

**EXPERT GROUP MEETING ON INTERNATIONAL  
MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT IN  
LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

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**WOMEN, GENDER, AND INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION ACROSS AND  
BEYOND THE AMERICAS:  
INEQUALITIES AND LIMITED EMPOWERMENT\***

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\* The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

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## A. MIGRATION AS A GENDERED PHENOMENON

In the last several decades, scholars from different disciplines have employed a variety of qualitative and quantitative methods to identify, explore and explain how gender shapes human life in all its phases. Gender is the meaning people give to the biological reality that there are two sexes. It is a human invention that organizes our behavior and thought, not as a set of static structures or roles but as an ongoing process (e.g., Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1999; Lorber, 1994; Ortner, 1996). The act of bringing gender centrally into migration studies represents an attempt to remedy many decades during which migration scholarship paid little attention to gender. The field had eschewed female migrants owing to the widely shared assumption that women (and children) migrate to accompany or to reunite with their breadwinner migrant husbands. Beginning in the 1970s, the dearth of research on women was replaced by a flurry of historical and contemporary studies that took women migrants as the primary subject of inquiry; many other studies incorporated “gender” by inserting the variable of sex into their quantitative data collection. More recently, poststructuralist scholars have argued against comparing males versus females and their corresponding gender “roles” for a more dynamic and fluid conceptualization of gender as relational and situational. In everyday life and even in many scholarly circles gender operates so “naturally” that it may easily escape our awareness. To measure its effects we must first see gender operating, as this paper on international migration across and beyond the Americas sets out to do.

## B. THE FEMINIZATION OF MIGRATION

For at least one-half century women have made up the majority of internal migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean. This has been the result of both gendered transformations in agriculture alongside the precipitous decline in women’s craft production, on the one hand, and heightened demand for female urban workers, on the others. Latin American and Caribbean women have participate in interurban migrations, temporary, in rural-rural migrations, and in the increased female employment in export-oriented agricultural production and in manufacturing (Arizpe, 1977; Beneria and Roldan, 1987; Fernández-Kelly, 1983; Carillo and Hernández, 1985; Recchini de Lattes, 1988; Oliveira and Roberts, 1993; Ellis and others, 1996; de los Reyes, 2001). Whereas in the 1960s and 1970s, single women predominated among internal migrants, the economic crisis of the 1980s has propelled married women with young children into the labor force as well (Aziza, 2000; de Oliveira, 1990). Many of these women have elected to migrate internally in order to be able to continue to care for their families locally (Escobar and others, 1987). Others have made the difficult decision to migrate internationally and to pass on childcare responsibilities and other domestic duties to stay-at-home partners, kin, and paid domestic servants (Ortega, 2001; Aymer, 1997; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001) Thus, in Latin America and the Caribbean where today some 25 million people reside outside their countries of origin, the decades-old predominance of women as internal migrants is being complemented by growing numbers of female international migrants who cross borders within the Americas and beyond to Europe.

Since the 1980s women and children in Latin America and the Caribbean have been particularly handicapped due to cut backs in government programs for education, housing, and health care. Moreover, austerity and structural adjustment programs have exacerbated poverty and greatly increased levels of unemployment. In this environment, single and married women have increasingly been tapped to shoulder the burden of their households’ survival (ECLAC, 1995; Repak 1995; Sorensen and Olwig 2002; Sassen, 2002; Woo Morales, 2001). Export-oriented and subsistence agriculture, informal work, employment in export-processing zones, sex work, and emigration are strategies that many women have adopted.

For those engaged locally in the proliferating sector of export-processing manufacturing—out-migration may be but a step away. Studies show that the higher the percentage of women working in local manufacturing, the greater the chance that any one woman will emigrate abroad (Massey and others, 1998). Economic need, reinforced by knowledge of global workplace

culture, the development of work-based, transnational social networks, and exposure to first-world commodities create a powerful mix of incentives. After years of virtual disregard for the ways in which social networks and migrant social capital are gendered, we are coming to appreciate how extremely gendered social networks are. As pioneering research in Mexico has proven, many women have had to wait for the development of more female-centered networks to embark on a project of outmigration (Cerutti, 2001; Curran and Rivero-Fuentes, 2003).

In speaking about women and export-oriented manufacturing, I would be remiss were I to neglect to mention the growing incidents of femicide within such nations as Mexico and Guatemala and along international borders. These murders have followed the establishment of neoliberal policies, heightened female labor force participation and male under- and unemployment, and the tolerance of violence against women by certain Latin American governments (Wright, 2001; 1997). It is imperative that advocates of women's, workers', and migrants' rights join forces to ensure that feminicides are no longer tolerated by governments and are eradicated from women's lives.

Sex work is another form of labor that has grown and internationalized. Research among female sex workers in countries heavily dependent upon tourism, like the Dominican Republic and Cuba, has documented how certain women approach their sexual labors as a means to forge transnational ties so as to continue to receive money, goods, and the most-coveted prize of all: an immigrant visa from foreign clients (Brennan, 2004; 2001). Latin American and Caribbean sex workers also migrate internationally within the Americas and to Europe (Kempadoo 1998). In formulating policies on national and international sex work, we must not confuse—as do many U.S. politicians-- a self-righteous morality with women's limited agency. We should also take care to distinguish between the victims of trafficking and those who elect sex work as a form of labor—seeking to eradicate the former while providing alternatives, protections, and rights for the latter.

My discussion thus far has privileged the economic conditions promoting female internal and international migration. For wives, single mothers, daughters and sons, gender and generational inequalities within migrant households and communities may prove to be important factors promoting migration as subordinated household members seek greater freedom over their mobility, productivity, consumption, and social life (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Hondagneu-Sotelo 1994; Vega Briones 2002). Migration can also be an escape from hetero-normative sexual constraints (Luibhéid, 2005; Cantú, 1999).

### *1. Gender and the Demand for Immigrant Labor*

Gender also conditions migratory practices and policies within labor-importing countries in the Americas and Europe. These societies have also experienced restructuring in the face of global competition and the subsequent growth of deskilled, female-intensive industries, particularly in service, healthcare, microelectronics and apparel manufacturing. In the United States, Canada, and Europe, gender and race work together to render Latin American and Caribbean women more employable in these labor-intensive industries than their male counterparts. This outcome rests on patriarchal and racist assumptions that women can afford to work for less, do not mind dead-end jobs, and are more suited physiologically to certain kinds of detailed and routine work (Espiritu 1997). As a male production manager and hiring supervisor in Silicon Valley, California explained: “Just three things I look for in hiring [entry-level, high-tech manufacturing operatives]: Small, foreign, and female. You find those three things and you're pretty much automatically guaranteed the right kind of workforce. These little foreign gals are grateful to be hired—no matter what” (Hossfeld 1994:6).

In wealthier Latin American and Caribbean nations and in North America and Europe, the demand for international domestic workers has also boomed (Aymer, 1997; Ortega, 2001; Hondagneu-Sotelo, 2001). Although domestic service is considered to be a menial job, in many cases this female immigrant workforce possesses a relatively high level of education, as is the case with Peruvian domestic workers in Chile whose ranks include some 70 percent who have completed either high school or university education (Ortega, 2001).

