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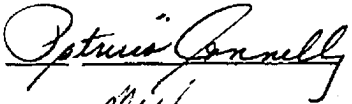
**SHANTYTOWN WOMEN, THEIR WORK, SURVIVAL STRATEGIES
AND ASPIRATIONS:
A CASE STUDY IN TETELA DEL MONTE, MEXICO**

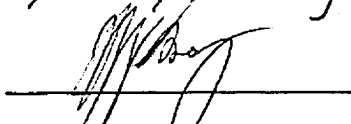
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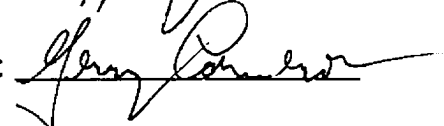
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March 30, 1992

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ABSTRACT

SHANTYTOWN WOMEN, THEIR WORK, SURVIVAL STRATEGIES AND ASPIRATIONS: A CASE STUDY IN TETELA DEL MONTE, MEXICO

This thesis attempts to expose the daily lived experiences of shantytown women in the context of their work and survival strategies. Using a socialist feminist analysis and incorporating the radical feminist view of patriarchy and marriage, it reveals the extent of shantytown womens' subordination both in the public and private sphere. Trends in the Mexican economy over the past decades are highlighted to illustrate the nature of industrialization policies and their effects on the poor, particularly women who, by being forced out of jobs in the agricultural sector, have become the majority of migrants heading for already over-crowded cities. In the urban setting, women's job opportunities are limited and most become domestics or street vendors. With such employment, they combine their productive and reproductive roles. The structures which keep poor women marginalized are reflected through an examination of the position of women in Mexico since the conquest. This reveals social, political, cultural and gender inequalities which have been perpetuated in a male-dominated society for centuries.

Data from the field research which I carried out in the shantytown of Tetela del Monte in Mexico, confirms the women's daily struggle for survival. It brings to the fore the strategies they put in place to survive, and it raises questions around their workloads, status and future well-being.

My conclusion aims to point out the inter-relatedness of work, survival strategies and aspirations, and suggests solidarity amongst all classes of Mexican women, action by the Mexican government, and recognition of the contributions of poor women to Mexican society, as the first steps in eliminating their daily oppression.

March 30, 1992

Robyn S. Young

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The daily struggle for survival is carried out many times over by shantytown women throughout Mexico. This situation is not right. It is unjust. Yet it continues. It is perpetuated by social, economic, political and cultural barriers which are so entrenched in Mexican society that they are often left unquestioned and unchallenged.

Although much has been written about shantytowns and the urban informal sector, few studies have focussed specifically on women in these situations. Some studies (Bunster 1985; Beneria and Roldan 1987; Babb 1989) have examined particular segments of the informal sector in which women predominate as street vendors, marketers, domestic workers and industrial outworkers. These studies have provided insight into the struggles faced by poor women in those occupations. Moser (1981), Logan (1984) and Chant (1987) have looked at the survival strategies of women in relation to the shantytown community as a whole. Both approaches point to the hardships endured by poor women as they carry out productive and reproductive tasks in living conditions devoid of basic services and marginalized by social and cultural prejudices and political and economic inequalities.

In an ironic contradiction, it has been recognized that while women's productive and reproductive work are in themselves survival strategies, they also form the basis of

the barriers to advancement, integration, equality, acceptance and empowerment. Therefore the advantages of these survival strategies are negated by the limitations and restrictions they place on the women. Apart from that, work-related survival strategies are insufficient to sustain shantytown women and their households. These women are obliged to "create" other, supplementary strategies to ensure their survival. Although these strategies help to ensure daily survival, they do not challenge the structures in place in Mexican society which reinforce class, gender and cultural differences. Examination of the evolving and changing policies of the Mexican government along with the perpetuation of the ideology around women as mothers and wives, is essential so that linkages can be made between daily life situations and national development plans.

As mentioned, there is a vast literature on shantytowns and their inhabitants although relatively few writers deal specifically with women. When the position of women is addressed, the focus is usually on their present and concrete situation. The hopes and aspirations of poor women have been left unarticulated, unrecognized, and therefore, we assume they are unimportant.

In this thesis I will examine the daily lives of shantytown women in relation to the current political and economic situation in Mexico, pointing out how this situation has caused an increase in the number of women in the informal sector; a continued struggle by poor women for survival; and fading hopes for the attainment of their

aspirations.

This thesis is, then, important for a number of reasons. First, it will challenge the readers' perception of shantytown women. Second, because the literature on the daily lived experience of shantytown women is limited, it will point to their daily struggles, their survival strategies and to the barriers which keep them marginalized. Third, it will offer a clearer understanding of women's paid and unpaid work in the context of the shantytown. Finally, it will discuss the aspirations of shantytown women in relation to their situation, and provide some insight into the attainability of these aspirations.

In Chapter 2, I examine a range of theories and frameworks and determine that a socialist feminist/GAD approach incorporating a radical feminist view of patriarchy and marriage should be used for my analysis. The survival strategies of women will be analysed with a focus of the relationship between class and gender and capitalism and patriarchy within the Mexican political economy.

Chapter 3 examines changes in the Mexican economy, pointing out industrialization policies and their effects on the poor, especially women who, by being forced out of jobs in the agricultural sector, have migrated to overcrowded urban areas where many end up living in shantytowns. Under present economic conditions few job opportunities exist for these migrants and many men and most women find work in

the low-paying informal sector.

The first segment of Chapter 4 reviews the literature on the informal sector and shows the conditions under which women work in that sector. It highlights the barriers which keep women in marginal, low-paying jobs, and points particularly to the combination of productive and reproductive work which further burdens shantytown women. The second segment of Chapter 4 traces the position of Mexican women since the conquest and reveals the effects of a patriarchal society on the economic, political and social advancement of women.

Having set the political, economic and cultural context in Chapters 2, 3 and 4, Chapter 5 presents a case study of women's survival strategies in a Mexican shantytown. The first section of Chapter 5 discusses the methodological approach and research methods used in my study. The community and the women who took part in the study are introduced in section 2, and section 3 analyses the women's survival strategies around the themes of paid and unpaid work; their families and community work; and their well-being and future aspirations.

CHAPTER 2: FEMINIST FRAMEWORKS

In seeking to understand and explain the work and survival strategies of shantytown women, it is necessary to examine them in the light of existing theoretical frameworks which are feminist in their perspective. Feminist frameworks seek to give us a better and deeper appreciation of the causes of women's oppression and subordination and in so doing, point towards the action steps necessary to challenge the structures which limit women's full participation in society. By testing these theories in the context of the work of shantytown women, we are, as Patricia Maguire so aptly put it, "adjusting the lens."¹ That is, we are looking at the situation in a new way and with new eyes with a view to shedding new light on the complexities of women's continued exploitation and struggle for survival.

Liberalism began in the Age of Enlightenment in Western Europe when great faith was placed in the ability of human reasoning to generate social reforms. At the same time, the world capitalist system came to the forefront and the authoritarian hold of religious bodies began to decline. With the rise of capitalism, those in rural areas became marginalized and a wealthy capitalist class emerged. This was a time of increased urbanization and a switch to industrialization - all part of the process of capitalist accumulation.

¹ Patricia Maguire. Doing Participatory Research: a feminist approach. Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1987:28

Liberal feminist theories came to the fore as a rebellion against the social situation of that time. The focus of these theories was equality of opportunity for women. The belief was that women were oppressed because they were not allowed equal civil rights or equal opportunity for education.² It was Mary Wollstonecraft (1759-1797) who put a voice to these issues. Although restricted to a certain extent by the thinking of the time related to family structure and the ideology of motherhood, Wollstonecraft was adamant in her belief that women had the same reasoning ability as men; that reason was a gift from God and therefore both men and women could, and should, be equal contributors to society. She stressed the importance of women using their intellectual ability³ although indicating that in her view, women were intentionally kept on the periphery of knowledge.

"... in order to preserve their innocence, as ignorance is courteously termed, truth is hidden from them, and they are made to assume an artificial character before the faculties have acquired any strength."⁴

Although Wollstonecraft is not associated with radical feminism, we can see in this statement a challenge to the patriarchal control of knowledge - the idea of those in control only allowing certain information to certain people in the society. She does

² Margaret L. Anderson. Thinking About Women: Sociological and Feminist Perspectives. New York; London: Macmillan Publishing Co. Inc., 1983:236-238

³ Eleanor Flexnor. Mary Wollstonecraft: A Biography. New York: Coward, McCann and Geoghegan, Inc., 1972:145

⁴ Mary Wollstonecraft. A Vindication on the Rights of Women. New York; London: Garland Publishing Inc., 1974:81

criticise women's economic dependence on men⁵ although she doesn't offer a direct challenge to the male domination of the family. Overall, it could be said that Wollstonecraft, through her personal life experience, realized the subordinate role played by women in all walks of life. She dared to question the established norms of women's inequality but failed to carry her analysis through to examine the patriarchal structures of her society. Nevertheless, she paved the way, and opened the dialogue, for others, like John Stuart Mill and Harriet Taylor Mill who followed in her footsteps.

Liberal feminism became firmly entrenched from the 1850's until the turn of the century. John Stuart Mill (1806-1873) along with Harriet Taylor Mill (1807-1858), was one of its champions, carrying on the tradition and thought established by Wollstonecraft. The Mills also believed strongly in equality between men and women and that women should have equal access to education at all levels.⁶ Further, they declared that women were prohibited from access to certain societal privileges and benefits by laws and institutions which limited their participation in society at large.⁷ John Stuart Mill was more vocal than Wollstonecraft about the inequality in marriage and the subservient role of women in that situation.

⁵ Zillah R. Eisenstein. The Radical Future of Liberal Feminism. New York; London: Longman, 1981:94

⁶ John Stuart Mill. The Subjection of Women. Edited by Susan M. Okin. Indianapolis; Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company Inc., 1988:14

⁷ Mill 20

"The law of servitude in marriage is a monstrous contradiction to all the principles of the modern world, and to all the experience through which those principles have been slowly and painfully worked out... Marriage is the only actual bondage known to our law. There remain no legal slaves, except the mistress of every house."⁸

Notwithstanding this statement, John Stuart Mill still believed that women's place was in the home, carrying out domestic responsibilities especially as they related to the nurturing of children. This is the point on which Harriet Taylor Mill strongly disagreed. Her thinking was more radical. She advocated equality for women without any restrictions.⁹

Contemporary liberal feminism has grown out of these early theories, particularly out of the concepts of individual freedom and the ability of all humans to reason. With equality as their goal, liberal feminists place a high priority on gradual reform from within existing political and economic structures. Because the barriers to women's rights are seen as societal laws, liberal feminists tend to rely on the state to solve the problem by changing the laws.¹⁰ As a result, the power structures of patriarchy and capitalism are not challenged. The social relations of gender and the effects of race and class on women's lives are not addressed.

⁸ Mill 26

⁹ Anderson 251

¹⁰ Anderson 238 & 240

"Today, liberal feminism is a mix of several orientations. Although all liberal feminists adopt the ideas of freedom of choice, individualism, and equality of opportunity, they differ on how self-conscious they are about patriarchal, economic, and racial bias of these ideas."¹¹

Therefore, in analysing women's oppression, liberal feminists highlight the general treatment of women by society, saying that it goes against the values of equality, liberty and justice. They point to the discrimination women endure because of their sex, as well as through legislation which often denies women property rights and access to certain jobs. Discrimination is also manifested in social customs which dictate the "suitability" of women for particular jobs. Therefore women are relegated to marginal jobs through a system of discrimination. The conditions of women's work reflect the lack of freedom and the lower salaries, leaving more women than men in poverty. Liberal feminists also recognize that this situation of women is not the best and most efficient use of human resources.¹²

According to liberal feminists, social change will be affected through educating the public; changing the laws that are restrictive to women; state intervention in the elimination of poverty; and emphasis on the importance of public law to change personal beliefs and attitudes.¹³ Regardless of this, the oppressive social structures

¹¹ Zillah R. Eisenstein 229

¹² Alison M. Jaggar. Feminist Politics and Human Nature. New Jersey: Rowman and Allanheld Publishers, 1983:176-178

¹³ Jaggar 181-184

remain in place and go unchallenged.

In order to place liberal feminism in the context of the developing world, it can be equated with the modernization theory which was at the forefront of development thinking from the 1950's to the 1970's. Modernization meant capitalist industrialization, the effects of which would "trickle down" to the poorest and so improve their lives. Unfortunately, this did not happen, and by the 1970's the modernization paradigm was being questioned. The position of women had not improved and, in some cases, it has declined. Women remained in low-paying, tedious jobs with little hope of advancement.¹⁴ In relation to women, modernization theory had shown itself to be a linear, cumulative process. Technology did not liberate women, nor did the change from a subsistence to cash economy enhance women's economic status.¹⁵ Together with increased urbanization, these "modern" changes separated women from their traditional economic and social roles and pushed women into a competitive modern sector where discrimination, exploitation and dependency on male support increased.¹⁶

The Women in Development (WID) approach developed out of a concern to link

¹⁴ Eva M. Rathgeber. WID, WAD, GAD: Trends in Research and Practice. Ottawa: International Development Research Centre, 1989:3-4

¹⁵ Ester Boserup. Women's Role in Economic Development. New edition. London: Earthscan Publications, 1989: 80

¹⁶ Jane Jacquette. "Women and Modernization Theory: A Decade of Feminist Criticism." World Politics, 34(2), 1982:269 & 271

Western ideas of development and feminist theory to the position of women in developing countries. It had been shown that a new approach was needed as women continued to fare badly in the development process. WID became acceptable because it paralleled modernization theory, and continued to accept the existing social structures which were at the root of oppression and exploitation. The integration of women into development was examined rather than the development strategies themselves. WID continued to pursue the idea of equality, especially in education and employment, but did not tackle the issues of class, race or culture. Its focus remained on productive work as opposed to the reproductive work carried out by women. Therefore, income-generating was a major theme of projects initiated under the WID banner. Unfortunately, most successful income-generating projects were often taken over by men.¹⁷

"The WID/liberal feminist approach has offered little defense against this reality because it does not challenge the basic social relations of gender. It is based on the assumption that gender relations will change of themselves as women become full economic partners in development."¹⁸

Applied to the work and survival strategies of shantytown women, the WID/liberal feminist perspective does explain certain conditions, but leaves others untouched. It is obvious that part of the reason for the disadvantaged status of shantytown women

¹⁷ Rathgeber 4-7

¹⁸ Rathgeber 7

is their inequality with men. This is manifest in their roles in productive and reproductive work as well as the other strategies they are forced to employ for survival. In Mexican society, although men and women are equal before the law, men are generally "more equal" than women. The concept of inequality also helps to explain the double and triple day of most women. In carrying out reproductive work, they receive little assistance from husbands or other male household members. Household tasks are the "natural" realm of the woman and are not considered man's work. The persistent subordinate position of women in shantytowns cannot be explained by the liberal feminist approach since it ignores class, gender and racial structures. There is no challenge to male domination and male control, and reliance on the state (male-dominated) to make and/or enforce laws opposing discrimination against women does not reach the root of the problem. Patriarchy and gender relations remain outside of the analysis.

Shantytown women are in the lower, poorer classes of Mexican society. They are exploited by men but also by other women of higher classes. Even within the ranks of the shantytown women, some are more disadvantaged than others because they have indigenous backgrounds - their culture and customs differ from those of the majority. By failing to address issues of class, race and culture, liberal feminism overlooks key factors in women's oppression.

WID focuses on integrating women into development. That is a contradiction in

terms because development implies the whole community - women, men and children. One segment of the community cannot function without the other, and, in failing to recognize that women are already integrated into development but on unequal terms, the WID approach cannot hope to fully explain the causes, and continuance of women's oppression.

Liberal feminism has been criticized by Marxist feminists for the limitations of analysis of women's position and particularly of the reluctance to confront the structural barriers to women's progress. The Marxist feminist approach, it was argued, seemed to fill the gaps in liberal feminist thinking.

The Marxist perspective is founded on historical materialism, which espouses the theory that people and their social and physical environments interact on a continuing basis, and in this way create society. Work, or human production, is the cornerstone of this social structure.¹⁹ In her introduction to Feminist Marxism or Marxist Feminism: a debate, Meg Luxton (1985) supports the idea that early feminists "took hold" of Marxists theories as a basis for their analysis of women's oppression. Marxist theory was based on class inequalities and had acknowledged women's disadvantaged position in relation to men.²⁰ Although acknowledging

¹⁹ Anderson 268

²⁰ Meg Luxton. "Introduction." Pat Armstrong, Hugh Armstrong, Patricia Connelly and Angela Miles (eds). Feminist Marxism or Marxist Feminism: a debate. Toronto: Garamond Press, 1985:introduction

women's disadvantaged position, many feminists argued that the analysis of this situation was not fully explored. Women's oppression was seen as a reflection of class oppression with women and men being lumped together. Little attention was given to the sphere of reproduction. It remained within the family, totally separate from the realm of production. In other words, women's oppression became secondary to class oppression, and gender relations were not an issue.²¹ Although traditional Marxism does not support the sexual division of labour, it reasons that while the capitalist system remains in place so will the sexual division of labour. Therefore, Marxists see the sexual division of labour as necessary to the continued expansion of capitalism, and contend that the struggle should be against capitalism.²²

Another point in the Marxist perspective concerns the control of the means of production and communication of ideas under the capitalist system. Marx contends that the ruling class is in control of this, allowing certain ideas to be communicated to society. In this way, ideas become ideology or a system of beliefs that help to maintain the status quo.²³ This is particularly relevant to the ideology surrounding women and their roles in productive and reproductive work. In other words, it is a form of domination and control.

