica, but also prior to migration in Nicaragua.

Secondly, this research lacks the perspectives of experts on the matter, as discussed in Chapter 3.4. Opinions of professors specialized in migration studies of the Costa Rican universities and the perspective from governmental officials would have been of additional value. What are their perspectives on the situation, how do they perceive the law and if they think that there are aspects that should be different, how can they be changed. In this research, this side of the case has not received enough attention.

Thirdly, this research has been mostly explorative, getting to know the current situation in Costa Rica and gaining some general ideas about how this relation related to the law, which have led to results that open several opportunities for further (more in-depth) research. A first window for future research can be found in a comparison between different regions in Costa Rica. As the results from this thesis have shown that it appears to be possible to see groups of migrants living under different conditions in different cities/towns, it is interesting to research whether this is a trend in the whole country and which factors contribute to this.

Another opportunity can be found in Nicaragua. In this research, methodological restrictions led to the decision to give less attention to Nicaragua. However, there is a group of migrants who return to Nicaragua and never go back to Costa Rica. Their motives for staying there, can differ from the motives discussed in this thesis, other factors can be important than those considered to be of importance for the respondents in this research. Also the Nicaraguan population who never migrated is interesting, did there indeed emerge a culture of migration and do they have the intention to migrate in the future, or do they think differently and see opportunities without migration.

Lastly, I would like to suggest more in-depth research on the migrant population in Costa Rica. Although the Nicaraguan migrants form the majority of migrants in Costa Rica, it is possible that other migrant groups have other experiences. Also, coming back on the social factors, these are aspects that should be discussed. This are topics related to emotions, making it ethically more complicated, but with interviews and by gaining the trust of the migrant population, it is possible to gain more insight in these factors. Considering this research, it is most certainly worth-while addressing them, as it can reveal what people think and show the cultural meanings they use on a daily base (Spradley 1980).

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Appendices

A – Matrix of respondents

	INTERVIEW RESPONDENTS – LOCATION: SAN JOSÉ			
	Age	Time in Costa Rica	Visa	Currently employed
1	30	Third time*	Tourist visa	No
2	30	Several years*	Tourist visa	No
3	42	2 years	Tourist visa	Yes
4	33	3 years	Tourist visa	No
5	43	12 years	Residency	Yes
6	43	1 year	Residency	Yes
7	+/- 40	8 years	Work permit	Yes
8	35	19 years	Residency	Yes
9	25	2 months	Tourist visa	No
10	52	2 months	Tourist visa	Yes
11	47	15 years	Work permit	Yes

* These women have been travelling between Costa Rica and Nicaragua for several years because their tourist visa gives them no permission to stay longer than 90 days. So, they did not know exactly how long they have been in Costa Rica.

	SURVEY RESPONDENTS – LOCATION: Garza			
	Age	Time in Costa Rica	Visa	Currently employed
1	33	10 years	Residency	Yes
2	37	2 years		Yes
3	28	4 months	Tourist visa	No
4	47	17 years	Tourist visa	Yes
5	20	1 year	Tourist visa	No
6	26	1 year	Tourist visa	Yes
7	33	5 years	Tourist visa	No
8	19	10 months	Tourist visa	No
9	26	3 months	Tourist visa	No

	SURVEY RESPONDENTS – LOCATION: SAN JOSÉ			
	Age	Time in Costa Rica	Visa	Currently employed
1	14	6 months	Tourist visa	No
2	26	8 months	Tourist visa	Yes
3	50	10 years	Tourist visa	Yes
4	42	9 months	Tourist visa	No
5	45	6 years	Work permit	Yes
6	24	2,5 years	Work permit	Yes
7	63	3 years	Tourist visa	No
8	43	22 years	Residency	No
9	21	3 months	Tourist visa	Yes
10	35	1 year	Tourist visa	Yes
11	29	1 year	Tourist visa	No
12	0	1 day	Tourist visa	No
13	38	3 months	Tourist visa	No
14	30	15 years	Residency	No
15	42	5 years	Work permit (expired)	No
16	30	4 months	Tourist visa	No
17	36	10 years	Residency	No
18	23	10 days	Tourist visa	No
19	34	11 years	Tourist visa	Yes

	SURVEY RESPONDENTS – LOCATION: PUNTARENAS			
	Age	Time in Costa Rica	Visa	Currently employed
1	25	6 years	Tourist visa	No
2	58	40 years	Nationalized	Yes
3	51	32 years	Residency	No
4	38	20 years	Residency	No
5	43	24 years	Residency	Yes
6	34	18 years	Residency	No
7	27	18 years	Residency	Yes
8	30	17 years	Residency	Yes
9	59	37 years	Nationalized	Yes
10	47	24 years	Residency	Yes
11	41	36 years		Yes
12	36	10 years	Residency	Yes
13	63	22 years	Residency	No
14	82	20 years	Tourist visa	No
15	62	11 years	Tourist visa	No
16	49	8 years	Residency	No
17	27	26 years	Residency	No
18	25	8 years	Residency	Yes
19	53	8 years	Residency	Yes
20	52	23 years	Residency	Yes
21	30	5 years	Tourist visa	Yes
22	45	24 years	Tourist visa	Yes

B – Interview Guide and Survey

General

Hola mi nombre es...