Throughout the Americas and beyond the demand for foreign domestic servants has been spurred by an escalation in native-born female employment and the shortage of nationals available for domestic service alongside the undercutting of social welfare policies favorable to women and children. It is hardly surprising, then, that in Spain approximately half of all annual immigrant quotas have been designated for domestic workers. And a goodly number of these women originate from Latin America. Some have worried that such quota laws further ghettoize female migrants into “women’s work” by placing a priority on domestic workers. In light of such patterns, we might easily jump to conclusions about the “triple marginality” of migrant women as domestic help-- individuals who find themselves on the wrong side of the intersection of gender, race, and class. Paradoxically, certain advantages can accrue to the stereotype of domestic service as “women’s work.” First, it eases access for female migrants into a sector where job opportunities are proliferating. Research in countries like Italy and the United States shows that men commonly find their way into domestic service or landscaping by following on the heels of an already employed wife or girlfriend. Second, immigrant women in domestic service may have advantages over men with respect to citizenship and access to state entitlements, like social security. This is the case because immigrant domestic workers in such countries as Spain and Italy are more likely than men to have entered legally. Moreover, their records of stable and uninterrupted employment pave the way toward future citizenship. Finally, in these countries immigrant women’s organizations have been in the vanguard of efforts that demand that local governments deliver on promises regarding legalization, labor and social security protections, and health care (Calavita, 2006; Chell-Robinson, 2000; Ribas-Mateos, 2000; Rubio, 2003). These findings indicate that we must ask under what specific conditions of state recruitment and societal incorporation specific categories of women and men are differentially disadvantaged or rewarded, disenfranchised or mobilized (Pessar 2001; Mahler and Pessar 2001). Clearly, additive models of immigrant women’s oppression may not always be accurate or strategically useful (Calavita, 2006).

In light of the multiple gendered factors conditioning international migration, it is simply inexcusable for prestigious international entities like the recent Global Commission on International Migration (2005) to continue to release “universal” findings about the causes of migration which neglect to consider the important role of gender.

## C. CHANGING GENDER IDEOLOGIES AND RELATIONS

### *1. Partners and Children Who Stay Behind*

Migration studies often neglect the family members left behind. This leaves us at a loss to appreciate the new activities and responsibilities migrant household members may assume with the departure of husbands, wives, parents, brothers, and sisters. The scant research available for Latin America and the Caribbean focuses on wives who stay behind or the female kin who care for migrants’ children (Soto, 1987; Aymer, 1997). In light of the growing international feminization of migration and the departure of married wives and mothers, we need more research on the ways in which stay-at-home husbands and fathers adjust their masculine identities, practices, and domestic power dynamics to conform to this altered situation.

The literature that does exist on the stay-at-home wives of migrants reveals a mixed picture. Not surprisingly, the outcomes for women are conditioned by existing gender ideologies, the flexibility or rigidity of proscribed gender roles, family organization and post-marital residential norms. In those communities and family structures in which women are highly dependent on males and patrilocal residence prevails, women may find themselves residing with their husband’s kin, carefully monitored by them, and afforded little or no control over their movements, their income-generating activities, and the use of remittances. In such cases, outmigration may simply reinforce conventional gender ideologies and roles (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991; Georges, 1992; Goldring, 1996; Mahler, 1999). There are other cases in which women left behind—often as provisional household heads—are called upon to assume roles and tasks previously assigned primarily or only to men (Chaney and Lewis, 1980; Mummert, 1988; Kyle,

1995; D'Aubeterre Buzengo, 1995). These women may be obligated to initiate or increase income-generating activities to compensate for finances lost when men migrate or when remittances are erratic or insufficient. While these new responsibilities increase women's burdens, wives may also become sufficiently empowered to attempt to emigrate themselves, even against their spouses' wishes (Hondagneu-Sotelo, 1994). On the other hand, there are also instances in which women (commonly from more economically secure households) are forbidden by migrant husbands to work outside the home. In these domestic units local income generation is reduced, if not totally abandoned, and women and their children become wholly dependent on male migrants and remittances. These women, too, may balk at their reduced autonomy and heightened dependence, and develop strategies to migrate abroad (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991).

Although kin networks prove to be remarkably resilient throughout Latin America and the Caribbean, there are definite gendered and generational costs. These include stay-at-home wives abandoned by their immigrant husbands, what Judith Ennew (1982) calls the "grandmother syndrome"—elderly women charged with raising their children of their own immigrant offspring, and the practice of sending unruly children "home" to be raised by kin (Mahler, 1991; Guarnizo, 1997)

## *2. Remittances, Gender, and Development*

The time is right to ask how gender shapes remittance flows, informal practices, and official policies. To date there are few studies that disaggregate remittances by the sex of remitters and senders or that, more ambitiously, offer comprehensive gendered analyses of their findings. To reveal why and how gender operates here, we require detailed analyses of who earns remitted income, what they are *not* spent on in order that they might be sent abroad and who is affected by this lack of spending, who transmits and controls the money and who benefits from the profits generated by these transactions.

Fortunately, there have been recent moves by international lending institutions like the Inter-American Development Bank and the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women (INSTRAW) to develop a more gender-based approach to remittances. These developments are both promising *and* troubling. Despite these organizations' efforts, the conversation among policy makers in general revolves around the "productive" uses of remittances and how to promote them. These officials decry the fact that the bulk of remittances are spent by recipients on purportedly "unproductive" purchases such as food, shelter, clothing, and education. Their goal is to increase the percentage of funds that are saved, not spent, so that the capital might be invested.

Gender seeps subtly into a seemingly neutral notion of "productive" versus "unproductive" uses of remittances. The value of capital investments for socioeconomic development is undeniable. Yet, these discussions often fail to adequately engage the situation of actual remittance recipients—families that are frequently headed by women. One wonders why these families should be singled out for disciplining when what they receive barely meets the needs of their dependents, particularly given that remittance streams can be paltry and irregular. Is it appropriate to not characterize as "productive" expenditures on children's nutrition, education, and welfare? Is there a less gendered rhetoric that might be substituted? And should recipients of remittances be disproportionately burdened with the responsibility for the development of home country economies? Why not invest as much or more effort in lowering interest rates offered by financial institutions in remittance-impacted countries, institutions that in many if not most cases are controlled by and have harnessed credit largely on behalf of male elites? Investing in banking the unbanked, through building branches in communities where remittance recipients live, might be a productive strategy (Mahler and Pessar, 2006).

## *3. Transnational Migrant Households and Immigrant Mothers*

The myth of the sole or primary male breadwinner continues to hold weight throughout the Americas and beyond. It serves the interests of employers who use the myth to legitimate paying women lower wages than men—75% less throughout Latin America and the Caribbean

(Grynspan, 2003). It benefits husbands of working wives who continue to pass on major responsibilities in childcare and housework to their wage-earning wives, and perhaps also, to a migrant maid and nanny. And, the myth of the sole or primary male breadwinner benefits male leaders of states and ethnic communities. They discipline wives and daughters to view wage employment and “public” lives as incompatible with their primary duties to uphold patriarchal national honor and ethnic traditions largely within the confines of the household.