²¹ Anderson 269

²² Janet Saltzman Chafetz. Gender Equity: An Integrated Theory of Stability and Change. London: Sage Publications, 1990:218

²³ Anderson 272

"For feminists, Marx's work on ideology is fundamental to their understanding of sexism. Sexism, as an ideology that justifies the power of men over women, emerges not in the best interest of women but as a defense of male domination. Like other ideologies, sexist ideology is a means by which one class rules a society and sanctions the society's social relations. The extent to which women believe in the precepts of sexist ideology is only a reflection of the powers of coercion (whether subtle or overt) and social control."²⁴

Spender (1983) has called this "gatekeeping" and explains it as a way of perpetuating male points of view and power structures. In this way, the culture of a society takes on a male bias and the information incorporated into a society comes from a patriarchal viewpoint.²⁵

How then do Marxist feminists deal with the issues in the Marxist tradition and how do they explain the interaction of capitalism and patriarchy in women's subordination? Carroll (1980) believes that Marxist-feminists fall into two camps - one group equating women's oppression with capitalism; and the other expanding feminist thinking through the use of Marxist terminology. According to Carroll, there is no agreement on the relationship between patriarchy and capitalism, with patriarchy often being treated as a sub-system, separate from the more encompassing social systems.²⁶ On the other hand, Chafetz (1990) maintains that, in Marxist

²⁴ Anderson 272

²⁵ Lynne Spender. Intruders on the Rights of Men: Women's unpublished heritage. London: Pandora Press, 1983:6

²⁶ Berenice A. Carroll. "Political Science, Part II: International Politics, Comparative Politics and Feminist Radicals." SIGNS, Vol.5, No.31, 1980:455-456

feminist theory, it is believed that capitalism and patriarchy support each other to continue women's subordination. This subordination is perpetuated through capitalist power which keeps women in low-paying jobs and devalues domestic work; through patriarchal ideology which emanates from capitalists; and through the support given to this system of capitalist patriarchy by male workers who see it as advantageous to their position in society.²⁷ Carroll then argues that rather than one being a subsystem of the other, that capitalism and patriarchy work together at the same level to exploit and oppress women. To her this is how Marxist feminists see it.

Tiano (1987) believes that the Marxist feminist analysis of the role women play in capitalist societies can be equated with the exploitation thesis. Referring to Third world women, she states that, although capitalist development makes them more pivotal to industrial production, as in the case of the maquiladoras in Northern Mexico, their involvement is not always personally beneficial, and in many cases is negative to their well-being. Women still provide a cheap, expendable source of labour and, because of the structure of capitalism and patriarchy, have little power to change the exploitative situation. Tiano points out that women's exploitation in the Third world is exacerbated by issues of race and dependency, as well as gender inequalities. She agrees that capitalist development can provide jobs for women, but

²⁷ Chafetz 20-21

questions the cost to the women.²⁸

In response to the limitations of the WID approach to the analysis of the position of Third world women, the Women and Development (WAD) or Marxist feminist approach came to the fore. It assumed that women were, and always have been, part of the development process and therefore did not have to be integrated into it. The WAD approach is related to the dependency theory and like the dependency approach, focuses primarily on class relations. It recognizes that women's productive and reproductive work is central to the maintenance of the existing class structure, but it does not explore the issue of gender subordination within classes. The WAD approach like Tiano's (1987) explanation highlights the fact that, although women play a major role in productive and reproductive work in the maintenance of society, the double burden of these two often keeps them in a subordinate position bounded by societal structures. Women and men are treated as one group, and both are seen to be oppressed by international structures of inequality. Therefore the particular issues surrounding women's oppression are not addressed. At the project level, WAD is more like WID as it fails to analyse, to any depth, the impact of class, race or culture on women's status. Again, WAD shies away from tackling the issue of patriarchy, assuming that a change in international structures will improve the

²⁸ Susan Tiano. "Gender, Work, and World Capitalism: Third World Women's Role in Development." Beth B. Hess and Myra Marx Ferree (eds). Analyzing Gender: A Handbook of Social Science Research. London: Sage Publications, 1987:217-218

situation of women. The WAD perspective is self-limiting as it tries to incorporate both women and men into its analysis, thus down-playing the more subordinate role played by women in male-dominated societies. Almost as an extension of this, we see WAD's preoccupation with the productive sector, overlooking at the analytical level, women's reproductive roles. Like WID, the WAD approach has therefore promoted income-generating projects in an effort to improve women's lives.²⁹

In looking at the position of shantytown women in relation to the WAD/Marxist feminist approach, one can see that the issue of class is useful in partially explaining the subordinate position of women. The scant attention paid to women's reproductive work results in their ignoring the sexual division of labour and gender relations within the household. WAD fails to address or challenge the system of patriarchy although, for some Marxist feminists, capitalism and, secondarily, patriarchy are recognized as collaborators in the continuing oppression of women. It cannot be overlooked that the capitalist system of accumulation, recognized by the WAD approach, is directly related to the situation of shantytown women who, because of both this class position, and male domination, are forced into marginal jobs which help sustain the capitalist state at minimal cost to the state. Recognition by the WAD/Marxist feminist approach of the importance of gender ideology in the capitalist system explains some of the social conditions shantytown women face especially in Mexico. According to the Marxist feminists, the perpetuated ideology

²⁹ Rathgeber 7-10

of the Mexican woman in relation to the Virgin Mary - humble, loving, obedient, docile, motherly, and respectable - is a clear illustration of the control of ideas by a male-dominated society, church and state, designed to keep women in a subordinate position in relation to men, in order to perpetuate the capitalist system and the development of underdevelopment. In sum, the WAD approach does explain some of the issues related to the position of shantytown women but it fails to address the larger and more encompassing issues of patriarchy and gender relations within the family. Therefore, although it recognizes women as part of the development process, it doesn't explain their secondary status within that process.

As has been shown, class analysis on its own is not sufficient to explain the complex relationships within the family and between productive and reproductive issues. Socialist feminism came into its own during the late 1970's mainly because of the opinion that women's status in society was not solely reliant on economics. The socialist feminists believe that the household, as the centre of male domination is the prime location of women's oppression. Further, they claim, this situation works for the benefit of capitalism as women reproduce the labour force at minimum cost to the state. This means that women's choices of productive work are severely curtailed and restricted by their reproductive activities.³⁰

Socialist feminism makes the connection between work carried out in the home and

³⁰ Tiano 239

paid labour, and believes that, consequently, there is a direct relationship between subordination in each of these areas of work. To change this situation requires a close examination and reorganization of how work is carried out domestically and outside the home. Further to this, domestic labour must be recognized as work, and not relegated to unimportance and invisibility.³¹

Both class relations and gender relations are high on the socialist feminist agenda for the determining of the status of women. In other words, women's oppression goes beyond the realms of economic production and enters the private world of reproduction and the family.³² Socialist feminism makes the personal, political and so opens the question of women's status not only to the family but to the more intimate aspects of sexual and emotional relations.³³

In discussing socialist feminism, Zillah Eisenstein (1979) sees capitalism and patriarchy as "mutually dependent" and the basis of women's oppression.³⁴ Maria

³¹ Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S. Rothenberg. "Introduction: Feminist Theory and Feminist Practice." Alison M. Jaggar and Paula S. Rothenberg (eds). Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men. Second edition. New York: McGraw-Hill Inc., 1984:219

³² Anderson 282

³³ Roger S. Gottlieb. History and Subjectivity: The Transformation of Marxist Theory. Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1987:124

³⁴ Zillah Eisenstein. "Developing a Theory of Capitalist Patriarchy and Socialist Feminism." Zillah R. Eisenstein (ed). Capitalist Patriarchy and the Case for Socialist Feminism. New York; London: Monthly Review Press, 1979:22

Mies (1986) supports this by saying that capitalism and patriarchy are "the same system" which works towards the oppression of women.³⁵ On the other hand, Roger Gottlieb (1987) argues that although patriarchy influences the public and private lives of women, patriarchy and capitalism are separate and distinct. One is unrelated to the other even though most capitalists are male. Gottlieb's theory argues that putting an end to capitalism will not automatically terminate patriarchy. Therefore, to overcome both of these structures we have to create "a new form of socialization."³⁶ Gottlieb's claim that patriarchy and capitalism are distinct can be questioned. The modes of production in capitalist societies are controlled by those in power - males. Those in power also make the decisions affecting the everyday lives of women and men. Patriarchy is really the backbone of capitalism. They work together to keep women subordinated in both public and private spheres. As Zillah Eisenstein states,

"... patriarchy (as male supremacy) provides the sexual hierarchical ordering of society for political control and as a political system cannot be reduced to its economic structure; while capitalism as an economic class system driven by the pursuit of profit feeds off the patriarchal ordering. Together they form the political economy of the society, not merely one or another, but a particular blend of the two."³⁷

Although dealing with class and gender, socialist feminism falls short in its analysis

³⁵ Maria Mies. Patriarchy and Accumulation on a World Scale: Women in the International Division of Labour. London: Zed Books Ltd, 1986:38

³⁶ Gottlieb 141

³⁷ Zillah Eisenstein 28

of race and cultural differences. It is thereby limited in its overall analysis of women's subordination especially as it relates to Third world women.³⁸

Expanding on the WID approach, Gender and Development (GAD) is based on socialist feminism, and has developed with considerable input from Third world women. It attempts to integrate issues of race and culture in a Third world context. It's primary aim is to explain why women are automatically delegated secondary roles, i.e. subordinated, in society. In response to this, the GAD approach sets out to address both productive and reproductive spheres and gender relations within those spheres. GAD recognizes the contributions made by women inside and outside the family, and pays particular attention to women's oppression within the family or "private sphere". Like WID, it focuses on the role of the state but, contrary to WID and WAD, women are viewed as "agents of change" and not receivers of development assistance over which they have no control. Because it challenges power bases and structures of patriarchy and capitalism, the GAD perspective is not always incorporated into development projects.³⁹

In relating the GAD approach to the situation of shantytown women, it is clear that it touches closer to the heart of women's subordination. The main reason for this is its concentration on the household as the primary sphere of male domination and its

³⁸ Anderson 291

³⁹ Rathgeber 10-13

exploration of gender relations within the household. For shantytown women, the social relations of gender combined with the concept of patriarchy determine what type of work they do in both productive and reproductive spheres; where they do it; and what they are paid. An examination of gender relations in the household brings us face-to-face with the shantytown women's double and triple day and helps to explain why this occurs. By bringing women's "private" oppression into the "public" sphere, GAD challenges the existing power structures which restrict shantytown women from participating in their own development.

An examination of feminist frameworks remains incomplete without the inclusion of radical feminism and its related forms.

"Radical feminism is a new political concept. It evolved in response to the concern of many feminists that there has never been even the beginnings of a feminist analysis of the persecution of women. Until there is such an analysis, no coherent, effective program can be designed to solve the problem." ⁴⁰

Although approached in different ways by different writers, the cornerstone of radical feminism is its emphasis on male power and male domination as reflected through patriarchy. Radical feminists go further than socialist feminists in their conviction that

⁴⁰ Ti-Grace Atkinson. "Radical Feminism and Love." Alison M. Jaggar and Paula Rothenberg Struhl. Feminist Frameworks: Alternative Theoretical Accounts of the Relations between Women and Men. New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1978:289

the downfall of patriarchy would lead to women's liberation. Patriarchy supercedes class relations in determining how women live their lives. This emphasis on patriarchy is challenged by Anderson (1983) who asserts that both minority men and women experience oppression and domination.⁴¹ However, it can be argued in response that even in minority groups men have control over women. According to Linda Nicholson (1986), radical feminists challenge the idea of "femininity" as "natural" for women, arguing that this role of "femininity" contributes to women's lack of power and status in both the political and economic sphere. Nicholson goes on to say that these gender differences between men and women are learned in the home and transferred to society at large to support the subordination of women in both private and public spheres.⁴²

In their work, Jaggar and Rothenberg (1984) point out the fact that women's oppression is fundamental to society and that most radical feminists agree that women were the first oppressed group; women's oppression is the most widespread; and women's oppression is the hardest to eradicate.⁴³ Considering this, the direct confrontation with patriarchy seems all the more necessary.

⁴¹ Anderson 291

⁴² Linda J. Nicholson. Gender and History: The Limits of Social Theory in the Age of the Family. New York: Columbia University Press, 1986:27 & 28

⁴³ Jaggar and Rothenberg 86

"Patriarchy is itself the prevailing religion of the entire planet..."⁴⁴

In order to make women more aware of their oppression, "consciousness-raising" was developed by radical feminists in the late 1960's. One of its goals was to help women share information amongst themselves about their daily lives and experiences with a view to creating solidarity. Women would also be encouraged to connect the personal and the political and to understand the societal structures which exploit them in both spheres. The women themselves would then become the expert sources of knowledge about their own lives.⁴⁵ In his book, Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Freire (1970) called for the same approach as he argued that only the poor and oppressed are equipped to speak with knowledge about their situation.

"Who are better prepared than the oppressed to understand the terrible significance of an oppressive society? Who suffer the effects of oppression more than the oppressed? Who can better understand the necessity of liberation?"⁴⁶

One of the weaknesses of radical feminism has been its shallow analysis of the class system. Charnie Guettel (1974) claims that it doesn't pay attention to working class

⁴⁴ Mary Daly. Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism. Boston: Beacon Press, 1978:39

⁴⁵ Hester Eisenstein. Contemporary Feminist Thought. Boston: G. K. Hall & Co., 1983:35-37

⁴⁶ Paulo Freire. Pedagogy of the Oppressed. Translated by Myra Bergman Ramos. New York: Continuum, 1983:29

women, and therefore marginalizes a sector of oppressed women.⁴⁷ One of its strengths, however, has been its analysis of women's oppression in relation to heterosexuality. Charlotte Bunch (1987) states that heterosexuality is "central to all women's oppression."⁴⁸ Further, she believes that male supremacy is kept in place through heterosexuality; and that it causes division amongst women who often side with men over other women. Heterosexuality, she says, remains in place because women benefit from it. They take on its power, social standing, and rely on the economic assistance gained through heterosexual relationships.⁴⁹ The mere presence of lesbianism challenges this type of male domination and superiority, and Bunch argues for the inclusion of an analysis of lesbian life experience as part of socialist feminism.⁵⁰

"Lesbian-feminism is based on a rejection of male definitions of our lives and is therefore crucial to the development of a positive women-identified identity, of redefining who we are supposed to be in every situation, including the workplace."⁵¹

With its greater stress on patriarchy as the cause of women's subordination, radical

⁴⁷ Charnie Guettel. Marxism & Feminism. Toronto: The Hunter Rose Company, 1974:60

⁴⁸ Charlotte Bunch. Passionate Politics: Feminist Theory in Action. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1987:181

⁴⁹ Bunch 166-167

⁵⁰ Bunch 180

⁵¹ Bunch 177

feminism more fully explains the position of shantytown women in Mexico. Supporting this is its challenge to the "natural" role of women which is manifest in Mexico through the ideology (patriarchal) of women's attributes and status. Although weaker on class analysis, radical feminism highlights gender differences in the public and private spheres and therefore helps to explain differences in productive and reproductive roles. In the case of shantytown women, the question of heterosexual relationships, in part, explains a need for economic support and social acceptance. "Consciousness-raising" is a tactic that could be used to make shantytown women more aware of their oppression, and of the structures which prohibit them from realizing their aspirations.

In sum, I will use a socialist feminist/gender and development framework for my analysis. However I feel that a stronger approach to patriarchy is needed in order to explain the experiences of shantytown women. We need a closer examination and a more committed challenge to male domination within the household than a gender and development analysis provides. Therefore, while recognizing that socialist feminism/GAD is adequate to explain the issues of class and gender; productive and reproductive work; and, to a certain extent, capitalism and patriarchy, I will draw on radical feminism for a clearer explanation of the issues surrounding patriarchy, heterosexuality and marriage.

CHAPTER 3: THE MEXICAN ECONOMY

In the course of this century, Mexico's role in the global economy has shifted and changed. Under the leadership of Porfirio Diaz (1877-1911), the country enjoyed an era of relative peace; mining and industrial development progressed; and both exports and imports rose substantially. Because of this the economy attracted foreign capital investment which assisted the Mexican government in its plans for internal development.

The advent of the Mexican Revolution (1910-1917), in many ways, destabilized the economy. Because of the destruction in rural areas, many people began migrating to the urban centres in search of jobs and better living conditions. Mexico City seemed to draw most migrants, even those from the far north of the country. The disruption caused by the Revolution discouraged foreign investment. Investors became wary of Mexico's inability to deal with its internal problems.

However, it wasn't until 1934 when Lazaro Cardenas became President, that the economy stabilized to some extent. Cardenas directed his attention to improvements in the rural areas, hoping to stem the tide of migration to urban centres. He also endeavoured to reduce Mexico's dependence on the U.S. and other foreign powers. During his presidency, the oil industry was nationalized, and, overall, the economy became state controlled. Regardless of his efforts, from 1940 onwards, Mexico

continued to experience rapid urban growth as well as high natural increases to its population. A "centralization" process was taking place whereby population and industries were concentrated in a few cities. There was no concerted government effort to stop or redirect this process.

Today, Mexico City is one of the most populous cities in the world with almost 20 million inhabitants. This number increases daily with the steady stream of migrants from rural areas, and a high natural birth rate. The never-ending influx of migrants to the city reflects, in many ways, the state of the Mexican economy over the past 40 years, and the crisis that the country has experienced.