Antes que nada me gustaría agradecerle por estar aquí y tomarte el tiempo de hablar conmigo.

Antes de iniciar le daré un poco de información general y le haré algunas preguntas acerca de la entrevista, está bien?

- Primeramente le diré algunas cosas sobre mi. Soy una estudiante Holandesa especializada en estudios migratorios y me interesé en los migrantes de Nicaragua en Costa Rica por lo que me puse en contacto con CIDEHUM. Me interesa investigar las leyes, derechos, y condiciones de trabajo que tienen efecto sobre los Nicaraguenses aquí.
- Los resultados de esta entrevista y de toda la investigación serán traducidos y entregados a CIDEHUM y mi universidad. Su información será tratada cuidadosamente y será confidencial para que nadie sepa quién es, a menos que usted quiera que esto sea diferente.
- La entrevista durará (Time frame) y me preguntaba si le parecería bien que yo grabe la entrevista. Como usted habrá notado mi español no es perfecto pues sigo aprendiendo, el grabar la entrevista me permite escuchar sus palabras más cuidadosamente y poder entender de manera más fácil. La grabación sería utilizada sólo por mi por las razones que le mencioné.

Bueno, para que conste, cuál es su: Voy a poner.....si es mujer, su edad y su barrio.

Factores Sociales:

Dígame algunas cosas sobre su familia.

- Tiene esposo/esposa?
- Tiene hijos?
- Dónde viven? En Costa Rica, en Nicaragua o en otro país?
- Alguien más de su familia ha migrado? Si la respuesta es sí, ¿A dónde?
- Otros miembros migrantes de su familia fomentaron su decisión de migrar? Por qué?

Ruta de Migración

- Cómo vino a Costa Rica?(¿ en qué condiciones está en Costa Rica, con permiso de trabajo temporal, o en forma indocumentada o con permiso vencido) . Con la ayuda de amigos o familia?
- Fue esta la primera vez que migró a otro país? Si no, dónde más ha vivido?
- Cuanto tiempo ha vivido/trabajado aquí?

Educación

Trabajó en Nicaragua antes de venir a Costa Rica? Si sí, el trabajo que tuvo se relaciona al que tiene en Costa Rica? Se relaciona también con la educación que tuvo en Nicaragua? O está por encima o por debajo de su educación? Está trabajando usted en lo que le gusta?

Discriminación

¿ha tenido alguna experiencia negativa aquí?

No hacer preguntas directas en este tema “discriminación”, sin embargo continuar con el tema cuando el entrevistado mencione algo sobre experiencias negativas.

Factores Económicos

- Qué trabajo realiza actualmente? Es el único trabajo que tiene en Costa Rica? Si no, ¿qué otro trabajo tiene?

- Cómo consiguió su trabajo actual? Sabía usted que realizaría eso antes de llegar a Costa Rica o migró y luego encontró un trabajo?
- Sabía usted sobre el permiso de trabajo que necesitaba? Me puede decir algo acerca de ese permiso? Es difícil de conseguir?
- *Migrantes Irregulares: Sabía sobre el permiso de trabajo? Por qué no tiene uno? Es muy caro, toma mucho tiempo? Por qué decidió quedarse en el país irregularmente?*
- Este trabajo soporta y mantiene su estilo de vida/familia? O necesita dinero extra para vivir?
- Qué quiere en el futuro? Quedarse en Costa Rica? Regresar a Nicaragua? Viajar y regresar entre Costa Rica y Nicaragua? Ir a otro país? Por qué?

Factores Políticos

La última parte de esta entrevista consiste en un par de preguntas acerca del sistema político de Costa Rica.

- Antes usted mencionó que era caro/ lento ,tardado/difícil/etc. conseguir un permiso de trabajo.
 - Le recomendaría a otros ir a Costa Rica y aplicar por un permiso?
 - Siente usted que el gobierno hace suficiente para proteger su bienestar?
 - El permiso de trabajo hace que se sienta más seguro/segura? Ayuda a mantener sus derechos?
 - Qué quisiera usted que fuera diferente?
 - ¿Le gustaría aplicar por un permiso nuevo cuando el suyo caduque (Solo para los que tienen permiso)?

Investigación de migrantes nicaragüenses

Tema de investigación: la situación de los inmigrantes nicaragüenses, de ambos sexos en Costa Rica.

Enfoque:

- Con o sin permiso laboral.
- Como piensan los migrantes nicaragüenses que se puede mejorar su situación e integrarse laboralmente en Costa Rica.

Toda la información es confidencial y solo para Radboud University Nijmegen de Holanda y Centro Internacional para los Derechos Humanos de los Migrantes (CIDEHUM) de San José, Costa Rica.