Nonetheless, such ideology about gender roles flies in the face of everyday practice. Worldwide, one-fifth of all households are headed by women; and one-half of all women between ages 15 and 65 are engaged in paid work (Hochschild, 2002: 19; Ehrenreich and Hochschild, 2002: 6). Reconstituted gender ideologies are clearly in order. These must acknowledge women’s large-scale labor force participation worldwide. They must also envision “the family” as composed of both multiple breadwinners of both sexes and variations in forms of parenting, including transnational mothering (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila, 1997). In regions like the Eastern Caribbean where there has been a long history of female-headed households and female internal and international migration, masculinities and femininities already incorporate these notions (Aymer, 1997). These ideological constructs must be disseminated more widely and retooled accordingly to ensure that transnational migrant households and transnational migrant mothers are not the objects of disdain and stigmatization. Finally, new ideologies must recognize that many global businesses rely on female labor, as do those poorer nations that benefit tremendously from women’s sizeable remittances.

Research in labor-exporting countries has shown, not surprisingly, that children of immigrant mothers do best when their mothers’ sacrifices and contributions are affirmed both privately and publicly, when a stable core of caregivers is in place, and when routine contact with mothers abroad is maintained (Aymer 1997; Parreñas 2002). Unfortunately such flexibility has been undercut of late, especially for undocumented women in North America and Europe. Concerns about unprotected borders have led to a more stringent policing of national borders and to the accompanying elevation in fees for “professional” border crossers and visa brokers. Although a few years ago undocumented Mexican and Central American female workers in the U.S. might have taken periodic trips back home to reunite with family, today these reunions have become riskier and far less frequent. We can hear the anguish such separation instills in the words of a migrant mother who cares for other women’s children. “If I had wings, I would fly home to my children. Just for a moment, to see my children and take care of their needs, help them, then fly back here to continue my work” (Parreñas, 2002: 42).

Among the most progressive critics are those who view the plight of migrant mothers and their children as a human rights issue. They draw our attention to Article 9 of the United Nations Declaration of the Rights of the Child (1959) that states, a child “should grow up in a family environment, in an atmosphere of happiness, love, and understanding [and] not be separated from his or her parents against their will.” Ironically, just at the moment when free trade proponents are celebrating globalization and transnationalism, nation-state borders have become very real obstacles to many immigrant women who given the appropriate circumstances would want to be reunited with their children. “Demanding the right for women workers to choose their own motherhood arrangements would be the beginning of truly just family and work policies, policies that address not only inequalities of gender but also inequalities of race, class, and citizenship status” (Hondagneu-Sotelo and Avila 1997:568).

#### *4. Gender Ideologies and Relations When Men and Women Cross International Borders*

When men and women migrate internationally they are confronted with alternative gender ideologies, institutions, and practices. This encounter can lead to varied (and mixed) outcomes. They include: challenges and renegotiations of pre-migration gender ideologies, beliefs, relations, and practices; a wider acceptance and consolidation of counter-hegemonic gender regimes, which were available prior to departure; and the reproduction, if not intensification, of original gender beliefs and norms.

Although immigration is surely not a panacea for women's empowerment, research does point to certain consistent gains. Within households, Latin American and Caribbean immigrant women have often been able to use their wages and increased access to state services as leverage to attain more control over household decision-making, over personal and household expenditures, and over spatial mobility. Many studies also document greater male participation in household and childcare responsibilities, albeit not approaching real parity. In one study that attempted to track these changes, Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) found a direct relationship between the pattern of family migration and how gender relations and domestic work were negotiated. In instances of "stage migration," when men migrated first and resided abroad for years before their wives joined them, the men learned household tasks and were more willing to assist their spouses when the two were reunited in the United States. Conversely, when the family emigrated as a unit, the man generally expected his wife to replicate pre-existing gender practices, and many wives, including those who worked outside the home, acceded to these wishes.

If international migration often leads to an improvement in women's status, the opposite can hold for men who commonly experience a decrease in relative authority and privilege within households, workplaces, and the wider community (Foner 1978; Eastmond, 1993; Margolis 1994; Hagan, 1994; Peña, 1991; Menjivar, 2000). These contrasting gendered outcomes often condition immigrants' orientations to settlement versus return. Research with Mexican, Dominican, Salvadoran, Jamaican, and Haitian immigrants in the United States reveals that women are more likely than men to pursue strategies to prolong their residence and attempt to reunite family members abroad (Pessar, 1986; Guendelman and Perez-Itriago, 1987; Foner, 1987; Guarnizo, 1996; Mahler, 1997; Fouron and Glick Schiller, 2001). In her research with Mexican immigrants of rural backgrounds, Luin Goldring (1996) found that women were reluctant to return to Zacatecas, Mexico because they reasoned they could not easily find waged work outside the home, would not have access to time-saving technology, and would be given less license to participate in community organizations. The women also perceived that their children would receive better educations and employment opportunities in the United States.

Among Mexicans and many other Latin American and Caribbean populations, men often develop transnational ties that will facilitate a speedier and smoother return. In certain cases, like Mexican migration, men may be assisted by state officials. Research on Mexican hometown associations (HTA's) and on Mexican local, state, and federal officials has revealed a definitive male bias. Migrant women play essential roles in the fundraising necessary to initiate development projects in their hometowns. Yet, they typically are deprived access to the increased power and social capital that accrue to male hometown association participants because decision-making and project implementation are perceived as male prerogatives, both by the men in the associations and more importantly by government officials who co-sponsor and shepherd the projects to fruition (Goldring, 2001). Fortunately exceptions do exist such as the an initiative in the town of Tendeparaqua in which HTAs and the government worked together to purchase sewing machines, train female workers, and arrange for these women to market school uniforms to the State (Orozco, 2003). When immigrant women who participate in immigrant associations are relegated to the roles of party planners, cooks, and beauty queen contestants, they are marginalized from the rewards of transnational citizenship, and they may become even more committed to a strategy of permanent settlement abroad (Jones-Correa, 1998 ; Goldring, 2001).

#### D. GUATEMALAN REFUGEES AND GENDER PARITY WON AND LOST: A CASE STUDY

Examples from Latin America, the Caribbean, North America, and Europe reveal that migration can be a vehicle for empowerment and broadened forms of citizenship. The following case study of Guatemalan refugees is a cautionary tale, however. It illustrates how gains in gender empowerment, especially with respect to citizenship, may be achieved in exile only to be squandered upon return.

Guatemalan refugees were displaced by a bloody war that raged for more than thirty-five years until an internationally brokered peace agreement was signed in December 1996. The insurgency was ignited by a grossly inequitable distribution of income and land, a brutal history of ethnic genocide and discrimination, and the elite's unwillingness to entertain peaceful

organizing around civil reforms and economic rights (Carmack, 1988; Falla, 1994). Initially, in the 1960s and 1970s, social activists were targeted for repression, disappearance, and murder. In the early 1980s, when such selective violence proved incapable of stemming popular reformist struggles, and at a time when some were even predicting the imminent victory of the guerrilla forces, the Guatemalan government unleashed its horrific Scorched Earth campaign. It targeted the western highlands and adjacent lowland areas. At least 100,000 civilians were killed and more than 400 villages razed. Some 150,000 to 200,000 people, the majority of whom were indigenous, fled to neighboring Mexico (U.S. Committee for Refugees, 1993).