A number of world-wide trends can be cited that have affected Mexico, both directly and indirectly. First, there has been a major restructuring of the world economy. New political alliances have been formed, and trading blocs (the E.E.C. for example) have emerged. Most recently, the collapse of the Soviet Union has redirected world attention to the Baltic States. Second, the welfare state that has been in place since the second World War is shrinking, and in some countries, is being systematically dismantled. Governments, needing to service their national debts, are diverting money from the social service sector for that purpose. Third, regional alliances for economic reasons, have led to a certain amount of cultural "invasion". Mexico in particular has been sensitive to the influence of U.S. culture and the fear of becoming "Americanized". The fourth trend relates to the increasing uneasiness

around one-party political regimes, especially those in Africa and Latin America. Not only is the world community "urging" such states to democratize, but the groundswell from within those countries (Kenya for example) indicates the discontent of the people with this form of government.⁵² Mexico and its economy can be placed in the context of each of the four world-wide trends.

From the second World War until the early 1970's, the Mexican economy gained considerable ground. By the 1960's, Mexico was being hailed as a model for state-led industrial development. This was due mainly to the policy of "desarrollo estabilizador" (stabilizing development) which was in practice during those years. The features of this policy were, (a) a stable ratio of budget deficits to GDP; (b) a stable ratio of public external debt to GDP; (c) internal inflation and world inflation at comparable levels, and (d) positive returns to domestic investors.⁵³ Import-substituting industrialization (ISI) was also in place from the mid-40's. It began because Mexico's access to foreign manufactured goods was severely limited during World War II, and also because of the demand in the U.S. for Mexican manufactures, as U.S. industry concentrated on war-related production. The basic purpose of ISI was to ensure that domestic production remained profitable through a system of protective tariffs on

⁵² Adolfo Gilly. "The Mexican Regime in its dilemma." Journal of International Affairs. Vol.43, No.2, Winter 1990: 276

⁵³ William Chislett. "The Causes of Mexico's Financial Crisis and the lessons to be learned: Economic Policy 1970-1983." George Philip (ed). Politics in Mexico. London; Sydney: Croom Helm, 1985:1-2

imported goods.⁵⁴

"Broadly defined, import substitution is a strategy for development which favours the expansion of the internal market, in contrast to orthodox neoclassical doctrines which emphasize development through primary commodity exports (or through following market forces)."⁵⁵

In other words, ISI tends to disguise the real condition of domestic industry and protect it from competing openly on the world market. Consequently, industry becomes less and less efficient and productive while being shielded by protective tariffs.

The policies adopted from the 1940's to the 1970's basically stimulated the Mexican economy. Living standards and incomes rose, even in rural areas; agriculture expanded marginally; employment opportunities increased; education systems grew; and there was improvement in public health. Because of this prosperity, a new middle-class group of consumers began to emerge and large firms and companies controlled the industrial, agricultural and financial sectors. Therefore, the control and

⁵⁴ Celso Cartas Contreras. "The Agricultural Sector's Contributions to the Import-Substituting Industrialization Process in Mexico." Bruce F. Johnston, Cassio Luiselli, Celso Cartas Contreras and Roger D. Norton (eds). U.S.-Mexico Relations: Agriculture and Rural Development. Stanford, California: Stanford University Press, 1987:111

⁵⁵ James M. Cypher. State and Capital in Mexico: Development Policy Since 1940. Boulder; San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990:5

ownership of the Mexican economy changed as a result of this increased growth.⁵⁶

Elected in 1970, President Luis Echeverria aimed at dispersing the benefits of development more evenly. He felt that the policy of "desarrollo estabilizador" had failed to distribute income equitably to all segments of the population and that the policy fostered private capital accumulation. For example, in 1958, the incomes of the richest 5% of families were 22 times that of the poorest 10%. By 1970, the gap had widened considerably, and the incomes of the elites were 39 times that of the poor. To bridge this gap, he decided on two specific strategies - increased public spending, and increased borrowing of foreign capital.⁵⁷ His efforts to change the direction of the Mexican economy were not successful, and by the mid-1970's, the economy was in bad shape. Overall economic growth had declined, and, due in part to ISI, the industrial sector had become inefficient and reliant on imported foreign inputs. Imported technology was being used by all sectors of the economy. Due to the increasing emphasis on export-oriented crops, the agricultural sector was unable to produce sufficient food for domestic consumption. In many areas, livestock, which were more profitable for export, had replaced food crops. Therefore agricultural imports were on the increase. Mexico was not devoid of financial problems at this time. High inflation continued, and thus accelerated massive capital flight. The

⁵⁶ David Barkin. Distorted Development: Mexico in the World Economy. Boulder; San Francisco: Westview Press, 1990:79, 82

⁵⁷ Chislett 2

country had a budget deficit and the peso was overvalued. The number of imported goods and services continued to rise. Even oil was being imported as the country's reserves could not cover domestic needs.⁵⁸ Therefore, by mid-1976, the Echeverria government was facing a severe economic crisis. Because of this situation, the government had been forced to borrow on the international market, and in so doing, had increased its foreign debt substantially. Although at the outset of his presidency, Echeverria had wanted to ensure a more equal distribution of income, this did not occur. In fact, the poor were further marginalized especially as a result of the changes in the agricultural sector.

Into this situation came President Jose Lopez Portillo who began his sexenio at the end of 1976. With a loan from the IMF, he immediately imposed an austerity program. This program was interrupted by discovery of new oil reserves in the Bay of Campeche in 1977. As a result of this the government substantially increased its spending, encouraged by an increase of foreign investment in Mexico. This, of course, could not be sustained in the face of high inflation and an unstable currency.⁵⁹ This turn of events did not benefit the population at large, and in fact more people were excluded from the benefits of development than had been in 1940. In 1979, illiteracy was 16%; only 2 of every 5 Mexicans were fully employed; 18 million (of a

⁵⁸ Tom Barry (ed). Mexico: A Country Guide. Albuquerque: The Inter-Hemispheric Education Resource Center, 1992:81-82

⁵⁹ Barry 82-83

population of 67 million at that time) lived in extreme poverty; and 40 million were undernourished. Also, regardless of these new oil discoveries, imports remained high and corruption was rife in the public sector.⁶⁰ By mid-1981, oil prices began to drop and the "miracle years" made possible by the oil boom, were coming to an end. The government found itself unable to make debt payments, and because of the fluctuating peso, there was extensive capital flight. This placed Portillo in a very difficult situation. In an effort to take control and to try to avoid total financial collapse of the economy, he nationalized the banking system and imposed foreign exchange control. Unfortunately these moves were made too late. By 1982, Mexico was in a critical economic condition with inflation running at 100%. Chislett (1985) cites Portillos' main errors as his lack of attention to the massive unemployment situation, and his insistence on keeping domestic petrol prices at the same level for 7 years while, on the world market, oil prices had tripled in the same time period.⁶¹ In this way, Portillo continued to protect domestic industry and thus created a false sense of security and well-being.

According to Rojas (1987), the causes of this severe crisis originated from four main factors. First, ISI had protected Mexican industries for too long. Mexican companies were not competitive on the world market. Industry had also expanded rapidly, but with no concrete plan. Foreign currency, earned in the agricultural sector had assisted

⁶⁰ Chislett 4-5

⁶¹ Chislett 8

in financing the consumer goods industry. This financing was not coming from the export of manufactured goods, as it should have been. The amount of capital goods imported also remained high, as domestic industries were unable to cope with the demand or compete with the quality of foreign-made goods. Second, the agricultural sector was in crisis. Agricultural prices had been controlled in order to make available cheap food to ever-expanding urban areas. In other words, the agricultural sector was being exploited to support the increasing labour force in the cities. The focus of agricultural production had changed and was more oriented to export production than production for domestic use. Therefore, basic foodstuffs were being imported as small farmers relinquished their lands to large holdings, and made their way to the cities joining the increasing labour force. Third, Mexico had become overly dependent on foreign imports which helped to hide the imbalance between sectors of the economy. Again, this created a false sense of security. Fourth, Rojas insists that the crisis was brought about by "home-made" causes and cannot be entirely blamed on external factors. He stresses the almost total reliance of Mexico on imports to sustain its economy and the fact that future Mexican development had been planned around guaranteed oil revenue. Both of these created a false and dangerous situation.⁶²

⁶² Raul Rojas. "Mexico: Five Years of Debt Crisis." Elmar Altvater, Kurt Hubner, Jochen Lorentzen and Raul Rojas (eds). Translated by Terry Bond. The Poverty of Nations: A Guide to the Debt Crisis - from Argentina to Zaire. London; New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd., 1987:169-171

In an interesting analogy, Rojas (1987) likens the debt crisis to the earthquake which rocked Mexico City in 1985.

"When an earthquake transformed parts of Mexico City into a heap of ruins on 19 September 1985 no one could dispute the fact that the earthquake was unforeseeable. The effects of the earthquake could not, however, be laid at the door of nature alone. Fifty years of obsession with growth had turned Mexico City into a Moloch, an industrial monster, in which 25% of Mexico's total GNP was produced in the tiniest of areas. The agricultural crisis had been driving the campesinos from the countryside and into the town for years; even today 3,000 come in search of work each day. Not only did the earthquake destroy buildings, it also laid bare the infrastructural madness of Mexico's capital city. What happened in the debt crisis was very similar: the external shocks merely triggered the current desperate situation. Its deeper-seated causes, however, are to be found in the history of the last few decades, in attempts to speed up growth without tackling the structural causes of poverty and misery. The ruling party cannot shirk responsibility for this by blaming external factors."⁶³

At the time of the debt crisis in 1982, Mexico's total external debt had risen from US\$6,091 million in 1970, to US\$80,333 million.⁶⁴

The crisis impacted differently on diverse sectors of the economy. For example, as a result of the crisis, urban employment increased, especially the proportion of self-employed and non-paid family workers operating in the informal sector. This is particularly important in relation to women who, because of the restructuring of the

⁶³ Rojas 172

⁶⁴ Rojas 172

agricultural sector, were the majority of city-ward migrants. In other words, the crisis caused an increase in underemployment as well as unemployment.⁶⁵ Because the labour force is not a homogeneous group, it was affected in different ways. Unemployment, between 1981 and 1985, was highest among construction workers, while government employees suffered from declining wages. Regionally, Mexican workers were affected to varying degrees. The maquiladora workers on the U.S.-Mexico border did not undergo any significant wage loss. Perhaps this was due to the fact that the maquiladoras are controlled by transnational companies mainly from the U.S. and Japan. Although the crisis was felt in the production sector and this directly affected workers, it was also felt by consumers who are also the workers. In other words, the Mexican workers were hit doubly hard by the crisis with rising unemployment and underemployment accompanied by increased costs for goods and services. An issue not often discussed in relation to the crisis is its social effects - the forced reorganization and, in some cases, relocation of families and communities, and the extra tensions brought into the household because of difficult economic situations which contribute to the increased burdens placed on women. Social unrest began to manifest itself in demands for basics such as land, water and public services.⁶⁶

⁶⁵ Nora Lustig. "Economic Crisis, Adjustment and Living Standards in Mexico, 1982-85." World Development. Vol.18, No.10, 1990:1325-1342

⁶⁶ Barry Carr. "The Mexican Left, the Popular Movements, and the Politics of Austerity 1982-1985." Barry Carr and Ricardo Anzaldua Montoya (eds). The Mexican Left, the Popular Movements, and the Politics of Austerity. San Diego: Center for U.S.-Mexican Studies, 1986:3-5

It was obvious that strong measures needed to be taken to redirect the Mexican economy and to stem this downward spiral. President Miguel de la Madrid (1982-88) decided on a return to the earlier policies of "desarrollo estabilizador" (stabilizing development). In this he was encouraged by the IMF, the World Bank, and Washington with loans beginning in 1982. These loans came with the provision that Mexico would follow a neoliberal policy in restructuring its economy.⁶⁷ De la Madrid curbed the over-spending trend, and set out to increase government income through higher taxes, reduced subsidies, and stricter measures to stop the existing rampant corruption.⁶⁸ He abandoned the ISI policy, which had been in place since the 1940's, and opened the Mexican economy to foreign competition as it became evident that the domestic market could not sustain growth. In 1986, Mexico also joined GATT (General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs), having only a few years earlier been reluctant to become part of it. This change of heart showed the international community that Mexico was heading towards a more open trade policy. A reduction in government-owned enterprises paved the way for the privatization policy which has been continued and expanded under the present government.⁶⁹

The gains to the poor under this new form of modernization were insignificant. If anything, their position worsened. As mentioned earlier, the numbers in the informal

⁶⁷ Barry 83

⁶⁸ Chislett 8-9

⁶⁹ Sidney Weintraub. Transforming the Mexican Economy: The Salinas Sexenio. Washington: National Planning Association, 1990:3-6

urban sector increased and Mexican society became more polarized with wealth concentrated with a small oligarchy. Spending on social services was cut and the cost of public utilities (electricity, gas, water) increased.⁷⁰ By the end of de la Madrid's presidency in 1988, the position of the poor continued to be a real problem, but one which had not been properly addressed.

The policies of the current President, Carlos Salinas de Gortari, elected in 1988, have been a continuation, and in some cases, an expansion of those of his predecessor. The economic policies of the Salinas government have aimed at penetrating the markets of the industrial nations, particularly those of the U.S. Mexico has become a more open competitor on the world scene. Apart from this Salinas continues his attack on high inflation; promotes non-oil exports; stimulates investment, both national and foreign, in Mexican industries; and continues the privatization policy begun with de la Madrid.⁷¹ Salinas has also attempted to renegotiate the external debt so that resources will be available for internal growth programs. Improvements in technology and an improved ability to communicate at a world level, have been made, according to Jorge G. Casteneda (1990), with primarily the United States in mind.⁷²

⁷⁰ Barry 94

⁷¹ Weintraub 42

⁷² Jorge G. Casteneda. "Salinas's International Relations Gamble." Journal of International Affairs. Vol.43, No.2, Winter 1990:407

Summing up the current Presidents' policies, Mortimer B. Zuckerman (1991) states that:

"Salinas is diminishing the role of the state in daily life. He has introduced orthodox fiscal and monetary policies leading to balanced budgets, abandoned many industrial regulations, lowered tariff and nontariff barriers and privatized the state-owned enterprises. He has also taken on the rural chieftans, corrupt bureaucrats and labor bosses who have long dominated his own party. Business now competes in a free market, without the umbrella of local monopolies and political interference."⁷³

While acknowledging that Salinas' policies have paid off, Robinson (1991) believes that there are certain areas which need more attention and with which, so far, Salinas has not dealt effectively. She feels that in order for Mexico to receive the intended benefits from a free trade agreement (FTA), Salinas must address the inefficiency, corruption and political uncertainty that exists within his own party (PRI). Also, Robinson points out, he has not dealt with the agricultural sector which has been ailing for decades.⁷⁴ Pastor (1990) is not as critical as Robinson of the progress made under the Salinas government. He points to the fact that Salinas has taken definite steps to curb corruption; has given priority to the reduction of the external debt; and has lowered trade barriers, making for a more open market. Privatization

⁷³ Mortimer B. Zuckerman. "Mexico on the Move." U.S. News and World Report. July 8, 1991:58

⁷⁴ Linda Robinson. "Mexico's New Revolution." U.S. News and World Report. July 8, 1991:38-39

of state corporations and banks is seen, by Pastor, as a positive step. In 1989, partly due to these policies, capital began returning to Mexico and the rate of economic growth was 2.9%. This was the first improvement since the debt crisis. Pastor, like Robinson, points to the fact that agricultural production is down, and, although exports have increased, imports have grown at a faster rate.⁷⁵ Underneath a rosy exterior, Pastor identifies class and race differences as possible triggers for social unrest and even violence.⁷⁶ This is due to the widening gap between rich and poor caused by state policies which promote the Mexican elite and further marginalize the poor, especially women whose struggle for survival is intensified because of these differences.

In an effort to address the situation of the poor who, in 1990, were 1 in 5 Mexicans,⁷⁷ Salinas launched the National Solidarity Program (PRONASOL) in 1989. The aim of the program is to fight poverty, but it has been received sceptically by many. Some see it as a way to increase the PRI's, and Salinas' popularity. Others regard it as a way of appeasing the poor who don't benefit from other social programs. PRONASOL supports programs related to food aid, social services and infrastructure. Its working budget comes from the sale of state enterprises. In all fairness, the program has attempted to work directly with community groups and

⁷⁵ Robert A. Pastor. "Post-Revolutionary Mexico: The Salinas Opening." Journal of Interamerican Studies. Vol.32, No.3, Fall 1990:4-5

⁷⁶ Pastor 13

⁷⁷ Barry 96

grassroots leaders, but is still criticized as only a token measure for those living in extreme poverty. PRONASOL has received a tremendous amount of media promotion, and the posters advertising it sport the Mexican colours. This automatically links it with the PRI. Although PRONASOL is attempting to address certain social inequalities, it may only provide temporary relief, as it does not confront the structures which keep many Mexicans poor and marginalized.⁷⁸

Any discussion of the Mexican economy remains incomplete without an examination of Mexico's foreign policy, especially as it relates to the U.S. Until recently, Mexico has been sensitive about forging closer ties with the U.S. Over the past several decades, Mexico and the U.S. have differed on a number of matters, and it is evident that the Mexican approach to global situations is not always in accordance with that of its northern neighbour. The U.S. take-over of Mexican territory in the nineteenth century, and the more recent U.S. action in Grenada and Panama, tend to keep Mexico cognisant of the superior military power of the U.S. and the possible threat to Mexican security. This threat encompasses a number of areas. First, Mexico's territorial sovereignty; second, the issue of control over the 2000 mile shared border; third, U.S. intervention in Mexico's internal politics; fourth, Mexico's economic independence; fifth, U.S. interference in the political alliances in Central America and the Caribbean; and, finally, distortion of Mexico's national identity by

⁷⁸ Barry 100-102

overwhelming U.S. media propaganda.⁷⁹ All of these factors are significant in Mexico's foreign policy relations with the U.S.

