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

Population Division
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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

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

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*

(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

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(e w)6.8882(s, dasratonclu)12tr(e)-0.9enellaasratont12.5(sT53.3(g w)6er)8.3e.5(sT53j)-1

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

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

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,

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 ideoscopes 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.

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.[ii] 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."[iii] 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

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-19990s they confronted thousands of already-suspect Guatemalan nationals[iv] returning home along with an entourage of U.N. officials, international accompaniers, 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

"[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.[viii]

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."[ix]

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.[x]

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,[xi] 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.[xii]

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.w1 1-7012.4003 Tm -0.1893 Tc 0 Tw xiii

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ENDNOTES

[i.] 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 extremelso soredinge theo coy8Ro the "liso mmso " asorivi4(t)8.i7(so)s! (caidung

[ix] 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.

[x] Interview #32, Nenton, July 27, 1998.

[xi] 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