Sometimes traveling in entire community groups, thousands of victims of the Scorched Earth campaign began crossing into Mexico in the early 1980s. Many settled in Chiapas, and it was this group that benefited from the Mexican government's agreement to recognize a subset of the Guatemalans as refugees. This group of 43,000 was permitted to settle in camps in southern Mexico, where individuals and families were assisted by the Mexican government's refugee agency, the Catholic Church, the UNCHR, and international NGOs (Aguilar Zinzer, 1991).

In many instances, refugee families had to rent the lands they lived and worked on from Mexican owners. Wages were needed both to pay this rent and to supplement the food aid received from the Mexican government and UNHCR. In the pursuit of wages, women found themselves at a distinct disadvantage. In Guatemala women had been able to contribute income as artisans and traders. By contrast, in the early years of exile, women found their access to local markets in rural Mexico severely limited. Similarly, wage work was generally hard to find, and the travel and lodging expenses for a couple and their children often outweighed the extremely low wages women were paid. As a consequence, women tended to be left at home by their wage-earning husbands (Billings, 1995).

Women's self-esteem plummeted as they became increasingly dependent upon male partners. In 1992, a 32-year-old Chuj woman lamented: "When I cry I say to myself, 'What a shame that I am a women.' If I weren't I could walk where I want and with money in my hand." And a 35-year-old Chuj stated: "We have no way to help ourselves. We can't go out and earn anything. We see the men. They can earn and we're dependent on them" (ibid: 174).

### 1. *The Creation of Female Refugee Subjects*

If in these early years of exile Guatemalan refugee women found themselves particularly adrift and needy, they were to meet up with representatives of an international refugee regime poised to acknowledge this condition and determined to turn it around dramatically. The women were extremely fortunate because, earlier and worldwide, most female refugees had encountered indifference on the part of local and international personnel charged with administering refugee programs (Martin, 1991). It was only in the 1980s that activists in the international women's movement managed to gain the attention of high-ranking officials of the United Nations and convince them to treat refugee women as persons with special needs and potentials. Consequently, in 1991, some forty years after the founding of the United Nations High Commission for Human Rights (UNHCR), U.N. guidelines for the Protection of Refugee Women were finally issued. This achievement followed on the heels of international feminist struggles and accomplishments, such as the proclamation of 1976-1985 as the U.N. Decade of Women and the 1985 Nairobi meeting in which refugee women first emerged as a special category of migrant (ibid). As the product of a progressive social movement, refugee *women* were refashioned as active subjects with specific needs, obligations, and rights. According to the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action: "The strength and resilience that women refugees display in the face of displacement is not acknowledged. Women's voices need to be represented in policy-making that affects them, including in processes to prevent conflicts before they result in the need for communities to flee (In Mertus, 1999: 125). And, more forcefully, the Women's Commission for Refugee Women and Children asserts: "[R]ather than seeing refugee women as *victims* who need to be protected, protection must be recognized as a woman's *right* (1992:4).

The fate of Guatemalan refugee women and men was significantly shaped by the convergence in time between their arrival in Mexico and this new construction of refugee women as rights-bearing subjects

who were poised for empowerment as women and as citizens of localities, nations, and the world community. As a UNHCR representative who worked with Guatemalan refugees observes:

[W]omen were singled out to implement small economic projects. Even when these were unsuccessful economically, [they] brought refugee women together. NGOs, UNHCR, and the women's organizations eventually approached their work with refugees with a defined agenda of empowering women as a necessary step to ensuring women's participation in creating durable solutions for themselves, their families, and the community (Worby, 1998b: 6).

## *2. From Female Consciousness to Feminist Consciousness*

It is noteworthy that Guatemalan refugee women quickly moved beyond mere participation in modest income-generating projects to create a feminist organization, Mamá Maquín. The latter boasted some 8,000 members in its heyday. In the words of its leadership: "Our demands should not be reduced to small economic projects, but rather to become ourselves—active subjects, women with a consciousness about gender, ethnicity, and class—in order to participate in social and national projects where we women play an active role, side-by-side with men" (Billings, 1995: 261).

The founding of Mamá Maquín and the formulation of its feminist platform reveal a marked change in political consciousness. Many women made a transition from a "female consciousness," which places human nurturing above all other social and political requirements (Kaplan, 1982), and from actions based on "practical interests" (Molyneux, 1982) centered around family survival, to a "feminist" and "strategic consciousness" (Ibid). These women concluded that all struggles for equality must be connected to a broader, strategic struggle for women's rights. These were notions of female personhood, citizenship, and struggle that emerged largely in exile. While still in Guatemala, some of the refugee women had participated in progressive organizations such as Catholic Action and the Committee of Campesino Unity (CUC), as well as in various guerrilla movements (Sinclair, 1995; Hooks, 1993; Colom, 1998). Although these entities emphasized equity in ethnic and class relations, they were largely silent on matters of gender oppression and certainly did not see the fostering of feminist consciousness as central to their mission.

Although for many women a feminist consciousness was forged in exile, its roots go back to asymmetrical gendered relations that existed long before. For example, a young refugee woman reported during a workshop on human rights:

Before we left Guatemala, when I was 19 years old, I helped my father work the fields. If we didn't work hard enough he hit us. When this happened we had no right to question him or say anything. At home, the women had no right to speak nor to complain that there was too much work. It was worse in the community where only the men make community decisions. They thought that women were only there to have children and serve them. We had to put up with the drinking and hitting and people saying that women weren't worth the same as men. All of this seemed normal....Now it's different. We know that we have rights and that in order for these rights to be respected we have to carry out the struggle among all of us (Billings, 1995: 225).

Another woman told a representative of a Canadian-based international development agency:

Some people and agencies mistakenly see our indigenous communal approach, where both women and men participate in many tasks, as a sign that women have a sense of their value in the community. This isn't usually so. Women participate as part of the community but their self-esteem remains low....They don't realize the value of their own contributions nor their capacity to learn new skills and assume new roles (Arbour, 1995: 10).

As these remarks illustrate, the past was revisited in workshops on human rights, women's rights, and violence. Norms and practices that were previously naturalized were now denounced as forms of patriarchal privilege and violence that were no longer tolerable.

### 3. Violence to Bodies and Homes

In the 1970s during the initial phase of selective repression and violence in Guatemala, the army and death squads focused on popular leaders who operated in such arenas as community cooperatives, labor unions, and local government. These were sites that rural and indigenous Guatemalans perceived as “public” and “male.” Although women, either as activists or as close kin of male victims, suffered greatly during this initial phase, they became far more implicated and terrorized over the course of the government’s Scorched Earth campaign. In the early 1980s the state aimed to separate the insurgents brutally from their popular base. In practice, this meant destroying the quotidian infrastructure through such acts as massacring *campesino* families, and/or burning their homes and *milpas* (small farming plots). In these acts of broad-based destruction, the army invaded women’s “personal” spaces and denied them their most important role: to maintain *la lucha* (the struggle), i.e., what women must do simply to keep their families alive from one day to the next (Ehlers, 1990: 46).