Nonetheless, Salinas has forged ahead with expanded and extended relationships with the U.S. Salinas recognizes the importance of trade between the two countries, and, apart from that, he and his cabinet ministers have established a good relationship with their counterparts in the U.S.⁸⁰ It is, of course, in the best interests of the U.S. to have a stable, friendly neighbour with a growing economy. As Pastor (1990) points out:

"If Mexico does not succeed in modernizing its economy and democratizing its politics, the United States cannot escape the consequences. Instability in Mexico would cause massive migration, capital flight and radicalism."⁸¹

Roett (1991) suggests that Mexico has a number of choices regarding a regional or geographic partner. Mexico needs a partner with technological expertise; access to new capital investment flows; and access to world markets for its exports.⁸² Roett

⁷⁹ Lorenzo Meyer. "The United States and Mexico: The Historical Structure of their conflict." Journal of International Affairs. Vol.43, No.2, Winter 1990:252-253

⁸⁰ Pastor 15-16

⁸¹ Pastor 21

⁸² Riordan Roett. "Mexico's Strategic Alternatives in the Changing World System: Four Options, Four Ironies." Riordan Roett (ed). Mexico's External Relations in the 1990's. Boulder; London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1991:4

outlines four possible options for Mexico. First, there is the U.S. Considering that Salinas has already indicated Mexico's interest in a free trade agreement with the U.S., this seems like a viable option. The U.S. has also realized the importance of bilateral ties with Mexico. However, two sensitive areas in this relationship are immigration and illegal drugs. Also, U.S. domination of the world scene is diminishing. Once the leader in high technology, it now takes a back seat to Japan on this issue. Therefore, considering that the U.S. position may decline even further in the future, its suitability as a partner for Mexico needs to be questioned. The second option as Roett sees it, is Japan who is Mexico's second largest trading partner after the U.S., and also the second largest investor in the maquiladora program. Japan serves as an outlet for Mexican exports and also provides Mexico with access to advanced technology. With the recent deterioration of U.S./Japanese relations, this may pose a problem for Mexico, trying to maintain close ties with both countries. Would Mexico be prepared to jeopardize ties with the U.S. in favour of a closer alliance with Japan? Western Europe is a third option for Mexico. Growth in Western Europe in the past couple of years has exceeded that of the U.S. The former West Germany was a large investor in Mexico, being third after the U.S. and the U.K. and, in turn, Mexican exports to West Germany during the first half of 1989 rose by 35%. Unfortunately for Mexico, with the emergence of Eastern Europe, Western Europe is endeavouring to forge trade links with those countries, and to a certain extent, Mexico has been overlooked. What of Mexico's relationship with the countries of Latin America? Is Latin America a fourth option as a solid partner for

Mexico?⁸³ According to Casteneda (1990), Mexico previously held a respected position in the hemisphere, able and willing to speak up on behalf of Latin America. Now with Salinas' definite move towards aligning Mexico with the U.S., many Latin American countries feel that Mexico has stepped away from its alliances with, and obligations to, its Latin neighbours.⁸⁴ Mexico's global alliances will have a direct bearing on how it continues to perform on the world stage and will play a major role in the reformation of its national economy. It is on this point that Barkin (1990) sees Mexico as always playing a secondary role and continuing to boost already prosperous economies to the detriment of its own. He states:

"This reorganization of the national economy is enabling countries like Mexico to better supply the different industrialized countries with less expensive goods and services. These products facilitate the task of controlling domestic inflation in the richer countries, as well as raising living standards there."⁸⁵

It has been obvious throughout this discussion that the Mexican economy has fluctuated considerably during the course of this century. In so doing, the majority of Mexicans - the poor - have been adversely affected, and even today, bear the brunt of economic policies motivated by industrialization, international competitiveness, and privatization. It is assumed that the benefits of this type of restructuring will

⁸³ Roett 4-12

⁸⁴ Casteneda 407

⁸⁵ Barkin 3

"trickle down" to the poorest segments of society, that somehow they will benefit. The agricultural sector is an example of this assumption gone wrong. National planning for this sector has, in fact, decreased the "trickle down" effects of government policies and has ultimately led to an increase in informal sector participation, especially for women, in the urban areas. Therefore a closer examination of this sector is appropriate in order to understand this complex situation.

Before embarking on an analysis of the agricultural sector since the early 1950's and particularly over the past decade, it is essential to keep in mind some important points. First, the sustained growth in the agricultural sector is deceptive, as will be shown later. Second, the U.S. market is of vital importance to Mexico, particularly for agricultural exports. Third, maize, rice and beans have always been the basic food staples of the Mexican people; and, finally, the Mexican urban population is currently estimated to be 72.6% of the total population, leaving about 28% in rural areas.

It cannot be denied that Mexican agriculture since World War II has sustained a growth rate of about 5% per year. The sector has had its ups and downs, with periods of dynamic activity during the 1950's and early 1960's and slower growth periods from the mid-60's to the mid-70's.

"But the role of agriculture changed over the period 1940-1980, not only in the products the system yielded and the land tenure and social

relations it sustained, but also in its importance to national growth."⁸⁶

The change in the agricultural sector came about in stages beginning in the early 1950's which, according to Celso Cartas Contreras (1987) saw a period of dynamic growth influenced by the Agrarian Reform which encouraged the cultivation of land previously unused. During this time, increased areas came under irrigation; the transportation system was improved; technological changes were introduced; and world markets favoured Mexican agricultural products.⁸⁷

With reference to the growth of irrigated areas, Sanderson (1986) argues that "the federal irrigation system grew mainly to serve U.S. markets for fresh produce, rather than internal markets for similar primary commodities."⁸⁸

It is in this period (1952-1964) that Mexican agriculture began its serious re-adjustment to external markets. This re-orientation had adverse effects over the next 10 years (1965-1976) as irrigated areas were used for livestock, instead of for producing basic grains. Responding to consumers in the U.S. and also to changed eating habits among the Mexican elite, the government promoted this emphasis on

⁸⁶ Steven E. Sanderson. The Transformation of Mexican Agriculture: International Structure and the Politics of Rural Change. Princeton, New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1986:38

⁸⁷ Cartas Contreras 113

⁸⁸ Sanderson 44

livestock and the fodder necessary to feed it. Basic grains were replaced by export crops, such as sorghum, which, although having a greater resistance to dry conditions, was planted in the irrigated areas. Less attention was paid to maize. Consequently production of maize, planted in rainfed areas even though less drought-resistant, began to decline. Government investment shifted to the irrigated areas to promote sorghum as the more profitable crop.

The effects of this shift in focus had direct consequences for small farmers and agricultural labourers both full-time and seasonal. In the first instance, because of the profitability of sorghum, the government directed more inputs (fertilizers, machinery, credit) to those large-scale farmers. Small farmers did produce sorghum, but in restricted quantities, and as well, many small farmers continued to produce maize, but principally for their own subsistence needs. Second, because the harvesting of sorghum was mechanized, this displaced many agricultural workers, a large percentage of whom were women.

As noted by Chandra Hardy (1982):

"... corn is mainly produced by small farmers using traditional methods while modern farming techniques are used to produce cattle feed and export crops. The data show a decline in the area under cultivation of maize and beans after 1966 and explosive rates of increase in the area

under cultivation of soya, sorghum and alfalfa."⁸⁹

It was at this time that grapes and strawberries began to be cultivated in the irrigated areas. Between 1976 and 1977, production of these export crops doubled, with grapes rising from 7,625 tons (1976) to 15,328 tons (1977); and strawberries from 38,100 tons (1976) to 80,429 tons (1977).⁹⁰

Under favourable climatic conditions from 1977 to 1981, agricultural production increased with some short-term gains being made in maize production. However, basic food grains began to be imported, and that trend continues to the present day. Also today, the emphasis on sorghum and livestock is more pronounced, as Mexico's agricultural policies continue to be demand-driven by the habits of affluent consumers. So, the crisis in agriculture continues despite years of successful agricultural growth. Currently Mexico is unable to produce sufficient food for its own domestic use.

"... the distorted pattern of development of Mexican agriculture has resulted in a generalized move toward a demand-driven model of agricultural production. The "natural shift" toward crops with higher income elasticities of demand has imposed its own "modern" imprimatur on Mexican agriculture: a productive structure oriented toward animal feed, luxury goods and agro-exports. Because of this,

⁸⁹ Chandra Hardy. "Mexico's Development Strategy for the 1980's." World Development. Vol.10, No.6, 1982:505

⁹⁰ Sanderson 45

and in spite of the ready availability of the necessary human, natural, and produced resources, small farmers traditionally responsible for staple food production can no longer guarantee the country adequate supplies."⁹¹

The results of this crisis in agriculture are many, and although most stratas of society have been affected, it is the poor who have fared worst. First, un and underemployment are widespread in the agricultural sector, affecting, as mentioned earlier, women who were seasonal and part-time workers. Second, there is insufficient production of basic foods to satisfy domestic needs. For example, in 1989, 10 million tons of grains were imported, which is 40% of the national production. Because of this women in poor circumstances are forced to try to raise turkeys and chickens or grow fruit to supplement household food requirements. Third, poverty is apparent in both rural and urban areas, although the increase of poor women in the informal sector is particularly evident in urban centres. Fourth, Mexico faces a nutritional problem with 50% of the population undernourished, most of those being women and children. Even tortillas, the Mexican staple, are suspected of being made with wheat flour instead of from pure maize. This was an observation conveyed to me on a number of occasions during my field research in Mexico (1991) by women who were responsible for food preparation. Fifth, there has been an increase in migration, or as Cartas Contreras puts it, a "labour transfer", from the agricultural sector. In most cases, this has been migration towards the cities, with the bulk of

⁹¹ Barkin 31

migrants being women.

Therefore, it is obvious that planning policies in the agricultural sector have been directed by the governments' focus on the export market and its continued pursuit of the internationalization of agriculture. This, as we have seen, has placed poor, traditional farmers in a difficult position, unable to keep up with the large-scale producers, and gradually being squeezed out of the sector because of lack of access to necessary inputs and lack of government support.

In particular, the Agrarian Reform excluded benefits to women as they were not classified as "heads of households". Female-headed households were left with little or no land because inheritance rights to land were through male members of the family. Therefore, female labour force participation in rural areas and the overall importance of women in agriculture fell. Seasonal agricultural work for women gave way under the introduction of sophisticated machinery. Lack of employment in the rural areas, especially for low-income women, left no alternative but for them to migrate to cities in search of income. It is well documented (Bonilla, 1990; Bunster, 1985; Jelin, 1977; Orlansky and Dubrovsky, 1978) that more women than men migrate in Latin America, and this is true for Mexico. This creates a high incidence of female-headed households in the urban areas, which need income for survival. In most cases, the women's choices for employment are limited and they join the ever-swelling ranks of the informal sector.

"... female-headed households are on the increase all over the continent, providing a sharp contrast to official ideologies in which women, especially those with children, should be dependent on their menfolk. The instability of family life which results from migration, urban poverty, political repression and economic recession, forces women to fend for themselves." ⁹²

In sum, the overall policies of the Mexican government over the past decades have had a significant impact in class and gender terms. They have widened the gap between rich and poor and increased the number of Mexicans living in poverty. This is especially true of those policies related to the agricultural sector which have directly affected the lives of poor women. In an effort to survive in increasingly difficult circumstances, these have joined the ranks of the informal urban sector where their labour is continuously exploited, and the demands of productive and reproductive work cause physical hardship and emotional stress. Indeed, this is the situation in which shantytown women live their daily lives. What, therefore, are the issues surrounding women in the informal sector and what factors affect and direct their participation?

⁹² Olivia Harris. "Latin American Women - an overview." Olivia Harris (ed). Latin American Women. London: Minority Rights Group, Report No.57, 1983:5

CHAPTER 4(A): WOMEN IN THE INFORMAL SECTOR

Introduction: The Informal Sector - an overview

The term "informal sector" was first introduced to the literature by Keith Hart in 1971 after a study of urban economic activities in Ghana. In a subsequent article published in 1973 in The Journal of Modern African Studies, he distinguishes the formal and informal sectors on the basis of wage-earning and self-employment. His classifications of informal sector activities are taken from the point of their legality or illegality.⁹³

The International Labour Organization (ILO) gave the term "informal sector" more credibility when, in 1973, they used it in a survey of employment in Kenya. Since then, the informal sector has become part of economic jargon, and the sector itself has been the focus of many studies. Attributing characteristics to the informal sector has been done mainly from two points of view - characteristics of the informal sector workers and characteristics of the informal sector activities. In the case of activities, these are usually small-scale family operated businesses with little or no credit or capital, and relatively few workers. The size of the businesses is usually limited by the demand for the goods and services they provide, as well as by the workers lack of training, and also by regulations imposed by governments and other local authorities.

⁹³ Keith Hart. "Informal Income Opportunities and Urban Employment in Ghana." The Journal of Modern African Studies, 11, 1, 1973:68-69

These activities are often illegal contravening local laws related to selling on the streets and hours of business operations. Workers employed in these activities have in the main, low formal skill training although, as pointed out by Sethuraman (1976)⁹⁴ many have skills that were acquired outside the formal education system. Because of this lack of skill and also because of the "fragility" of many informal sector activities, earnings are low and often irregular. Workers are not included in the social security benefits or pension schemes, and in general, are not members of unions. This means that the informal labour force is easily exploited, manipulated, and, when necessary, discarded. Workers productivity falls on the low end of the scale, not because of laziness, but principally because of lack of access to technology in any form. Labour intensive methods of production are used which cannot compete with larger operations using up-to-date methods. Considering the above, it is logical to assume that for workers in this sector capital accumulation is almost non-existent, and their purchasing power is severely limited.

"Definitions of the informal sector vary greatly, but the usual characteristics include a lack of official registration, a dominance of self-employment, a low capital-labour ratio, often the production of low-quality goods and services, high levels of competition, easy entry, restricted access to credit and limited capacity for accumulation."⁹⁵

Although discussed by many writers, the dualistic approach to the formal and

⁹⁴ S. V. Sethuraman. "The urban informal sector: concept, measurement and policy." International Labour Review, Vol. 114, No.1, July-August 1976:71

⁹⁵ Gerry Rodgers. "Introduction: Trends in Urban Poverty and labour market access." Gerry Rodgers (ed). Urban Poverty and the Labour Market: Access to Jobs and Incomes in Asian and Latin American Cities. Geneva: International Labour Organization (ILO), 1989:9

informal sectors emanating from the modernization theory, has recently been discarded on the grounds of oversimplification. Bromley (1978) found that the distinctions being made between the sectors were often difficult to observe and he preferred to identify the relationship as a "continuum". The two sectors, to him, had many similar characteristics.⁹⁶ Connolly (1985) states that one of the most common misconceptions about the sectors is that there is a "distinction" or division made between them - that they are somehow isolated from one another.⁹⁷ She also points out that the informal sector is often described in negative terminology - illegal, disorganized, uneducated - leaving the formal sector in a more positive light.⁹⁸ The idea of the duality of the sectors is also dismissed by Brydon and Chant (1989) who say that the sectors are "connected" and "interlinked".⁹⁹

Moreover, it has become evident that the informal sector is not homogeneous - neither the sector itself nor its sub-sectors. Clark (1988) points this out in her

⁹⁶ Ray Bromley. "Introduction - The Urban Informal Sector: Why is it worth discussing?" World Development, Vol.6, No.9/10, 1978:1033-1039

⁹⁷ Priscilla Connolly. "The Politics of the Informal Sector: A Critique." Nanneke Redclift and Enzo Mingione (eds). Beyond Employment: Household, Gender and Subsistence. New York: Basil Blackwell Inc., 1985

⁹⁸ Connolly 64

⁹⁹ Lynne Brydon and Sylvia Chant. Women in the Third World: Gender Issues in Rural and Urban Areas. New Brunswick, New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 1989

introduction to the research carried out on traders.¹⁰⁰ MacEwen Scott (1986) also notes this in her study of market sellers in Lima, Peru. The heterogeneity of the sector is evident in the type and size of activities; in the amount of capital necessary to start activities; and in the differences in incomes earned.¹⁰¹ Nevertheless, in discussions of the informal sector in the literature, the particular situation of women is seldom addressed, and one is left to assume that conditions which apply to men also apply to women. This is not the case.