Nota: En las preguntas extensas puede ampliar su respuesta si lo cree necesario.

Factores sociales

☐ Mujer ☐ Hombre

Edad: _____

¿Dónde vive usted?

☐ San Jose ☐ Otro: _____

¿Tiene usted un(a) compañero/compañera?

☐ Sí ☐ No

¿Tiene usted hijos?

☐ Sí ☐ No

Si es así:

¿Dónde viven su(s) compañero(a) y/o hijos?

☐ Costa Rica ☐ Nicaragua ☐ Otro: _____

¿Cuanto tiempo está en Costa Rica en total?

¿Ha tenido alguna experiencia negativa en Costa Rica? (Como discriminación en su trabajo o su vida diaria).

☐ Sí ☐ No

Cuales experiencias:

Factores económicos

¿En que condiciones está en Costa Rica?

☐ Pasaporte ☐ Permiso de trabajo ☐ Permiso de residencia

¿Tiene usted un trabajo en este momento?

☐ Sí: _____ ☐ No

Si es así:

¿Este trabajo es suficiente para soportar su vida/familia (económicamente)?

☐ Sí ☐ No

Si no es así:

¿Tuvo usted otro trabajo en Costa Rica?

☐ Sí: _____ ☐ No

¿Tuvo usted otro trabajo en Nicaragua?

☐ Sí: _____ ☐ No

¿Que quiere usted en el futuro?

☐ Vivir en Costa Rica ☐ Vivir en Nicaragua
☐ Viajar entre Costa Rica y Nicaragua ☐ Vivir en otro país

Porque: _____

Factores políticos

¿Les recomendaría a otros de venir a Costa Rica?

☐ Sí ☐ No

Porque: _____


¿Cree usted que los gobiernos de Costa Rica y Nicaragua puedan hacer algo diferente para mejorar su condición de migrante?

☐ Sí ☐ No

Porque: _____

¡Muchas gracias por su tiempo!

C – Application form Work Permit or Residency

		FORMULARIO DE FILIACIÓN SOLICITUD DE PERMANENCIA LEGAL EN COSTA RICA		<div style="border: 1px solid black; padding: 5px; text-align: center;">FOTO</div>
NÚMERO DE EXPEDIENTE _____				
1. NOMBRE		2. PRIMER APELLIDO		3. SEGUNDO APELLIDO
4. CONOCIDO COMO		5. SEXO FEMENINO <input type="checkbox"/> MASCULINO <input type="checkbox"/>		6. NACIONALIDAD
7. LUGAR Y FECHA DE NACIMIENTO				DIA / MES / AÑO
8. NOMBRE DEL PADRE		9. NOMBRE DE LA MADRE		
10. REPRESENTANTE LEGAL (MENOR DE EDAD)		11. CURADOR (SI ES DISCAPACITADO)		
12. ESTADO CIVIL UNIÓN LIBRE <input type="checkbox"/> SOLTERO <input type="checkbox"/> DIVORCIADO <input type="checkbox"/> CASADO <input type="checkbox"/> VIUDO <input type="checkbox"/> OTRO <input type="checkbox"/>				
13. NIVEL DE INSTRUCCIÓN PRIMARIA SECUNDARIA SUPERIOR <input type="checkbox"/> INCOMPLETA <input type="checkbox"/> COMPLETA <input type="checkbox"/> INCOMPLETA <input type="checkbox"/> COMPLETA <input type="checkbox"/> ANALFABETA <input type="checkbox"/>				
14. PROFESIÓN U OFICIO		15. LUGAR Y FECHA DE INGRESO A COSTA RICA		DIA / MES / AÑO
16. DOCUMENTO DE INGRESO PASAPORTE <input type="checkbox"/> SALVOCONDUCTO <input type="checkbox"/> PERMISO VECINAL <input type="checkbox"/> NINGUNO <input type="checkbox"/>				
17. NÚMERO DE DOCUMENTO DE INGRESO		18. DIRECCIÓN PROVINCIA CANTÓN DISTRITO		
19. DIRECCIÓN EXACTA DE LA RESIDENCIA				
20. NOTIFICACIONES FAX NÚMERO PERSONAL / APODERADO ESPECIAL CORREO ELECTRÓNICO				
<p>Si no aportó número de fax, queda por entendido que el usuario deberá presentarse en la Plataforma de Servicios a retirar la resolución en la fecha indicada por el funcionario (a) de la Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería. En caso de que el número de fax indicado sea cambiado o se encuentre en mal estado, será responsabilidad del usuario notificarlo a la Dirección General de Migración y Extranjería.</p> <p><input type="checkbox"/> He leído con detenimiento y aceptado las indicaciones expuestas en el presente formulario.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">_____ FIRMA</p>				
La Uruca contiguo a Aviación Civil, San José, Costa Rica, Teléfono (506) 2299-8100, Fax (506) 2231-7553, www.migracion.go.cr				

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