The state-instigated intrusion into domestic space dissolved the appearance of a fixed divide between male/public and female/private spheres. This was an incursion steeped in ethnic and gender symbolism and fueled by patriarchal rage. Diane Nelson describes a “terrible intimacy” between Mayan and ladino (2001: 332). The latter’s vision of the nation evokes the power asymmetries embedded in the patriarchal nuclear family and imagines the nation as home: the ladino as father/husband, and the Maya as wife and mother. In the 1980s as the nation bled along class and ethnic lines, powerful ladinos struck out violently against their “wayward” and “disloyal wives.” During the attacks indigenous females were frequently raped and murdered. Other atrocities included ripping the unborn from their mothers’ bodies and smashing them against house beams and trees. There were also incidents of ritual burnings of indigenous women’s clothing; woven articles of dress (*traje*) that symbolized both women and their ethnic communities (Billings, 1995).

A willingness to imbue these searing experiences with alternative meanings and purpose is what many refugee women brought to their participation in human rights and women’s rights workshops. The following commentary about the Guatemalan organization of war widows, CONAVIGUA, applies equally well, to their refugee sisters in Mexico: “Their sense of “knowing,” of learning from each other’s experience, which was in conflict with ‘the [State’s official] truth,’ was continually being reconstituted, especially as patterns of violence against them began to emerge. [They queried] ‘If they say we are mothers who should be respected, and yet treat us and our daughters with rape and torture, who are these men who sexualize us, soil us, and degrade us?’” (Schirmer, 1993: 63).

In rights workshops the refugee women came to question first “the truth” and then the claimers of “truth.” They also came to challenge those “cultural” prescriptions that held that the home was female, private space. Some came to question why women’s authority in the household was subordinated to men’s and why they routinely blocked her participation in more formal public venues for decision-making. As one woman explained during a workshop on violence: “Indigenous men violate women’s rights, yes, but it’s not their fault. The rich have put that idea in their heads that women are only good for taking care of children. They say that a woman is only a woman when she’s in the house. But we women have no rights to decide what should be done in our homes, and then in our country we women have no rights to decide or to participate ....None of us knew our rights so we weren’t able to defend ourselves” (Billings, 1995:223-234).

In the spirit of “defending themselves” and claiming rights from a patriarchal state, the rich, and male family members and neighbors, thousands of Guatemalan refugee women in camps in Mexico joined women’s organizations, such as Mamá Maquín, Madre Tierra, and Ixmucané.

### 4. Refugee Camps and Multiple Constructs of “Home”

The patriarchal household was one among several manifestations of “home” present in the camps. Others included camps as reenactments of home communities, and camps as international, global villages.

Each alternative had its own gender dynamic. Each also placed specific constraints, and afforded distinct opportunities for, women's empowerment.

For the most part, domestic units were configured according to the norms of the heterosexual, patriarchal family. While women were assigned to *la lucha* of ensuring their household's basic subsistence, their duties were significantly lightened by the food aid, technology (e.g., electric corn grinders), and income-generation projects available in the camps. Indeed, women commented that these supports freed up their time and enabled many to participate in women's organizations and to attend workshops. Moreover, given the close physical proximity of households, camp residents were well aware of those men who forbade their female kin from participating in these initiatives. Not infrequently, more receptive senior men would be dispatched to counsel reconsideration. Although certain female refugee leaders and administrative staff endeavored to increase gender parity within domestic units, definite constraints were placed on their actions. Consequently, after a group of women urged that problems of domestic violence within refugee households be publicly aired and redressed, they were rebuked by other women and men who insisted on focusing solely on state-orchestrated violence (Billings, 1995).

Camps also come to represent local communities left behind. For example, individual camps were given the names of indigenous Guatemalan communities, and refugees struggled to maintain Mayan practices that had been outlawed in Guatemala by the occupying army (ibid). Camp life—like local communities—retained highly masculinized features. Only men held positions as *representes*—leaders who coordinated all facets of camp life and served as community spokespersons. Males also predominated among the camps' *promotores*, overseers of such essential activities as food collection and distribution, medical assistance, and education. Men filled the ranks of the Permanent Commission, the refugee body chosen to negotiate the terms of an organized and collective return to Guatemala. Finally, male *responsables*, guerilla organizers and spokesmen were highly influential in all camps.

Acting on behalf of the larger guerrilla organization, the *responsables* pressed refugee women to create separate women's organizations. With the Cold War receding and external funding for their cause greatly reduced, guerrilla leaders viewed this new interest in refugee women's projects and organizations as a windfall. While it is the case that guerrilla leaders had earlier refused to include gender equity within their political platform, the men's actions were not entirely manipulative of women. Rather, the overture by international donors created an opening for certain women within the guerrilla organization to advance their long-frustrated goal to foreground gender among the other forms of oppression to be eradicated. Indeed, some of the earliest members of Mamá Maquín were women who had become disaffected by the movement's failure to address patriarchal privilege and female combatants' special needs (e.g., as pregnancy and childcare) (Pessar, 2001).

The third manifestation of home present in the camp setting was a supranational formation akin to the global village. Here, officials of Mexican, intergovernmental, and nongovernmental organizations frequently encouraged Guatemalan refugee women to imagine and fashion modes of belonging and participation that included full membership in local, national, and transnational collectivities, such as those linked to human rights, women's rights, and indigenous rights. Not infrequently, women were introduced to values and expectations about gendered citizenship that contradicted those operating in households and ethnic communities. For example, women were urged to move well beyond the household; yet in doing so, they challenged common beliefs that females who routinely interacted with nonfamilial men (especially at night) were prostitutes or witches (ibid; Burgos-Debray, 1984).

In the camp-as- global village, refugee women and men were exposed to a universal language of human and women's rights. For example, women who attended workshops on women's rights were given instructional brochures that contained line drawings that simply, but eloquently, positioned indigenous, Guatemalan women—with their subordinated quotidian lives—alongside official national and international legal documents. One brochure, for example, shows a musing indigenous woman who asks, "What is my reality? Beneath a picture of men attending a public meeting, she is instructed, "Public positions are almost always held by men, based on the inequality between men and women. This impedes our participation." She counters, "And how could it be?" The question is "answered" by an accompanying drawing of women proclaiming, "We win!" And beneath it is article 7-8 of the U.N.

Convention to Eliminate Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW), which reads, “All countries should take measures such that women participate in political life equally with men” (Billings, 1995: 285). In another example, on International Women’s Day, pamphlets were distributed in the camps stating, “All of us women have the right to struggle for equality, which is a human right. We take our example from Rigoberta Menchú, who won the Nobel Peace Prize in 1992, who struggles for the indigenous and for human rights” (ibid: 278).

The discursive elements contained in these and scores of other similar texts belong to that globalized genre of meanings that Arjun Appadurai calls “ideoscapes.” By this term, he refers to the traveling concatenation of tropes “that are often directly political and frequently have to do with the ideologies of states and the counterideologies of movements explicitly oriented to capturing state power or a piece of it” (1996: 36). The ideoscapes refugee women were exposed to exhorted them to widen their horizons, and to stake claim to “pieces” of local and state power that unbeknown to them, were already legitimately theirs. As women came to weave new tropes of human rights and women’s rights into the *testimonios* (testimonial accounts) they delivered publicly in camp workshops, in encounters with international visitors, and at international conferences they seemed to confirm Ruth Lister’s claim that, “We are today witnessing the emergence of a global civil society, in which women are playing a central role (1997: 18).