Women in the Informal Sector: factors affecting participation

In the ever-expanding informal sector, women play a major role. According to Bonilla (1990), 52% to 62% of informal sector workers in Mexico are women, and between 1985 and 1988, women's contribution to household income in the lowest-income informal sector families rose from 20% to 32.4%.¹⁰²

Reasons for women's participation in informal sector activities are many and varied. Several authors have cited women's general lack of access to the formal sector

¹⁰⁰ Gracia Clark. "Introduction." Gracia Clark (ed). Traders Versus the State: Anthropological Approaches to Unofficial Economies. Boulder; London: Westview Press, 1988

¹⁰¹ Victor E. Tokman. "Policies for a Heterogeneous Informal Sector in Latin America." World Development, Vol.17, No.7, 1989:1069

¹⁰² Elssy Bonilla. "Working Women in Latin America." Inter-American Development Bank. Economic and Social Progress in Latin America: 1990 Report. Washington: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1990

(Sethuraman 1976; Bonilla 1990; Goodale 1989). Bonilla (1990) points out that women are unable to find work in the formal sector which could reflect a lack of jobs in that sector. In other words, the process of industrialization has not been able to keep pace with the demand for jobs created by the constant and steadily-growing rate of urbanization and the swelling ranks of the potential labour force. It could also mean a lack of necessary qualifications on the part of the women to undertake formal sector work. Goodale (1989) stresses the angle of "lack of access" which indeed may reflect some of the structural constraints surrounding women's entry into the labour force. Draper (1985) equates this lack of access for women to jobs in the formal sector with certain assumptions about the types of jobs that are seen as appropriate for women. Consequently, in her view, women are restricted to unskilled, low-paying jobs despite any economic progress that is made.¹⁰³ This argument is substantiated by Babb (1984) in her study of market women in Huaraz, Peru. She discovered that women comprised the majority of marketers. One of the reasons for this stemmed from the fact that marketing or petty trading was viewed as "fitting for women".¹⁰⁴ Challenges to this line of thinking have come from Arizpe (1977) who states that "participation in the informal labour sector does not automatically result from lack of jobs in the other sectors."¹⁰⁵ She goes on to explain that traditional

¹⁰³ Elaine Draper. "Women's Work and Development in Latin America." Studies in Comparative International Development, Spring, 1985:3-30

¹⁰⁴ Florence E. Babb. "Women in the Marketplace: Petty Commerce in Peru." Review of Radical Political Economies, Vol. 16(1), 1984:51

¹⁰⁵ Lourdes Arizpe. "Women in the Informal Labour Sector: The Case of Mexico City." SIGNS, 3, 1977:28

informal sector activities continue to fill a need for consumers and a demand for labour, and are usually not affected by variations in the labour market. In her study of market sellers in Bogota, Colombia, Caroline Moser (1977) supports Arizpes' view. Her research revealed that the market sellers (men and women) did not necessarily want employment in the formal sector, and she goes on to say that "too strong an emphasis may have been placed on the modernization type assumption that there is movement from this type of employment into the wage labour force."¹⁰⁶ Based on an assessment of the informal sector in Rhodesia, Rob Davies (1979) also discovered that not all informal sector workers wanted employment in the formal sector.¹⁰⁷ Also in my own research in Mexico (1991), I found that some of the women preferred the flexibility of work in the informal sector, mainly because it allowed them to combine their domestic responsibilities, especially child care, with their paid labour.

This highlights one of the main factors affecting women's participation in informal sector activities - the restrictions of their domestic responsibilities. Household and family obligations restrict the woman's choice of employment as well as her mobility. Because of this, women are pushed into specific areas of the informal sector. These

¹⁰⁶ Caroline Moser. "The Dual Economy and the Marginality Debate and the Contribution of Micro Analysis: Market Sellers in Bogota." Development and Change, 8, 2, 1977:485

¹⁰⁷ Rob Davies. "Informal Sector or Subordinate Mode of Production? A Model." Ray Bromley and Chris Gerry (eds). Casual Work and Poverty in Third World Cities. Chichester; New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1979:94

can be grouped into four main categories - petty trading, street/market vending, domestic service, and, particularly in Mexico City, subcontracting or outworking. In each of these categories, it is apparent that women can be situated near or in their homes to carry out the work, and that the activities are closely related to their domestic tasks of food preparation, cleaning, washing, sewing, etc. Brydon and Chant (1989) cite this as one of the major reasons for women not being involved in the formal sector.¹⁰⁸ Alternatively, if a woman is unable to secure employment at or near her home, she often chooses a job to which she can take small children. Lubell (1991) sees this combination of income-earning and unpaid household work as a distinct handicap to women in the informal sector, limiting their productivity and mobility.¹⁰⁹ Referring to women undertaking subcontracting work in Mexico City, Bonilla (1990) found that 37% of those interviewed indicated that they were involved in such work because it allowed them to carry out their domestic responsibilities.¹¹⁰ Subcontracting work, according to Ward (1990) is often seen by men as an extension of the woman's household tasks, therefore it is not given any importance, nor does it increase the woman's economic status relative to that of men.¹¹¹ For example, in 1980, 72% of informal sector women in Mexico earned below the minimum wage.

¹⁰⁸ Brydon and Chant 176

¹⁰⁹ Harold Lubell. The Informal Sector in the 1980's and 1990's. Paris: OECD (Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development), 1991:100

¹¹⁰ Bonilla 235

¹¹¹ Kathryn Ward. "Introduction and Overview." Kathryn Ward (ed). Women Workers and Global Restructuring. New York: ILR Press, 1990:11

The question of mobility for women in the informal sector also colours their decisions regarding the type of work undertaken. Having noted that petty trading and street/market vending are areas of the informal sector in which women are highly involved, it is essential to discuss how restricted mobility affects women in these activities. Caroline Moser (1981) amply illustrates this in her study of women in a shantytown in Guayaquil, Ecuador. Success in trading and vending depends almost entirely on what is sold and where it is sold. According to Moser (1981), in shantytowns, prepared foods as well as fruits and vegetables are the most common items sold. These are sold in various locations which may include a fixed stand in the market or a shop; housefront locations (outside the sellers house); or carried around the community (mobile-selling). Whatever the method, it is devised by the woman to suit her situation. Those with children usually prefer to have housefront stores and sell outside their homes. In this way they can supervise children at the same time. Fixed location stands or shops are often owned by men and run as a family business, so the role of the woman in that situation is different. She often prepares the food, sells it at the stand or shop , but doesn't receive any of the profit. Mobile selling is done mainly by men, although again, women prepare the food to be sold. Men have the advantage in this form of selling, as they can move about the community more easily than women who are hampered by domestic responsibilities.¹¹²

¹¹² Caroline Moser. "Surviving in the Suburbios." Kate Young and Caroline Moser (eds). Women in the informal sector. IDS Bulletin, Vol.12, No.3, July, 1981:25-26

This leads into another prominent and important factor influencing a woman's participation in the informal sector - male attitudes and male domination. Even in poor families, husbands often restrict their wives from seeking employment. This is a method of control - of the enforcement, in Latin America particularly, of the concept of machismo - so that the man can remain to be seen as the "breadwinner" and provider for the family. Control of their wives' mobility is also related to the fear that, if allowed to associate with other men, wives will be unfaithful. Roldan (1985) in her study of women outworkers in Mexico City discovered that one of the main reasons why women did not accept work outside the home was due to the opposition from their husbands. This, as Roldan points out, illustrates the attitude to the "domestic/maternal" role of women.¹¹³ Clark (1988) brings up the point of harassment by men, of female street traders. This threatens the women's trading locations and, consequently, their productivity.¹¹⁴

Associated with male dominance but a factor in its own right is a woman's marital status. In many cases this is directly associated with the age factor. As many studies have shown (Arizpe 1977; Draper 1985; Brydon and Chant 1989; Tokman 1989), young, single women have more chances for employment than older, married women

¹¹³ Martha Roldan. "Industrial Outworking, Struggles for the Reproduction of Working-class Families and Gender Subordination." Nanneke Redclift and Enzo Mingione (eds). Beyond Employment: Household, Gender and Subsistence. New York: Basil Blackwell Ltd, 1985:268

¹¹⁴ Clark 8

with children. Often young women enter the informal labour force as domestics, but once they have children, are forced to search for other work like street vending, petty trading or subcontracting, where their children can be supervised. Draper (1985), in her study of women's work in Latin America, states that,

"Compared with domestic servants, women who work in the informal labour sector are older and more likely to be married."¹¹⁵

Moser (1977) supports this in her description of the women market sellers in Bogota. Approximately 50% of those interviewed in her survey began their selling careers when they were over 40 years old and past child-bearing. Many had to take on this work as a means of self-support. Women who began market selling at a much younger age were often former domestics who had been unable to retain their positions once a child was born. Many of these women were also deserted wives.¹¹⁶

Jelin (1977) draws attention to the age and marital status of domestic workers in Latin American cities and concurs with the findings of Moser and Draper.

"It is quite likely that many rural families allow their daughters to move to the city just because there are jobs in domestic service available..... Thus, in part, the migration of young women to cities is encouraged by the existence of this occupational alternative."¹¹⁷

In a similar vein, Tokman (1989) points out the difference that age can make to the types of activities in which women are engaged. His findings in Latin America also

¹¹⁵ Draper 8

¹¹⁶ Moser 483

¹¹⁷ Elizabeth Jelin. "Migration and Labour Force Participation of Latin American Women: The Domestic Servants in the Cities." SIGNS, 3, 1977:136

support the fact that younger women are domestic workers while older women are often involved in petty commerce or are self-employed.¹¹⁸ In her research on maquiladora women in Northern Mexico, Tiano (1990) finds that amongst the workers in these factories approximately 80% are young women.¹¹⁹

Considering the evidence from a wide variety of research, there can be little doubt that both age and marital status are important factors not only in the types of paid activities women do, but also in the location and status of these activities. Connected to this is the increase in the number of female-headed households and therefore the necessity for women to enter the workforce in order to support themselves and their children. According to Berger (1989), this increase in female-headed households is one of the changes that, over the past two decades, has caused an increase in the number of women in the labour force in Latin America. Berger goes on to amplify this by explaining that, (i) female heads of households have a higher participation rate in the informal sector than women in general; (ii) this participation is motivated by economic necessity; and (iii), despite this, female heads of households are amongst the lowest earners in the informal sector.¹²⁰ This increase in female-headed

¹¹⁸ Tokman 1071

¹¹⁹ Susan Tiano. "Maquiladora Women: A New Category of Workers?" Kathryn Ward (ed). Women Workers and Global Restructuring. New York: ILR Press, 1990:198-199

¹²⁰ Marguerite Berger. "An Introduction." Marguerite Berger and Mayra Buvinic (eds). Women's Ventures: Assistance to the Informal Sector in Latin America. Connecticut: Kumarian Press Inc., 1989:3-4

households has made the need for jobs close to home more urgent. The alternative is for women to rely on other females in the household to share the job of childcare. Those choices highlight the balancing act carried out by women every day in relation to their productive and reproductive work. Brydon and Chant (1989) attribute the increase in female-headed households in Latin America to three main factors. First, the lack of employment opportunities in rural areas, created in part by the modernization of agriculture. Here, Mexico is a case in point. Although the agricultural sector in Mexico has sustained a steady growth rate since World War II, the focus of agriculture has shifted from domestic to export-oriented production. Because of this, small farmers and agricultural workers, particularly women, have been displaced by sophisticated machines and technology. Hence, this has caused a city-ward migration of displaced agricultural workers seeking employment in urban areas. Second, Brydon and Chant point out that women have a longer life expectancy than men; and third, the cultural concept of machismo, and its resulting oppression and subordination of women, is often a factor in the formation of female-headed households.¹²¹ Goodale (1989) stresses the urgent need for money by female heads of households, but also points out some of the obstacles encountered by them in their quest for survival.

"These women not only earn lower incomes than male heads of households but they typically have more dependents and fewer adults contributing to the household income. In addition, they suffer from a relative lack of access to productive resources such as credit, technology and land. This situation is of particular concern in view of

¹²¹ Brydon and Chant 146-147

the growing number of households which are supported solely by women."¹²²

Low incomes and lack of access to the means of production are highlighted in Buvinics' (1983) assessment of female-headed households.¹²³ Inaccessibility to capital, technology, markets and information hampers women's ability to increase their productivity or secure better jobs. Besides being bound to the house because of domestic responsibilities, women involved in industrial outworking in Mexico City have the added disadvantage of being secluded from other workers and therefore lack information about other employment possibilities. According to Roldan (1985), this constitutes one of the reasons why women opted for outworking - lack of information.¹²⁴ In her study of market sellers in Bogota, Moser (1977) relates the availability of capital to the age and sex of the market sellers, saying "that ultimately it is the age and sex of each seller on entry which determines the level of capital resources available and consequently the scale of operation..." It is the older women sellers who have little capital and who are usually economically "downwardly

¹²² Gretchen Goodale. "Training for women in the informal sector." Fred Fluitman (ed). Training for Work in the Informal Sector. Geneva: International Labour Office, 1989:49-50

¹²³ Mayra Buvinic. "Women's Issues in Third World Poverty: A Policy Analysis." Mayra Buvinic, Margaret A. Lycette, and William Paul McGreevey (eds). Women and Poverty in the Third World. Baltimore and London: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983:17

¹²⁴ Roldan 268

mobile."¹²⁵ Because, in many cases, women still need a husbands' or fathers' signature to obtain credit, these deserted and widowed market sellers are further disadvantaged. Accessibility to capital, markets and information are directly related to job access for the urban poor in Latin America, and according to Rodgers (1989), this applies particularly to those seeking self-employment. Capital is needed to begin a small business; markets are vital for selling the products of the business; and routine information, like how to obtain necessary documentation, facilitates easier operation and fewer legal hassles.¹²⁶ All of this is made more difficult for poor women who are restricted by their reproductive roles: lack of mobility; and, in many cases, isolation.

Although most writers (Roldan 1985; Chant 1987; Safa 1974; Brydon and Chant 1989; Moser 1977; Rodgers 1989; Lubell 1991) agree that the lack of education and training of women in the informal sector limits their job possibilities, there has been some debate principally by Arizpe (1977) to the contrary. Roldan (1985) and Chant (1987) both agree that, in relation to men, women workers lack education and training. In her study of female labour in Queretaro, Mexico, Chant discovered that women fell far behind men in literacy and educational levels, a fact which for her, is directly linked to the difference in the types of jobs and income potential between women and men. Moreover, in her study, women in domestic service and trading had

¹²⁵ Moser 482-483

¹²⁶ Rodgers 13

the least education.¹²⁷ Safas' (1974) research on women's work in a shantytown in Puerto Rico revealed that menial, low-paying jobs were equated with the women's low level of education. Most women took on jobs as domestics, while others ventured into illegal activities out of the necessity to earn cash for survival.¹²⁸ Years later, Brydon and Chant (1989) in their examination of women in urban labour markets came to the same conclusion - lack of education restricts job access. They then linked education to the sexual division of labour.

"The reasons that men generally have higher educational standards than women relate very much to the sexual division of labour and women's domestic roles."¹²⁹

Moser (1977) states quite clearly that women market sellers in Bogota were worse off and at a distinct disadvantage because they were unskilled and illiterate. This situation applied particularly to the older women sellers.¹³⁰

Notwithstanding the amount of evidence pointing to lack of education as a limiting factor to women's access to the labour market, Arizpe (1977) comes up with different findings and conclusions in her study of women in the informal labour sector in

¹²⁷ Sylvia Chant. "Family structure and female labour in Queretaro, Mexico." Janet Henshall Momsen and Janet Townsend (eds). Geography of Gender in the Third World. London: State University of New York Press, 1987:286-287.

¹²⁸ Helen Icken Safa. The Urban Poor of Puerto Rico: A Study in Development and Inequality. New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, Inc., 1974:28

¹²⁹ Brydon and Chant 182

¹³⁰ Moser 483

Mexico City.

"Since women with schooling have higher unemployment figures than their male counterparts, education, contrary to what is frequently argued, does not represent the determining factor in women's unemployment."¹³¹

Arizpe cites age as a limiting factor for older women and also the unavailability of jobs. Because of this, women resort to low-paying informal sector jobs for survival.

Apart from age, other personal characteristics often affect a woman's access to paid labour. Depending on the type of job, these can range from docility and initiative to migrant status.¹³² Women working on assembly lines piecing together radios, or contracted as outworkers for garment industries are often employed for their manual dexterity. It has been "accepted" that women are able to do this tedious, low-paying work better than men, regardless of whether or not it is true.

"It is widely believed that the manual dexterity and patience that "naturally" suit women to minute, repetitive, and boring tasks are integral aspects of women's "essential" nature. The fact that the maquiladora workforce consists primarily of women is offered as proof of the stereotypes' accuracy."¹³³

Beneria and Roldan (1987) in their work with women outworkers and factory workers in Mexico City, concluded that the principal reasons for hiring women for these jobs included their "careful manual work", "discipline and patience", and "ability

¹³¹ Arizpe 37

¹³² Rodgers 13

¹³³ Susan Tiano. "Maquiladoras, Women's Work and Unemployment in Northern Mexico." Aztlan, Vol.15, No.2, Fall, 1984:372

to follow orders", which, overall, gave the impression to employers that such women were less likely to cause disturbances. This could be the explanation for recruiting women to such jobs or it could be a rationalization for once again relegating women to marginal, subordinate positions. Nevertheless, Beneria and Roldan propose that the main purpose for hiring women to these jobs is the low wage paid.¹³⁴

The underlying factor affecting women's participation in the informal sector is poverty. Because of the ever-increasing numbers of poor women especially in urban areas, poverty has gradually become "feminized". Poor women have to have money to survive and to support their families. Even those women in nuclear families are forced into the workforce because in most cases the male wage is either insufficient, or it is not used for appropriate household needs. Instead of being secondary wage earners, women are often the main providers for their families. In many instances, women are forced to rely on other female household members or neighbours in order to carry out the demands of both productive and reproductive work. By doing this, women reinforce the cycle of constant demands on women's time, physical labour and often financial resources. Women become poorer and even more marginalized.

¹³⁴ Lourdes Beneria and Martha Roldan. The Crossroads of Class and Gender. Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1987:47-49

Women in the informal sector: the issues

In any discussion of women's work in the informal sector, it is difficult to distinguish the issues from the participation factors as, in some ways, they are inter-related. For the purpose of this discussion, issues will be those points which need to be addressed to improve women's position in the sector.