Women’s participation in global civil society was certainly facilitated by their residence in a supranational formation that operated as a transnational entrepôt. Through the comings and goings of internationals and owing to the presence of modern technology, the refugees experienced a marked quickening in the pace and intensity of movement and communication across space, as well as the geographical stretching out of social relations (Massey, 1994). Such time-space compression did not similarly affect all who lived in, or passed through the camps. Nor did all benefit equally from its potentials. Employing the concept of “the power geometry,” Doreen Massey observes: [D]ifferent social groups, and different individuals are placed in very distinct ways in relation to these flows and interconnections....[M]obility, and control over mobility, both reflects and reinforces power” (1994: 148, 150).

In the case of Mexican refugee camps, the refugees and the internationals differed greatly in their mobility, in their access to transnational flows of people, ideas, commodities, and services, and in their control over the content and directionality of these flows. Clearly, the internationals held the reins of power—a hard lesson the refugee women would learn when they returned to remote communities in Guatemala, still needing the aid of their international supporters. Refugee women and men also differed with respect to their patterns of mobility and control over flows of information and resources. Female leaders concentrated on travels to and contacts with grass-root supporters in North America and Europe. By contrast men, as guerrilla fighters and representatives of returnee groups, directed their actions more toward Guatemala and toward formal bodies like the UNHCR, the Guatemalan state, and the guerrilla organization, the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (URNG). This division of labor would have profound impacts later on the lives of returnee women and men, as well.

##### *5. The Supranational Meets the National: The Abandonment of Refugee Women*

The limitations for women of supranational forms of citizenship became clear when the refugees entered into formal negotiations regarding their collective return. At this juncture the refugees’ key political interlocutors became officials of the Guatemalan state. When crucial matters of gendered citizenship within the context of the nation-state were at issue, both the male refugee leadership and the women’s previously stalwart supporter, the UNHCR, failed them miserably.

Despite women’s objections, men totally dominated the ranks of the Permanent Commissions, the elected body charged with negotiating, alongside representatives of the Guatemalan and Mexican governments and officials of the UNHCR, the terms of the refugees’ collective return (Billings, 1995; Morel, 1998; Worby, 1998a).<sup>i</sup> UNHCR assumed a key role in financing the activities of the Permanent Commissions and had it so chosen, it might have asserted financial leverage to insist upon and facilitate a greater role for women. In an extremely frank admission, Terry Morel, a UNHCR representative who

worked closely with the refugee women in Mexico, publicly decried this failure of political will when she wrote:

Initially UNHCR did not take up the matter of women's participation in the representational structures responsible for the refugees' return. I am daring enough to state that this owed to our institutional difficulty in immediately defending the rights of women within traditional spaces of power. [Although we financed the representatives during their negotiations,] we never questioned the absence of women. This means that we [actually] fortified male leadership at the expense of the women's organizations (1998:16).

An unprecedented feature of the October 8, 1992 Accords was the Guatemalan government's agreement to help refugees recover lands occupied by others, and to obtain lands for all landless adult refugees. Although they had not been present during the negotiations, women militated for joint ownership of these properties. They did so only after analyzing the extreme vulnerability of women (and their children) who were abandoned by their partners and often deprived of the families' land and belongings.<sup>ii</sup> As Mamá Maquín's leadership opined:

We realized that women who were married or in common law unions were not taken into account in regards to the right to land, [o]nly men, widows and single mothers....That is when we decided to fight for the right to be joint owners of the land for our own security and that of our daughters and sons, so that we will not be left out in the street if the man sells the land or abandons his partner. This also means recognizing the economic value of the work that we carry out in the house and in the fields (cited in Worby, 1999:1).

There were early signs that these demands would not be easily met. With all the controversial concessions the Permanent Commission sought to extract from Guatemalan authorities, the provision to provide women explicit rights to land was hardly an item that the all-male negotiating team was eager to press. Indeed they only did so, at the last moment, to placate an insistent female UNHCR official.

While this was a victory of sorts, female returnees have faced a host of obstacles in their attempts to have this concession formally institutionalized. First, the majority of male returnees failed to make good on their pledge to support the women's access to land titles. As one man explained to me, when I asked if his wife was officially registered as a co-owner of their land in the Ixcán Grande community of Los Angeles: "Why should she be? My name is there on the title, and I represent her and our children." In fact, it took me several tries before this man even understood the gist of my enquiry. His initial bafflement, and subsequent remarks, underscore how deeply entwined are notions of Mayan masculinity, patriarchal authority in the household, and control over land in highland peasant communities (Wilson, 1995). The male returnee leadership similarly reneged on its promise to joint ownership: a guarantee which some observers believe was extended in an opportunistic fashion to take advantage of international sympathies for the indigenous Guatemalan women, and to gain international support for the overall return and its provision for land (Worby, 1999).

If returnee men developed social amnesia regarding their agreement to extend women co-ownership of land, so too, did Guatemalan state officials. As a UNHCR official explained to me, "Government authorities and government lawyers have never 'understood' the need for this initiative. Consequently, they have thus far refused to design and implement administrative policies and practices to facilitate joint ownership of land."<sup>iii</sup> Although correct, I would suggest that this noncompliance had deeper, more troubling roots.

While the refugees in Mexico were involved in fashioning gender relations in a somewhat more equitable fashion, many of their counterparts back in army-controlled villages were experiencing a hardening of patriarchal values and norms. Guatemala, a nation at war against guerrilla insurgents chose the familiar path of equating masculinity with patriotism and national belonging (see Yuval-Davis, 1997). Thus, indigenous males—who before the violence, had been largely disparaged and forgotten by the state—were now "rehabilitated" as patriots. That is, as long as they agreed to serve in the army or in the ubiquitous civil patrols. In this capacity, indigenous men were charged with protecting rural communities and the Guatemalan nation against the guerrilla enemies of the state. Even women were drawn into highly masculinized displays of loyalty. For example, in a community in the department of Alta Verapaz, the local representative from the army's civic affairs office ordered all the village's women and children to

line up in front of the Guatemalan flag post in the main square. As one observer wrote: "In what appeared to be a well-rehearsed pantomime, the women, all of them dressed in traje (indigenous dress), flung themselves reluctantly forward, feigning combat against a non-existent aggressor, their imaginary rifles poised in empty, outstretched arms" (Americas Watch, 1986: 17).

In other communities women were required to obtain passes from the army to travel to local markets and they were transported there in army trucks. In this way masculine discipline and policing were imposed on a set of practices and public spaces in which women had, until recently, experienced a far greater degree of control and autonomy (Ehlers, 1990; Bossen, 1944). Upon return, refugee women bumped up against the norms and practices of this highly-masculinized regime when they requested that government authorities make good on their promises to the organized women.

## 6. *Returnees and the Guatemalan State*

For over a decade, then, Guatemalan officials had invested heavily in the production of nationalistic, state-surveilled, rural citizens and localities. In the mid-1990s they confronted thousands of already-suspect Guatemalan nationals<sup>iv</sup> returning home along with an entourage of U.N. officials, international companions, and international donors and NGOs--all eager to build civil society. Indigenous women, including Rigoberta Menchù, were showcased. Government officials might well have envisioned the need for a "strong-armed" approach to reimposing the state, along with its highly masculinized practices, on the returnees. Paradoxically, though, in many cases it was the returnees who were the instigators of a closer relationship with the state. This was often the case because--as a consequence of their experiences in exile-- both returnee women and men came to view themselves as full Guatemalan citizens and modern subjects who had grown used to the amenities and up-to-date transportation, communication, and social services they had enjoyed in exile.<sup>v</sup> The challenges the returnees faced was to make their rural communities conform to these new subjectivities, and to do so they turned increasingly to the Guatemalan state. They needed government officials to help them litigate land conflicts with "recalcitrant" neighboring (non-returnee) villages, and to obtain such modern amenities as roads, electricity, and licensed teachers (Stepputat, 1997).

In this modernizing project, the state found a formidable ally in the *male* returnee leadership. This new alliance posed significant problems for returnee women, however. In exile, it will be recalled, women had little success in penetrating male-dominated, local and national power structures. Moreover, their allies were often representatives of the very transnational entities--such as, U.S. solidarity groups--that the state distrusted and sought to marginalize. The problems certain refugee women have experienced are illustrated in the case of the Ixcán Grande Cooperative--home of a large number of the returnees.<sup>vi</sup>

### a. *Returnees to the Ixcán Grande Cooperative*

The Ixcán Grande Cooperative (IGC), located in the tropical lowlands of northern Quiché, had been one of the most progressive communities in all of Guatemala.<sup>vii</sup> The five communities that comprise the IGC were sites of early guerrilla organizing in the 70s, and of brutal state-orchestrated violence in the 80s. Many members of the cooperative were murdered, joined the guerrilla, or were forced into exile (Falla, 1994). The cooperative's male leaders were among the earliest and most influential authorities in the Mexican refugee camps; and many served as representatives in the Permanent Commissions. It is thus with great dismay that Guatemalan, and international supporters watched these male leaders make common cause with "the enemy". For example, with the blessing of government officials and military authorities, male (returnee) leaders have actively pursued a brand of development that involves attracting foreign oil interests and privatizing cooperative lands (Davis, 1998).

In 1997 as part of a move aimed at consolidating power and at removing all challengers, the IGC's male leadership accused the members of Mamá Maquín of being guerrilla sympathizers. In flagrant violation of the provisions for free association in the Peace Accords, the cooperative's leaders declared "illegal" any group like Mamá Maquín that held meetings in the community without their permission. This threat was soon followed by the burning of Mamá Maquín headquarters in the Ixcán Grande community of Pueblo Nuevo. Reflecting on the refugees' years in exile, Paula Worby has written:

"[Once] the women began to take charge of their own organizations and conscious-raising to demand visible and formal roles in decision-making, this may have been perceived by men, consciously or unconsciously, as overstepping the acceptable limits they had prescribed for women's roles" (1998b: 10). What likely constrained male leaders from retaliating against the "uppity" women back then were, of course, the resources organized women obtained from international donors and the public relations benefits all the refugees accrued in international circles from images of fully-participatory refugee women. In the burning of Mamá Maquín's headquarters--a flagrant act of erasure directed at the women's only public space within the community--we find sad evidence that once the refugees had returned home and their male leaders had allied themselves with the state, women's "visibility" was no longer needed nor even tolerated.

Although the men sought to disenfranchise the organized women, the leadership of Mamá Maquín based in Guatemala City had other plans. They still believed in their power within the international "community" and, accordingly, sent urgent faxes addressed to "the Guatemalan government," "the people and governments of the world," "the national and international press," and "the popular movement in general." They hoped that international supporters would--as in the past-- support them decisively in their latest struggle. Instead, very little if any effective pressure was brought to bear.<sup>viii</sup>

Reluctantly, then, in the late 1990s many of the members of Mamá Maquín in the Ixcán Grande communities succumbed to the intimidation of the male leadership and to the urging of their husbands to drop out of the organization completely (Worby, 1998a: 9). In the cooperative community of Los Angeles, Mamá Maquín had been entirely replaced by a women's development committee that was controlled by the male leadership (the directorate); as one man explained, the directorate comes up with the ideas for women's projects and "write up the requests, and then we get the women to sign them."<sup>ix</sup>

The weakening, if not total abandonment of Mamá Maquín was not the only political loss these returnee women endured. Contrary to the women's understandings prior to their return, only men and widowed women have been granted titles to communal land. Membership to the communities' official governing board is determined by ownership of these titles. Thus once again, women with partners have found themselves excluded from full citizenship within their communities. Under such unfavorable circumstances, women have seen their interests trampled upon. In one particularly egregious case, the male directorate exacted a far more severe punishment on a man who had stolen a cow than on another who had raped a female member of the community.<sup>x</sup>

b. *Certain Gains Remain*

To end on such a resigned note would be inaccurate and misrepresent the overall struggle that many refugee women and men remain committed to. If we accept the feminist precept that "the political" resides in all cultural and social relations and domains, then women seem to have made their greatest strides in the micro-politics of the household and kinship spheres--not within community politics, as they had anticipated prior to their return (Mamá Maquín/CIAM, 1994). In Los Angeles and Chaculá (Huehuetenango), the two returnee communities I have studied,<sup>xi</sup> several couples pointed with pride to such practices as equity between partners in household budgeting and in reproductive decisions. They also noted the reduced incidence of domestic violence against women and their greater spatial mobility. It is striking that the majority of the interviewees in both communities employed a human rights discourse when they described more equitable gender relations in their own homes. Evaristo López Calmo, a 30 year-old Mam resident of Chaculá reflected:

In the old days when a couple married the woman became the property of the man. In this way he dominated all the decisions because he was the head of the household. And that's what we were taught from the time we were little; but then the situation changed.... In exile the women learned that they had rights equal to men. There's no difference. Before we never practiced this, women were treated like animals.... Now when I earn money I don't put it in my pocket like my father did. I bring it to the house and my wife and I decide together how to spend it.<sup>xii</sup>

And Petrona López García explained:

It used to be that the woman is a woman and the man is a man. She has to feed him, wash his clothes, care for him; and while he's in bed resting, she's there working until 8 or 9 at night, still giving and giving. But [Mamá Maquín] taught us that the woman has ten fingers and the man has

ten fingers....It's not that the man is worth more or the woman worth more; they're equal. My husband gives me liberty to work in whatever job I choose.<sup>xiii</sup> Now this seems strange to those who remained behind in my village....Even my own mother says to my husband, "Aren't you afraid she will find another man and do bad things because you allow her to go wherever she pleases?"<sup>xiv</sup>

Although many women and some men in both communities publicly expressed consternation over the women's failure to participate more fully and equally in the community's political and economic affairs, these individuals did hold out hope for the future. They pointed admiringly to their daughters who have higher education levels compared to other Guatemalan rural girls, and who have often chosen to marry later and/or delay childbearing in order to pursue their educations or careers. In writing about such practices, Worby concludes: "In this way they are varying the roles played by women and subsequently increasing recognition among men as to their different capabilities" (1999:6).