The question of why poor women are relegated to low-paying jobs can be partly answered with reference to ideology and culture. This is the way in which certain jobs are deemed appropriate for women. Society perpetuates this and, even sanctions it, as MacEwen Scott (1986) recounts, with "gossip and ridicule".¹³⁵ It is therefore unusual for women to transgress into a male job domain in informal sector activities. If this happens, women often pay the price with continued harassment which sometimes leads to violence. Draper (1985) affirms this by saying that one of the reasons that women are more prominent in informal sector jobs is simply because of assumptions about the appropriateness of certain jobs.¹³⁶ Although there was initial resistance to the employment of women in the maquilas, the ideology that women are more suitable for this type of tedious work than men has gradually broken down that resistance.¹³⁷ This ideological barrier to women's improved

¹³⁵ Alison MacEwen Scott. "Economic Development and Urban Women's Work: the Case of Lima, Peru." Richard Anker and Catherine Hein (eds). Sex Inequalities in Urban Employment in the Third World. New York: St. Martin's Press, 1986:318

¹³⁶ Draper 11

¹³⁷ Tiano 218

position in the informal labour force has continued to accentuate the inequality between men and women workers, and, accompanied by political and legal attitudes, helps to keep women marginalized.

According to Babb (1988), political barriers have been taken to the extreme in the case of the marketers in Peru, 80% of whom are women. With the Peruvian economy in a state of crisis and with food prices rising daily, the government, according to Babb, seems to be clamping down on marketers. The marketers have become scapegoats for the governments' restrictive policies and their attempts to curtail rising food prices. Heavy taxes and fines have been levied on marketers, making it difficult for the poorer ones (usually women) to stay in business. The government even introduced a scheme called "From Field to Cooking Pot" to circumvent marketers altogether by encouraging producers to sell directly to consumers. This eventually failed as producers preferred to sell through marketers than to sell produce directly to consumers. Even though this proved that the marketers were providing a service, the Peruvian government has continued to place heavy restrictions on marketers.¹³⁸ Those who suffer most in this situation are poor women - not only the marketers, but other women who rely on their services.

¹³⁸ Florence E. Babb. "From the Field to the Cooking Pot: Economic Crisis and the threat to Marketers in Peru." Gracia Clard (ed). Traders versus the State: Anthropological Approaches to Unofficial Economies. Boulder; London: Westview Press, 1988:17-26

How women's informal sector work fits into the capitalist system of accumulation has been the subject of many debates (Draper 1985; Acharya 1983; Brydon and Chant 1989; Tokman 1989). Using the ideology of "appropriate" jobs for women, governments, through various legal methods, keep women working for low wages. This, in turn, facilitates capital accumulation. Along with the issue of low pay, Brydon and Chant also point out that capitalism benefits directly from the work women do in reproducing the labour force. Here, women fulfill a function which, if provided by the state, would be much more costly.¹³⁹ Women's labour is often considered as a surplus commodity, being called into service when needed and discarded as demand changes.

These attitudes towards women's informal sector work as well as the reproductive roles in the household form the basis of gender segregation which stems from the sexual division of labour in the household and continues with class divisions in society at large. Feldman (1991) suggests that, until recently, discussions of the informal sector have not addressed the issue of gender relations. This, she says, has happened because of a number of reasons. First, women's work has been invisible. (Also pointed out by Berger 1989 and Goodale 1989). In other words, the productive work that women do, especially within their homes as outworkers or subcontractors, has been ignored. Second, if this home-based work is recognized at all, it is seen as either "unproductive household work" or "unproductive domestic work". Third, women's

¹³⁹ Brydon and Chant 184-185

time and skills are assumed to be available at the whim of capitalist producers, able to be utilized when needed. Feldman goes on to say that,

"What is clearly visible here is the assumption that there is a "natural division of labour" between home and work, unremunerated and wage employment, private and public space, and men's and women's social roles and access to resources. This assumed natural division of labour, with the patriarchal controls that enable women's labour to be deployed, characterizes much of the research on self-employment, the productive capacity of petty commodity producers, and the allocation of household time."¹⁴⁰

In part because of this "invisibility" of women's informal sector work, but also because of the ideology surrounding it, data collection on women's economic input is often inaccurate and incomplete. Jelin (1977) refers to this in discussing the type of work undertaken by women prior to migration and after they arrive in the cities. Because of lack of reliable data, it was difficult for Jelin to assess the importance of women's migration to the city.¹⁴¹ In her call for a "reconceptualization" of women's work, Draper (1985) points out the lack of attention given to women's informal work and the consequent under-recording of its productivity. Although informal work plays a major part in women's economic activities, in most cases, it is not included in the gross national product of countries in Latin America.¹⁴² Tokman (1989) and Lopez and Pollack (1989) in their separate studies of the informal sector in various Latin

¹⁴⁰ Shelley Feldman. "Still Invisible: Women in the Informal Sector." Rita S. Gallin and Anne Ferguson (eds). The Women and International Development Annual, Volume 2. Boulder; San Francisco: Westview Press, 1991:68

¹⁴¹ Jelin 134

¹⁴² Draper 19

American countries reveal similar figures in their estimates of women's participation in the sector. Referring to Brazil and Chile, Tokman indicates that about 40% of informal jobs are undertaken by women.¹⁴³ In agreement with Tokman, Lopez and Pollack in their study of Colombia, Venezuela, Panama, Costa Rica and Brazil, estimate the figure at between 30% and 50%.¹⁴⁴ In the publication, Economic and Social Progress in Latin America: 1990 Report, circulated by the Inter-American Development Bank, Elssy Bonillas' section on "Working Women in Latin America" includes some statistics on labour force participation for both men and women. According to this data, 27.4% of women were in the labour force in Brazil in 1990; 28.5% in Chile; and 27.1% in Mexico.¹⁴⁵

"Lack of understanding of the complexity of the work performed by young people and especially of the household work performed by women has often led society to ignore or discount such work. This limitation has had a particularly negative impact upon statistics relating to women..."¹⁴⁶

It is becoming more apparent that the "complexity" of women's work mentioned by Bonilla includes more than their productive and reproductive tasks. In many areas, women are involved in community organizing. A prime example of this is the establishment, by poor women, of the Peoples' Kitchens (also known as

¹⁴³ Tokman 1071

¹⁴⁴ Cecilia Lopez M. and Molly Pollack E. "The incorporation of women in development policies." CEPAL Review, No.39, December, 1989:41

¹⁴⁵ Bonilla 222

¹⁴⁶ Bonilla 218

Neighbourhood Kitchens) in shantytowns in Peru. The aim of these kitchens is to provide inexpensive meals, especially for children whose parents are working away from the house during the day. The kitchens also help to maintain family members and others who are temporarily or permanently without a source of income. Usually, 20 to 25 families pool their resources - labour and capital - to operate a kitchen. At the end of 1988, there were 1500 kitchens in Lima, 300 of those being in the shanty town of Villa El Salvador. Although these kitchens are an embarrassment, the government has not been able to provide any alternative relief for the situation of the urban poor.¹⁴⁷ Although these kitchens provide an essential service to poor communities, they increase, dramatically, the workload of already over-worked poor women and lead to what many researchers have recognized as the triple day for women.

"Because the triple role of women is not recognized, so neither is the fact that women, unlike men, are severely constrained by the burden of simultaneously balancing these three roles of productive, reproductive and managing work."¹⁴⁸

It is interesting to note the paradox here. While poor urban women marketers in Peru are harassed and exploited by the government for trying to earn a living to support their families, those same women are acknowledged as resourceful and

¹⁴⁷ Peru. Villa El Salvador, A Desert Dream. Produced by Luc Cote and Robbie Hart. Directed by Robbie Hart, Luc Cote and Joel Bertomen. 50 mins. 30 secs. Co-produced by Adobe Foundations and CIDA. 1989. Videocassette.

¹⁴⁸ Caroline O. N. Moser and Caren Levy. A Theory and Methodology of Gender Planning: Meeting Women's Practical and Strategic Needs. DPU Gender and Planning Working Paper No.11; University College, London: 1986:4

innovative for organizing the Neighbourhood Kitchens. Of course, by working in the Kitchens, the women provide a social welfare program which should be carried out by the government. In this situation, the government gains, and poor women lose.

Referring to women outworkers in Mexico City, Roldan (1985) notes that, in their case, the triple day refers to the fact that many of the women are involved in household tasks, outworking jobs and other income-earning activities which vary from taking in laundry and small-scale retailing, to selling Avon products. This, Roldan states, is one of the reasons why women's participation in productive and reproductive activity is underestimated - it remains invisible. This invisibility is often enhanced by the help from other female household members, who make the tasks seem less arduous and time-consuming.¹⁴⁹ In my own research in Mexico (1991), I was able to observe the "triple day" in action. One of the shantytown women in particular was the sole support of a household of six children. Apart from her heavy reproductive responsibilities, she took in laundry and ironing as part of her productive work. On top of this, she organized the ordering, delivery and distribution of lamina pieces (used for roofs and walls) given to poor families by the PRI (Mexico's ruling political party). In a subsequent conversation, she mentioned to me her desire to interest her immediate neighbours in the construction of a water catchment tank which would ensure that water would be close at hand, and would save the long daily walks by the women to the spring. It is worth commenting here

¹⁴⁹ Roldan 264

on the effects of the triple day on poor women. Undoubtedly, it takes its toll physically, mentally and emotionally. Outworkers and subcontractors can become mentally and emotionally depressed because of their isolation and the monotony of their tasks, while vendors, traders and domestic workers become physically stressed and tired. In both cases, this often affects child bearing.

While recognizing that women play a major role in informal sector activity, are we to assume that because of this their status is enhanced, and that, in some way they are empowered? There seems to be some debate on two fronts. First, are women empowered by work in the informal sector? Second, if their status is improved, how advantageous is it to the women? Ward (1990), when speaking of informal sector activities in general, and subcontracting in particular, believes that these activities don't lead to long-term empowerment for women. Alternatively, those working in assembly plants/factories do have some economic independence, and, by interacting with other workers, women have the opportunity to form solidarity groups.¹⁵⁰ In a study of women workers in the informal sector in Calcutta, Banerjee (1985) notes that although the financial contribution of these women is vital to their families' survival, their status remains secondary. She found that women workers in her study had minimally better status than other women, with indicators of this improved status being manifest through a voice in family decision-making and help with domestic

¹⁵⁰ Ward 14

tasks.¹⁵¹ Roldan (1985) found that work in industrial subcontracting in Mexico City gave women some "self esteem" and "confidence" but did little to overcome gender dependency.¹⁵²

The phenomena of urbanization cannot be overlooked in any discussion of increased participation of women in the informal sector. A number of writers (Jelin 1977; Bienen 1984; Roberts 1973; Orlansky and Dubrovsky 1978) agree that, in Latin America, women predominate in rural-urban migration. Jelin, Bienen, and Orlansky and Dubrovsky take this a step further by stating that the majority of the newly-arrived women find work as domestic servants. As discussed earlier, most domestic servants are young women who, after having a child, move on to other informal sector employment. Referring to Latin America, Tokman (1989) confirms the findings of other researchers.

"The occupational distribution of women in the informal sector is also revealing. Domestic service accounted for the majority of all women's employment in the informal sector between 1960 and 1980; in Brazil, Costa Rica and Chile, all domestic service jobs were held by women."¹⁵³

¹⁵¹ Nirmila Banerjee. Women Workers in the Unorganized Sector: the Calcutta experience. Hyderabad: Sangam Books, 1985:99

¹⁵² Roldan 281

¹⁵³ Tokman 1071

Women in the informal sector: plans and policies

In view of the multiplicity of issues facing women in the informal sector, planning for women in this sector presents particular challenges for planners, especially considering that, even today, women's work in the sector remains invisible. Speaking of the informal sector, Gershuny (1979) says that governments have three choices in relation to the informal sector. They can "ignore it; suppress it; or exploit it."¹⁵⁴ Although these three options are possible and are also practised to varying degrees by different governments, there is another option which could lead to the development of the sector - recognize it and deal with it. Lopez and Pollack (1989) suggest that plans and strategies for reaching women have failed because governments haven't been successful in reaching the poor which includes most women.¹⁵⁵

Since the ILO's adoption of the term "informal sector" in the early 1970's, and its further research, many other authors have contributed to the volume of literature on the informal sector. It has been dissected and put back together again. It has been examined in relation to the formal sector; to its role in urban employment; and to its input into the national economy. Types of work in the informal sector have been discussed, as well as types of people who work in the sector, their living conditions,

¹⁵⁴ J. I. Gershuny. "The Informal Economy: Its role in post-industrial society." Futures, February 1979:3

¹⁵⁵ Lopez and Pollack 37

and their survival strategies.

However, Tokman (1989) has suggested ways of planning for the informal sector, which revolves around four main proposals. At the time of Tokman's writing, Caroline Moser (1989) published an article on gender planning, particularly in relation to the developing world. Moser describes gender planning as, "a planning approach which, in taking account of the fact that women and men play different roles in Third World society and therefore often have different needs, provides both the conceptual framework and the methodological tools for incorporating gender into planning."¹⁵⁶ Moser believes that gender planning should aim to meet both practical and strategic gender needs for women. Tokman did address the position of women in the informal sector in his article, stating that, "Any policies directed toward the informal sector should explicitly incorporate the gender dimension, because the informal sector is increasingly becoming "feminized" in several Latin American countries."¹⁵⁷ The question that immediately springs to mind is, "Is this the only reason for incorporating gender into an analysis of the informal sector?"

Here I would like to examine and compare some of the points of view of Tokman and Moser in an effort to find an appropriate method of planning for women in the

¹⁵⁶ Caroline O. N. Moser. "Gender Planning in the Third World: Meeting Practical and Strategic Gender Needs." World Development, Vol.17, No.11, 1989:1799

¹⁵⁷ Tokman 1070

informal urban sector.

As mentioned, Tokman approached informal sector planning through four main proposals. The first proposal is based on providing informal sector workers with production assistance. He argues that, in most cases, workers in the sector have restricted access to resources such as capital and skills, as well as limited access to more dynamic markets. In order to overcome this, he suggests that mechanisms should be set up to allow easier access to markets, and facilitate participation of informal sector producers in a more competitive way. Informal sector producers need access to credit that doesn't depend on personal assets. Also, in order to improve production, workers need management and accounting training. These plans for productive assistance tend to favour the more "business-oriented" of the informal sector, but not necessarily the poorest in the sector, who are women. Women may not be managing businesses in the informal sector, but they are usually workers in such businesses. Moser labels this as the "anti-poverty" approach and suggests that there is a need to be wary of programs directed at providing employment and training for women, as they may reinforce the sexual division of labour within the household. Women's practical gender needs can be met by income-generating programs, "but unless employment leads to greater autonomy, it does not meet strategic gender needs."¹⁵⁸ Tokman's idea of facilitating access to credit could challenge the current banking structures and therefore lead to the meeting of both

¹⁵⁸ Moser 1813

practical and strategic gender needs.

The second proposal by Tokman is the welfare approach, which entails the improvement of basics such as health, nutrition, education and housing. He argues that once these basic needs are met, informal sector workers would be more productive and have better chances of securing jobs in the formal sector. This assumes that informal sector workers aspire to jobs in the formal sector. As we have seen this is not always the case as women often prefer the flexibility of work in the informal sector. The welfare approach tackles only practical gender needs.

Tokman's third proposal deals with legal recognition. His main aim here is to recognize and legalize the informal sector. In order to do this, he advocates challenging existing bureaucratic "red tape" which hampers the process of legalization of informal sector activities. Furthermore, he urges a revision of the taxation system, especially of the application of the value-added tax (VAT) applied to all businesses in Mexico. He suggests that informal sector producers be exempt from this tax, in order to make them more competitive on the open market. Because both of these initiatives are aimed at producers, they may have little direct impact on women. For women in particular he stresses equal rights in obtaining access without an accompanying male, to land, capital and credit. Moser term this the "equity" approach. Because it seeks to reduce inequality of access between men and women, this approach meets an important strategic gender need.

Finally, Tokman brings his proposals down to the "grassroots" or local level. He advocates giving more authority to local communities to deal with police harassment of vendors; legal regulations for shop owners; and the process of obtaining permits and licences for transportation activities.

"In order to take decisions, local governments need the authority and capability to answer and settle the claims that originate in the informal sector. Municipal government could be an appropriate level for analyzing and solving some informal sector problems, at the same time, the power to take decisions locally could enhance the efficiency of state and national governments."¹⁵⁹

What Tokman is really advocating here is a decentralization of planning - bringing it to the local level where the beneficiaries of the plans can be directly involved in the implementation of those plans. People then have some degree of control over their own lives. Moser calls this the "empowerment" approach, emphasizing that women through their own groups, need to challenge and question the power groups that formulate policies and plans which directly affect women's lives.

"... the empowerment approach recognizes the triple role of women and seeks through bottom-up women's organizations to raise women's consciousness to challenge their subordination."¹⁶⁰

In sum, both Tokman and Moser agree that there is a need for recognition of the informal sector and of women's role in it; that not only practical, but strategic gender needs must be addressed to challenge the inequities and power structures which

¹⁵⁹ Tokman 1075

¹⁶⁰ Moser 1815

inhibit women from full participation in the sector on an equal basis with men; that the state should intervene more effectively to facilitate some of these structural changes; and that women's needs, especially as they relate to the sexual division of labour, must be addressed separately, as women's lack of power and access keep them subordinated in the household, the workplace and the community at large.

The issues highlighted pertaining to women in the informal sector - ideology and culture, political barriers, capitalist system of accumulation, gender segregation, ineffective data collection on women's work, the triple day, women's status, and urbanization - answer some of the questions related to the overall status of Mexican women in society. In most cases, the issues point to a secondary status in a male-dominated society, through the underestimation of women's work and its value; the clear definition between reproductive and productive work; the gender relations which spill over from the household to the workplace; the glorification of a woman as wife and mother in order to further marginalize her, the political factors beyond the woman's control; and to the expectation that she will continue to work, regardless of the circumstances, to ensure the survival of herself and her children.

Therefore, I would argue that, by looking at women in the informal sector, the stage is set for examining the overall position of Mexican women. Do the issues affecting women in the informal sector apply to all Mexican women? - or do they only apply to certain classes of women? Are the issues less urgent for women with social,

economic and political status? Are these issues a continuing reflection of women's subordination, and if so, how do shantytown women fit into this pattern? Are the suggestions made by Tokman and Moser realistic in the Mexican context, and will they lead to an improvement in the status of poor women? The ultimate question is whether or not the barriers faced by women in the informal sector are barriers faced by women in all sectors of Mexican society. If this is so, we need to ask why and how this has occurred.

CHAPTER 4(B): WOMEN IN MEXICO

The image of the Mexican woman comes to us, over the centuries, as passive, humble, and self-sacrificing. First as a daughter, then as a wife and mother, she takes second place to the males in her life - brothers, fathers, husbands. The question is how did this image come about and how and why is it sustained in twentieth century Mexico?

The family has always been the focal point of Mexican life. In Colonial times, a marriage was often considered a coming-together of two families for improved social and economic status. A woman had very little say in this arrangement, and daughters were often married quite young with most between the ages of 14 and 18.¹⁶¹ There is no doubt that the family was male-dominated with the final authority resting with the husband/father who had control over both his wife and children. This included control over the wife's property and any legal transactions she made.¹⁶² Therefore, the institution of marriage reinforced the subordination of women and made it clear that a woman's family situation reflected her economic and social status in the community. Women did have the option of divorce, but this was used only as a last resort mainly to escape physically abusive relationships. By 1845, the state did have

¹⁶¹ Colin M. MacLachlan and Jaime E. Rodriguez O. The Forging of the Cosmic Race: A Reinterpretation of Colonial Mexico. Berkeley; Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1980:230-231

¹⁶² MacLachlan and Rodriguez O. 232

the power to punish husbands although the punishment usually depended on the amount of "provocation" under which the husband had been placed. It was also acceptable for husbands to "discipline" their wives, and "mild" physical abuse was not considered inappropriate or unacceptable.¹⁶³ On the other hand, single women from wealthy families, usually entered a convent at the "persuasion" of their families so that they would remain respectable.¹⁶⁴

"Lawbooks show that married women were the most restricted of any women and the only ones whose legal status did not improve over the first half of the nineteenth century."¹⁶⁵

During the Colonial period, the ideas of the Age of Enlightenment in Europe began to spill over into New Spain, and the question of women's education came to the fore. The rationale for education women was to make them better mothers, housewives and companions to men.¹⁶⁶ In other words, education would be designed to enhance the image of a woman as housewife and mother, and so keep her within the boundaries of a patriarchal structure. Around the turn of the nineteenth century, women's education was a controversial issue with some seeing it as advantageous to the family and society at large, while others saw it as a first step

¹⁶³ Silvia Marina Arrom. The Women of Mexico City: 1790-1857. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1985:218, 232, 237

¹⁶⁴ MacLachlan and Rodriguez O. 245

¹⁶⁵ Arrom 206

¹⁶⁶ Arrom 15-16

into a male domain. The idea became more accepted as the 1800's progressed, but, even so, only one-sixth of eligible girls were in primary school in 1838. Secondary school and university were not considered for women at that time.¹⁶⁷

If women fared poorly in marriage and in education, how then did they fare in the labour market? Speaking of Mexico City, Arrom (1985) tells us that the city was growing rapidly through migration from rural areas, and at the same time, it was becoming more industrialized. This, combined with the abolishment in 1799 of legal barriers to women's work, opened up new employment prospects for women.¹⁶⁸ A census was taken in 1811 and it revealed that women in Mexico comprised 30.9% of the labour force. Arrom sees this as an underestimation due to the methods of collecting such information and the fact that women did not always want it known that they were involved in paid work outside the household. The majority of working women (54%) were domestic servants which indicated that, at least in the urban areas, there was a large demand for household help.¹⁶⁹ It is interesting to note that the pattern has not changed much today, with domestic work as one of the main avenues of employment for women especially in urban areas. The census of 1811 also revealed that 20% of women worked in jobs related to food - preparing and/or

¹⁶⁷ Arrom 22-23

¹⁶⁸ Arrom 154

¹⁶⁹ Arrom 158

selling.¹⁷⁰ Again, this matches today's pattern of women's employment in the informal sector where the majority of street vendors, traders and marketers are women. It is therefore evident that in early nineteenth century Mexico City almost 75% of work performed by women was related to household tasks. Certain employment was completely out of bounds for women at the time - the clergy, the military, and government positions. Also the workers guilds which were formed by artisans excluded women from their membership. The only link women had to these guilds was through the preparing of materials to be used by male guild members.¹⁷¹

"Because so many of the married working women were self-employed, they were unable to combine household duties with work, supervising their offspring while they spun thread, cooked meals to sell, operated small stores out of their homes, or peddled their wares on the city streets."¹⁷²

Arrom's (1985) comment on the situation at that time reveals that women's choice of employment was dictated by their domestic responsibilities. The "double day" had emerged as women juggled productive and reproductive work in order to survive.

It must be kept in mind that this situation applied mainly to poorer women of the time. Middle class women usually became shopkeepers or teachers, while others turned to midwifery which was a respected and prestigious occupation. Regardless of their job, women's financial remuneration was lower than their male counterparts

¹⁷⁰ Arrom 158-159

¹⁷¹ Arrom 159, 163

¹⁷² Arrom 180

as women's wages were considered supplementary to the household income. As has been discussed, education played a major role in this inequality of pay, as women were restricted in formal educational opportunities and trained for domestic-related work. Women were often classed as "temporary" workers due to the belief that pregnancy and/or the demands of child care would take a women from the labour force at any time. The general assumption was that a women had a husband or other male to support her and therefore the money she earned wasn't necessary for her own economic survival.¹⁷³

Directly linked to the position of women in the family and in the workplace were the dual concepts of machismo and marianismo which are still evident today. The patriarchal overtones of machismo exalt male virility, superiority and strength. As the middle of the nineteenth century approached, the concept of marianismo began to surface in Mexican society. According to Stevens (1973), marianismo is the "cult of female spiritual superiority".¹⁷⁴ In other words, women are supposedly stronger and more superior to men in spiritual and moral aspects. Stevens (1973) argues that marianismo is not religiously aligned, but comes from the aura around the ability of women to produce children. This ties in with the cult of the "mother goddess" which

¹⁷³ Arrom 200

¹⁷⁴ Evelyn P. Stevens. "Marianismo: The Other Face of Machismo in Latin America." Ann Pescatello (ed). Female and Male in Latin America: Essays. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973:91

originated in the area around the Caspian Sea.¹⁷⁵ Arrom (1985), on the other hand, sees marianismo as aligned with the Victorianism of the second half of the nineteenth century which highlighted women's position in the family. This had a negative effect on Mexican women whose status was linked directly to that of the family, so that "when Mexicans spoke of raising women's status it was only to give them a more prominent role in the family."¹⁷⁶ In the context of nineteenth century Mexico, one wonders what that role would be, recognizing the complete authoritarian rule of males within the household. Perhaps it was, in some way, a compensation for women who endured continued repression and subordination within the household sphere.

Stevens (1973) raises the question related to marianismo and the percentage of women participating in the labour force in Latin America. According to the International Labour Organization (1985), 38% of North American women participated in the labour force; 34% of Western European women; 34% of Asian women; 33% of women from Oceania; 32% of African women; but only 24% of Latin American women.¹⁷⁷ In other words, is there a relationship with the exaltation of the mother in the home and her participation in paid labour? Do social and cultural barriers surrounding marianismo keep women in the home, and

¹⁷⁵ Stevens 92

¹⁷⁶ Arrom 253

¹⁷⁷ Jeanne Vickers (ed). Women and the World Economic Crisis. London; New Jersey: Zed Books Ltd, 1991:19

therefore dominated by men? Is the perpetuation of marianismo designed to keep women in their "natural" place, tending to household needs and nurturing children? One could argue as Arrom points out, that the development of marianismo took women away from public roles, particularly in the political sphere.¹⁷⁸

Conversely, Stevens(1973) believes that marianismo is advantageous to women at home and in the workplace. She notes that, "a Latin American mother is seldom faced with the dilemma, so publicized in the United States, of having to choose between her children or her paid job."¹⁷⁹ Her reason for this is that employers, recognizing and respecting the sanctity of motherhood are duty-bound to grant the mother leave to look after a sick child.¹⁸⁰ First, it is obvious that Stevens is speaking of the more well-to-do women in Latin America who have jobs in the formal sector. Poor women and those in shantytowns face the daily struggles of conflicts between productive and reproductive work. As discussed in previous chapters, the choice of productive work is often dependent on reproductive responsibilities, especially those related to child care. Second, Steven's assumption that employers willingly grant leave to women whose children are ill is questionable. Poor women work for economic survival. They usually work in the informal sector where they are either self-employed (street vendors, traders) or in domestic service.

¹⁷⁸ Arrom 263

¹⁷⁹ Stevens 99

¹⁸⁰ Stevens 99

In either situation, the question of leave from work to care for a sick child is seldom an option. For the self-employed woman, caring for a sick child means either ceasing to work until such time as the child is well, or attending to the child while continuing to work. For those in domestic service, the situation revolves around the employer and her/his relationship with the domestic help. In my own research in Mexico (1991), I discovered that one of the women who worked as a domestic had established a very good rapport with her employer over a number of years, and was able to negotiate time off when her children were ill, or other crisis situations arose. For others with whom I spoke, this was not an option. So, while marianismo may give the edge to middle and upper class women, I do not see it as advantageous for poor women. Stevens (1973) even goes so far as to refer to marianismo as "female chauvinism"¹⁸¹ - a strong endorsement for a concept with questionable benefits to the majority of women.

The twentieth century brought changes to Mexico which directly and indirectly affected the status of women. First, women participated in the Mexican Revolution of 1910 with its slogan of "land and liberty". Although their participation was recognized, after the Revolution women's agitation for suffrage was ignored. The new government was sceptical about allowing women to vote, fearing that women would cast their votes in favour of the church which had opposed the Revolution. As one of the aims of the new government was to curb the secular powers of the church, it

¹⁸¹ Stevens 100

felt that the female vote might hinder that aim.¹⁸² Therefore at this time women's political power was very limited. Second, the Constitution of 1917 reinforced the uncertainty of women's power in the political realm, although it did address some of their economic rights. Under the constitution, women were able to make contracts on their own without the consent of a male; to sue and be sued; and to hold property. Working women were eligible for benefits at the birth of a child. The constitution provided protection for women against night work and also against physically heavy and dangerous work.¹⁸³ One could question the "protection" clauses. Were they a further form of control by a male dominated society? From what kind of night work did women need protection? Was prostitution included in night work or was it overlooked because it related directly to male needs? Even the protection against dangerous and heavy work seems superfluous when poor women daily carried out work in both of those categories just to survive, and even night work, including prostitution, provided for some poor women the means to buy food for their children. In other words, I would argue that the constitution had little positive effect on the position of poor women and, in some ways, helped to keep

¹⁸² Margaret E. Leahy. "The Casa Prevails: Women in Mexico." Chap. in Development Strategies and the Status of Women: A Comparative Study of the United States, Mexico, the Soviet Union, and Cuba. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc., 1986:47-48

Roderic A. Camp. "Women and Political Leadership in Mexico: A Comparative Study of Female and Male Political Elites." The Journal of Politics, 41, no.2, May 1979:419

¹⁸³ Leahy 49

them marginalized and controlled.

A few years after the constitution was made public, women were granted the right to vote in local elections in the Yucatan (1922). The state of Chiapas followed in 1925. Although at first glance one might think that women's organizations pushed for the vote in these states, this was not the case. It seems that the governors of both states were forward-thinking - with a little help from their own wives.¹⁸⁴ The results of these elections demonstrated that women would not necessarily vote for the church as the post-revolutionary government had initially thought. Regardless of this, it was to be another twenty years, in 1946, before women had the right to vote in municipal elections, and then until 1953 when full female suffrage was granted.¹⁸⁵

The question at hand now is whether or not national suffrage has improved women's social, economic and political position in Mexico. Before addressing this question, it must be understood that, first, Mexico is a class society and therefore any changes or benefits may only affect women in certain classes while completely by-passing others. Women in the rural sector of Mexico are affected differently from those women in urban settings. Related to the issue of class, Meyer (1979) divides Mexico

¹⁸⁴ Leahy 48

Mary Elmendorf. "Mexico: The Many Worlds of Women." Janet Zollinger Giele and Audrey Chapman Smoch (eds). Women: Roles and Status in eight countries. New York; London: John Wiley & Sons, 1977:136

¹⁸⁵ Leahy 48

into three subcultures - folk, traditional, and modern. According to Meyer, women's status in each of these subcultures is quite different. For example, in the folk subculture which she estimates as 12 - 15% of the population, the family is paramount in the social structure and men and women fit "naturally" into their roles. Accounting for 50 - 60% of the population, the traditional subculture does not change to any large degree over time. It believes in the authority of the church and state and male and female roles are clearly defined. Kinship ties play an important part in this subculture and people rely on extended family in the establishment of a unit of production whether in the agricultural sector or the urban informal sector. In the modern sector, the focus is more on the individual with social status being based on achievement. Science and technology vie for attention with church teachings, and family planning is favoured. In this subculture, the value to women of their work comes through personal fulfillment.¹⁸⁶ If we use these categories, shantytown women would fall into the traditional subculture. The second consideration must be the industrialization policies of the Mexican government in the 1940's and '50's. When previously most of the population was centered in rural areas, the advent of industrialization changed that. People began migrating to cities, especially women who, as mentioned earlier, lost jobs as agricultural workers and then, in the cities joined the ranks of the poor in the informal sector.¹⁸⁷

¹⁸⁶ Victoria Junco Meyer. "Women in Mexican Society." Current History, 72, March 1979:121

¹⁸⁷ Leahy 49

In a markedly class society and with a shift in the focus of women's work, how then did women fare politically? Since 1975 women and men in Mexico have had equal rights under the law.¹⁸⁸ Unfortunately, within this system of legal equality, women face certain limitations. First, the political system itself presents a barrier and women are forced to work for change within a male-controlled and dominated structure. Even today, the social roles which women are "expected" to play are stumbling blocks to political action in favour of women's advancement. Also, the ruling political party - the Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI) - restricts women's participation in the party to the "official" interest groups which are already established by the male party members.¹⁸⁹ In this way, women's contributions are directed, supervised and censored by male counterparts. Although women do have limited opportunities for political involvement, the fact remains that these opportunities are only readily available to educated women. Therefore the majority of women are left out of this process. How then does the shantytown woman make her voice heard? Of course, she can exercise her right to vote. Time permitting, she can join an already-established group working for change within her community; she can form a group herself by organizing her neighbours; or she can seek change at her place of work through solidarity with other women. Without doubt, the shantytown woman is restricted in her options, all of which add into a triple day - productive work, reproductive work and community organizing. Yet, in my own experience in Mexico (1991), I found the

¹⁸⁸ Meyer 120

¹⁸⁹ Leahy 52

shantytown women with whom I interacted, politically aware. Several were involved in community organizations of various kinds. One woman in particular, already burdened with seven children, an unsupportive husband, and a job taking in laundry for others, took time to attend meetings related to the development of land on the edge of the shantytown. Another woman - a single mother with three children and a job selling flowers door-to-door - was involved in setting up an information booth for distribution of materials regarding the forth-coming elections. In my limited investigation, I found that shantytown women were aware and involved politically to the extent that their situation permitted.

Logan (1990) supports this view in her discussion of women's involvement in community-based organizations.

"The female activists who form the core of popular movements belie the stereotype of poor women as politically conservative, passive, or indifferent to the distribution of power and resources in their society. In fact, the formation of community-based movements in urban neighbourhoods by poor women is only the most recent example of their political activism."¹⁹⁰

Logan goes on to say that low-income women are motivated into mobilization by their own concept of themselves as mothers, responsible for the care and protection of their families.

"Urban poor women rally around the gendered role of motherhood as

¹⁹⁰ Kathleen Logan. "Women's Participation in Urban Protest." Joe Foweraker and Ann L. Craig (eds). Popular Movements and Political Change in Mexico. Boulder and London: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1990:150

a base for their mobilization."¹⁹¹

The reasons for mobilization are often centered around deteriorating living conditions in their poor communities, and their collective action is fortified by the already-existing kinship networks, compadrazgo relationships, friendships, and other forms of social interaction.¹⁹² Logan notes that although women are still involved in urban movements, their influence and power is being eroded as more men become involved in these movements and gradually take over the leadership. Poor women remain as followers.¹⁹³ Surely then, the needs of poor women become distorted as articulated by men on their behalf, and their voices become tempered by males with their own agendas who carry forward the patriarchal controls that continue to keep women in a secondary place in society. This situation reinforces the strong need to examine the position of shantytown women through the radical feminist approach to patriarchy, the gender relationships in both public and private spheres, and the concept of consciousness-raising for women without the overbearing influence of men.