Finally, over the course of the last decade as Guatemalan rural communities have absorbed the shocks of the nation's structural adjustment program and the lack of competitiveness of its traditional agricultural commodities in world markets, many returnee women have had to reassess their thinking about the family and local communities. The women's discourse and practices have modulated, no longer focusing so insistently upon patriarchy as a primary source of women's oppression. Instead they more freely acknowledge that families and local communities are sites of protection from, and resistance to, global capitalism and national forms of class and racial oppression. It is in this spirit that the current leadership of Mamá Maquín has developed a program to educate rural communities about the dangers of globalization and Plan Panama and to enlist women and men collectively to analyze the local and national impacts of these new developments. Although there is a gender component to this educational program (e.g., the current and growing demand for female workers in export-processing industries) gender is not foregrounded. The dilemma confronting these returnees, and many other poor women in Guatemala, is to defend and hold together their families and communities, while attempting gradually to reform those gendered norms and practices that continue to disenfranchise them. The fact that international governmental and non-governmental organizations, which labored so effectively to empower Guatemalan refugee women in exile, failed to sustain these efforts once the refugees returned home was a great opportunity lost. Its consequences not only redound to refugee women and men but to all Guatemalans.

## CONCLUSION

It is heartening that the United Nations has elected to focus its energies and resources on the pressing global challenges associated with contemporary immigration and refugee displacement. Moreover, the fact that I was asked to write a paper on women and gender reveals that a growing number of researchers and policy makers acknowledge that migration is a gendered phenomenon. Having said this, I would hope that very soon this kind of free-standing paper on women and gender will become unnecessary. This will occur when there is a shared understanding that *all dimensions* of migration are fully gendered, and when we agree that gender-free methodologies, data sets, and analyses represent impediments to our overall research and policy goals. The challenge for policy makers and immigration advocates is to translate our gendered research findings into best practices (see United Nations, 2005).

Gender equity is a crucial dimension of democracy, social justice, sustainability, and the eradication of social inequality. As currently constituted migration within and beyond the Americas is sustained by, and benefits from, gender inequity. There are, however, a few countervailing trends wherein migration has contributed to women's empowerment within households, communities, and supranational coalitions. It is these countervailing trends that must be celebrated, solidified, and repatriated successfully back home.

Although there is a fine and growing body of research, both quantitatively and qualitatively- based studies are needed to assist policy makers to recognize and address linkages between gender equality and international migration within and beyond the Americas. Among those questions necessitating fuller answers are:

- What are the factors that cause individuals regardless of gender to migrate internationally, and what are those factors that are gender specific? To what extent has the global increase in female labor force participation and in gendered recruitment patterns by governments and private actors changed the gender composition and origins and destinations of contemporary immigrants?
- To what extent does the feminization of migration reflect and exacerbate gender inequalities rather than contribute to greater gender parity? How are these outcomes influenced by such additional factors as race, education, ethnicity, religion, sexual orientation, and the legal status accorded to migrant women, (e.g., documented labor migrants, refugees, undocumented migrants, seasonal workers)?
- How can the rights and security of immigrant and refugee women best be protected, particularly from labor abuses, sexual exploitation, trafficking, and involuntary prostitution?
- How can immigrant and refugee men and women contribute to the economic development and political democratization of their countries of origin, particularly through such mechanisms as remittances, home town associations, ties to transnational social organizations and social movements, and temporary and permanent return?
- How can the social and economic security of migrants' partners and children left behind (i.e., members of transnational migrant households) be improved to mitigate long periods of separation and heightened dependence?

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## ENDNOTES

<sup>i.</sup> There was, apparently, interest early on in having some female representation. This interest waned soon after the first group of women was selected. According to an advisor to the Permanent Commissions, the male commissioners complained that the women could not "manage" the difficult working conditions (e.g., clandestine travel to camps in Mexico and camping with large groups of men), and most were found wanting by their male counterparts owing to an alleged lack of experience and training. This same advisor added that the male commissioners were also extremely reluctant to have the women become privy to the men's "leisure-time" activities! (Paula Worby, e-mail, April 9, 1999)

<sup>ii.</sup> In some Guatemalan communities, family problems, such as male abandonment, may be brought before an elders' council (of men) and/or respected community authorities. Although the man may be instructed to leave the family house and/or land to his children and former wife, such an outcome is by no means assured. Redress through the legal system tends to be time-consuming, expensive, and particularly intimidating for indigenous women, especially if they do not speak Spanish (Worby, 1999).

<sup>iii.</sup> Interview #37, Guatemala City, July 21, 1999.

<sup>iv.</sup> For example the Minister of Defense, Héctor Gramajo, publicly labeled the returnees as "subversives" (Manz, 1988).

<sup>v.</sup> Returnees in the community of Chaculá refer to themselves as "gentes formales" (formal people), while their "backward" neighbors are depicted in such unflattering and "pre-modern" terminology, as "animales" and people without reason ("a ellos no llegan razón") (Stepputat, 1997).

<sup>vi.</sup> For research on other return communities, see Taylor, 1998; Project Counseling Services, 2000.

<sup>vii.</sup> The Ixcán Grande region was settled in the mid-1960s by peasants from Huehuetenango at the urging of Maryknoll priests. Each family was given approximately 40 acres after a probation period. Ultimately the inhabitants grouped themselves into five savings and credit cooperatives, Mayalán, Xalbal, Pueblo Nuevo, Cuarto Pueblo, and Los Angeles. These five communities are all part of the larger Ixcán Grande Cooperative (IGC).

<sup>viii.</sup> It is probably the case that a good deal of the inaction resulted from the fact that Mamá Maquín and its local supporters were involved in a factional conflict within the guerrilla organization (URNG). This left international observers and supporters generally confounded and reluctant to step in.

For its part, Mamá Maquín released a communique shortly after the destruction of its headquarters in Pueblo Nuevo that stated: "The reason for this aggression against our organization and our right to free association is due to the fact that we do not share some of the political stances held by the [community's cooperative] directorate, [since] these opinions relegate women to second place in social and community participation" (Mamá Maquín, communique, June 11, 1997, reproduced in Worby, 1999:13).

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<sup>ix.</sup> Interview #5, Los Angeles, March 15, 1999. Most of the former members of Mamá Maquín have refused to join this group, but its existence has clearly demoralized many of these women.

<sup>x.</sup> Interview #32, Nenton, July 27, 1998.

<sup>xi.</sup> In Chaculá too, women have not gained joint ownership of their land nor are they members of the male-controlled cooperative. In one particularly disheartening incident, the male cooperative leaders asked the women to form a committee to request food from a foundation. When none of the women present at the meeting volunteered, the head of the cooperative said, "Oh, perhaps the problem is that the men have not given their wives permission to form a committee. Men, raise your hand, if you give your wife permission" (Interview #3, Chaculá, July 15, 1998). A clear sign of the women's demoralization is that the membership in Chaculá's branch of Mamá Maquín has dropped in four years from a high of 200 to a low of 3.

<sup>xii.</sup> Interview #12, Chaculá, July 20, 1998.

<sup>xiii.</sup> While this woman positions herself as very much a modern, self-actualized woman, it is significant that she views her husband as the one who possessed, and continues to possess, the right to give her freedom and to allow her to work at whatever job she chooses.

<sup>xiv.</sup> Interview #6, Chaculá, July 18, 1998. It should be noted that there is a vocal minority that disputes such assertions about increased gender parity. It includes a nun who has lived in the community since its founding. She characterized local gender relations as "99.9% sexist, machistic [and] patriarchal," and she backed up this statement with recent examples of domestic violence, abandonment, and bride price (Interview #3, Chaculá, July 15, 1998).