What I want to point out here is that poor women have a constant battle to make their voices heard in the political arena. Even if their voices are heard, they need

¹⁹¹ Logan 152

¹⁹² Logan 158

¹⁹³ Logan 158

support from those women in particular, who are already in positions within government. Solidarity amongst the various classes of women in Mexico then becomes essential for an effective political voice.

Women's economic position since suffrage has not progressed very far. Perhaps for women from middle and upper classes who have access to higher education, this may not be the case, but for poor women, the daily struggle for survival continues. Although men and women have the same rights to minimum wages and collective bargaining, in practice this doesn't always work for poor women because of the jobs they take out of economic necessity.¹⁹⁴ As already mentioned, the advent of industrialization has increased women's participation in the labour force. In the 1970's in Mexico, 62% of the total female labour force was involved in services with 25% of these women working as domestic servants. In the maquiladoras on the Mexico-U.S. border, women, in the 1970's, made up 80 - 90% of the workforce; and, on the other end of the scale, 17% of the female labour force held positions in professional and technical fields. Lest this be deceiving, it should be noted that these professional women made up only 2.2% of the total labour force.¹⁹⁵ Consequently, overall, women remain in lower-paying jobs restricted by lack of education, class status, male attitudes to women's work, and the different gender roles assigned to men and women.

¹⁹⁴ Leahy 55

¹⁹⁵ Leahy 57

These same constraints also limit women's social status. A good example of the restrictions and control still placed on women concerns the age at which men and women can marry. In both cases, marriage can take place at the age of 18, but girls can marry at 14 years of age provided that they have the consent of their father or their grandfather. The mother has no say in this arrangement.¹⁹⁶ This surely illustrates male control at its optimum level - control of the daughter and the wife concerning the one issue. In order to reinforce the idea of motherhood and of the woman as the one responsible for reproductive tasks, it is expected that the women will give up her job once married in order to devote her attention to the maintenance of the household. In doing this, her social status - by outward appearances - is enhanced as she functions within the accepted framework of the male-dominated society. Within the household itself, her perceived status goes unrecognized even when it comes to the number of children she will bear. That decision belongs to the male who must continually prove his virility and who is supported in this by the Catholic church.¹⁹⁷

For anyone who has watched a Mexican soap opera on television, it is perfectly clear that the image being portrayed is that of the passive, dependent women who relies on a male at every turn. Women are often shown as intellectually inferior to men and unable to survive without a man's protection and support. The popularity of these

¹⁹⁶ Leahy 59

¹⁹⁷ Leahy 59

programs is evident in all classes of society. I have seen middle class women rush home from appointments to watch these soap operas, or even organize their days around them. In the shantytown, where I carried out my research, television sets were not common, but I did visit a couple of homes in which small black and white televisions were in use with "borrowed" electricity. One particular scenario stands out in my mind. In a small one-room shack of tin and cardboard, a young girl of 14 sat each afternoon (she was on school holidays at the time) glued to the television screen watching as the media perpetuated the ideas of the male dominated female who accepts that as her role and basks in male attention. I wondered what was going through the mind of this 14 year old girl who each day spends three hours helping her mother with laundry at the river; who was responsible for the care of two younger brothers while her mother went to work; and who helped to collect water from the spring. Did she see the women in the soap opera as a step away from her existence in the male dominated shantytown community, or was she able to equate her situation to the one in the soap opera and realize that life can hold more? From a wider perspective, are soap operas, in portraying women as they do, deliberate propaganda aimed at keeping Mexican women in their place?

Butler Flora (1973) carried out an interesting comparative study between U.S. and Latin American fiction with a view to examining how the fotonovela in particular supported the idea of women's secondary status. The fotonovela is a small, pocket-

sized comic- style booklet which is geared to people with limited reading skills.¹⁹⁸

The stories in the fotonovelas parallel the message given out through the soap operas

- women should be humble, virtuous, passive and ever-dependent on a man.

"The universal stress on female passivity, plus the lack of class and national identification in Latin American fiction, suggests the counter-revolutionary potential for such literature, and the need to overcome the values they represent to mobilize women for radical change."¹⁹⁹

Over the centuries, the image of the Mexican woman has developed. It has been shaped by economic, political and social forces which are a product of male thinking and male perception of the role that women should play in society. These perceptions have then become institutionalized through marriage and accepted in the public sphere. For middle and upper class women in Mexico, some of these perceptions may be slowly changing. For shantytown women, the changes are not as evident as they continue to live and work in subordinate and oppressive situations.

As I proceed to take a close look at the lives of some of the women in the shantytown of Tetela de Monte, I hope to illustrate how the women's work, survival strategies and even their aspirations are directly related to their status as women in

¹⁹⁸ Cornelia Butler Flora. "The Passive Female and Social Change: A Cross-Cultural Comparison of Women's Magazine Fiction." Ann Pescatello (ed). Female and Male in Latin America: Essays. University of Pittsburgh Press, 1973:65

¹⁹⁹ Butler Flora 83

Mexico. In doing this, I will show that a more radical approach to the continuing male dominated position of shantytown women needs to be taken in order to secure effective and long-lasting changes in their lives.

CHAPTER 5: WOMEN'S SURVIVAL STRATEGIES: TETELA DEL MONTE AS A CASE STUDY

The questions

The focus of this chapter will be the daily lives of the women of the shantytown of Tetela del Monte in Mexico. It has already been shown that the lives of poor women in Mexico are the most marginalized and controlled. The male-dominated structures of Mexican society help to keep women in a subordinate position - socially, economically and politically. Within the household, gender relations dictate women's reproductive and productive roles; control their social contacts (therefore status); and limit their political involvement. It is now recognized that many poor women are involved in a triple day - productive work, reproductive work, and community organizing. All of these are directly connected to poor women's survival on a personal, household and community basis. The question is how do these women balance their triple day? How are these three forms of work integrated into their daily lives? What are the mechanisms put into place by the women to ensure their own survival and that of their families?

Socialist feminism helps us to answer these questions by looking at the issue of productive and reproductive work as well as gender relations within the household, and gives us a clearer understanding of class issues in Mexican society. Radical feminism offers a greater challenge to patriarchal constraints and male domination. It also focuses more closely on marriage as the main sphere of women's

subordination and oppression. Through a combination of these frameworks, the position of shantytown women becomes clearer.

The changing structure of the Mexican economy over the past several decades has further marginalized the poor, and especially women. Lack of jobs in rural areas, resulting in increased urbanization, and the governments policies of industrialization and international competitiveness have forced the poor into the cities and subsequently into low-paying jobs in the informal sector. The expansion of industry has not been able to provide sufficient work for an ever-increasing labour force and many of the urban poor are self-employed as street vendors and traders. Women make up a large portion of these workers and also predominate in the service sector as domestics - both jobs being seen as an extension of household responsibilities.

The benefits of Mexican modernization policies have not, as predicted, trickled down to the poor. If anything, these policies have made their struggle more difficult. Shantytowns and squatter settlements have sprung up in response to the desperate need for land and housing by the thousands who flock to Mexico's cities on a daily basis. Shantytown housing is often unsafe and inadequate, and in most cases, the residents do not have legal ownership of the land. Women are directly affected by these circumstances which aggravate an already over-burdened and stressful life.

The shantytown woman's need for cash propels her into the informal sector. In most

cases, she has no choice. It is a matter of survival. As discussed earlier, her participation in paid work is directly affected by her domestic responsibilities; by male attitudes; and by the ideology surrounding "appropriate" jobs for women.

Encompassing all women in Mexico, including shantytown women, cultural and social barriers are perpetuated in order to keep women as the focal point of the family and therefore responsible for its survival. Marriage institutionalizes this position, bringing social acceptance but domestic repression and domination. An increasing number of female-headed households reveal that women are often the sole providers for households - a fact not often recognized. Even when males are part of a household, their contribution is often minimal. Therefore, women are forced to activate other strategies for survival through kinship and reciprocity networks in order to balance their productive and reproductive tasks.

Although the focus of shantytown women's lives is survival, they too have dreams and aspirations. Considering their situation, are their aspirations realistic? What are the barriers which keep women from realizing their dreams? How are these barriers linked to the pattern of oppression and marginalization against which shantytown women struggle on a daily basis?

My Meeting With Mexico

It seems to me that one does not just randomly choose a place - region, country,

community - in which to undertake field research. However, the choice of the research site reflects, in many ways, the factors that have influenced, directly and indirectly, the researcher over a period of time. These factors can include childhood environment, education, social situation, involvement in paid and volunteer work, and peer influence.

Therefore, the question for me is, "Why am I interested in shantytown women in Mexico?" Casting my mind back to childhood days, I know that I was aware of inequalities among children with whom I associated - at school, in youth groups, and in my neighbourhood. Some families were poorer than others. At that stage, I didn't question why.

As an adult, having the opportunity to live and work in Mexico, I saw the inequality "first hand", and I was impressed by the courage and tenacity of people who existed from day to day with so little. I developed a deep appreciation of Mexico and its people, and came to understand, and feel comfortable in, a culture with customs and traditions vastly different from my own.

My Mexican experience began at 'Our Cabana', a residential program centre owned and operated by the World Association of Girl Guides and Girl Scouts. 'Our Cabana' is situated on five acres of land on the outskirts of Cuernavaca in the State of Morelos.

I was on staff of this centre as Program Director for six years, in three 2-year periods between 1972 and 1981. In conjunction with three other program staff, my job involved carrying out a program for groups of young women (14-18 year olds) and adult women who came from all parts of the globe, but particularly from North America. This program offered participants the chance to experience Mexico as a country with customs and traditions very different from their own. It was during this time that I became involved in working with women in the barrio of Gualupita in Cuernavaca. This project had been in place for many years as part of the Cabana program and I "inherited" it. The aim of the project was to give the participants an opportunity to interact directly with Mexican women in a situation which would be mutually beneficial to the participants and the women.

Groups (girls and women) attending program sessions at the Cabana usually interacted with the Gualupita women through a craft program carried out in the barrio where the women lived. Although the Gualupita women turned up every two weeks (that's how often the project was undertaken), I always had the feeling that the interaction was superficial. Keeping in mind that groups to the Cabana changed every two weeks, and in most cases, the North Americans didn't speak Spanish, it was very difficult to start something more "in-depth". Added to this was the fact that the groups usually planned their project before coming to the Cabana, through on-going correspondence with the Cabana staff.

On the other hand, the Gualupita women were fascinated by the girls and women from other countries, and many were exposed to new people, new ideas, and new ways of doing things because of that contact. The Cabana groups shared the same delight at being able to "socialize" in a non-formal way with the Mexican women. I was always amazed at how innovative the barrio women were - how they used everything for a purpose in and around their homes. I know I questioned their situation, at least, in my head, but my job commitments left me no opportunity to take this further.

It wasn't until August 1990 that I had some contact and direct involvement with Las Laminas, a shantytown just off the road that goes from Cuernavaca to Tepoztlan. Groups from the Cabana had been working there for a couple of years on a housing project in conjunction with a church youth group from Cuernavaca. Working together with members of the Las Laminas community, the Cabana groups helped to build and/or renovate houses for the most needy residents (usually elderly women) of the community.

The Western Hemisphere Youth Forum which I coordinated in August 1990 at "Our Cabana" had as its theme, "Your World is Mine: Our Common Future." Forty-four young women (17-25 years of age) attended this seven day gathering. They represented 19 countries in this hemisphere. "Water" was the focal point of the Forum, and as part of the program, the participants carried out a comparative survey

on the availability and use of water in three different socio-economic communities in and around Cuernavaca. Las Laminas was one of these communities.

My involvement began at the pre-conference meeting in March 1990 when I, with the other conference staff, went to Las Laminas with a present member of the Cabana program staff who has regular contact with this community. At that time, we spoke to a small group (men and women) of Las Laminas residents about the proposed survey, and once the issue of water supply was mentioned, it was obvious that these residents were interested in sharing their concerns. In August, a few days before the Forum began, we made another visit to the community and again talked with people informally (just by walking around the community) about the study. All those with whom we spoke indicated their willingness to share their views on the water situation.

Then, during the Forum, the young women carried out the survey through interviews with the Las Laminas residents. English speakers were paired with Spanish speakers in order to facilitate this process. The results of this survey, which highlighted the unpredictable delivery by the water truck (pipa), were sent to the Cuernavaca Water Supply Department.

It was clear to see that shantytown residents were interested in improving their situation and willing to express their honest opinions to facilitate that process.

Perhaps all of the above, coupled with my knowledge of Spanish, and other factors, led me to the point of wanting to hear how shantytown women themselves feel about their daily lives and what aspirations they have for their future and the future of their children.

Contacts for Tetela

Armed with my Cabana contacts and the support of friends in the Cuernavaca area, I re-entered Mexico in July 1991 to pursue research with shantytown women in, what I anticipated would be, the community of Las Laminas.

My initial contacts were with the staff at the Cabana. After my first meeting with them I began to realise that the barrio, known to me as Las Laminas, was not going to be suitable for my research, mainly because of the difficulties of distance, access and time.

My new plan was to try to make contact with a community through a church youth project called "Operacion Lamina". In conjunction with groups from the Cabana, these young people were involved in construction lamina house in poor communities around Cuernavaca.

In the course of a conversation with Harriet, a Cabana staff member, I discussed this possibility. She immediately suggested the name of the woman, Alicia, who

coordinates the housing program for Santa Catalina parish church. After a phone call to Alicia, I met with her at her pharmacy in downtown Cuernavaca where we discussed my intended research. She suggested that I meet her at Santa Catalina church during the following week. Every Tuesday morning a group of elderly poor women gather at Santa Catalina, and Alicia felt that would be a good place to start.

Because of my hesitation to rely solely on one contact, I tried, on the recommendation of a Mexican friend, to phone Dr. Max who works for ANSAM - a Mexican organisation whose mandate is to deliver health care to the elderly in their homes. My efforts to contact Max were unsuccessful at first, but when we finally did make contact, I had already established a link through Santa Catalina.

As it turned out, Santa Catalina was an ideal starting point. The Tuesday morning group at Santa Catalina consisted of about 80 elderly women living in poor circumstances in barrios around the northern end of Cuernavaca. These women came weekly to the church for Mass, followed by a breakfast, supplied by the church, and then participated in interest groups which included singing, literacy and catechism. The church also supplies these women with some food - staples such as rice, beans and sugar.

Alicia introduced me to the two women who organize this group - Magdalena and Lolita. They were interested in my project and very willing to let me speak to the

women once breakfast had been served. This I did, and a number of the elderly women came forward to let me know where they lived and to indicate their willingness to talk with me.

At this point, it appeared that the women represented, in the main, two barrios - Chamilpa and Tetela del Monte. I took the names of those interested, and with the help of my map, located the barrios in relation to the church. As it happened, both were close by.

Notwithstanding these direct contacts with the women, for me, a link was still missing - how to get into these communities and actually locate the women. Lolitas' advice was that I should make contact with some of the young people from the church youth group who had been working in these areas. Jose Luis and Graciela happened to be at the church that very morning. Both had been involved in Chamilpa and Tetela de Monte with "Operacion Lamina", and were enthusiastic about my project and eager to help. Pressure of their end of semester exams delayed further contact with them for another week, but we arranged to meet then and go into both communities. I felt that my luck was holding, but that time was against me. There would be only three of the five weeks left to carry out the research.

Our visits to Chamilpa and Tetela proved to be enlightening, and in the end, rewarding. Chamilpa was a low-income community but not a shantytown so I decided

that we should proceed to Tetela. Built into the side of a ravine, Tetela was to be the small shantytown where I carried out my research. With Jose Luis and Graciela, I walked into Tetela to a house which Jose Luis and his friends had built during the previous year for an elderly women. At the house we were greeted by Eva - my very first contact in Tetela. I explained to Eva that I hoped to collect some information in order to better understand the lives of shantytown women. This information would be used in my university studies as part of a thesis - a report. I told her that I hoped this information would make people more aware of the women's situation. She showed keen interest and a willingness to talk. As it happened, she was the daughter of one of the elderly ladies who had come forward at Santa Catalina.

In consultation with Eva, it was arranged that I would return in a couple of days. Meanwhile, Eva would spread the word amongst her friends and neighbours. She seemed confident that the women would be willing to talk with me. Because of her openness and receptiveness to my project, I also felt confident that this contact would be the first of many.

The Hunt for Statistical Information

From the outset, the quest for accurate statistics and other documentation on Tetela and Cuernavaca was frustrating. Offices had relocated, or in some cases, didn't exist

any more; up-to-date information was unavailable; and bureaucracy continuously added time and effort to the search.

I had decided to use the day before my return to Tetela to gather some data on the area. My contacts at the Cabana assisted me with this aspect. With the phone book as a guide, Bea, a Cabana staff member and long-time Cuernavaca resident, and I spent several hours discussing the pros and cons of visiting various government departments and ministries, as well as the State University of Morelos.

With my route mapped out and a list of eight government departments, I headed for downtown Cuernavaca. The majority of the offices has either changed their addresses or simply weren't anywhere to be found. By chance, I stumbled onto the Department of Statistics and secured the help of Maria Luisa, the director, in obtaining a copy of a socio-economic study carried out jointly by the Department of Statistics and the Department of Economics for the State of Morelos. The study encompassed the barrio of Buena Vista del Monte, and, initially, Maria Luisa indicated that Buena Vista del Monte was the same place as Tetela del Monte. On reading the report, I had my doubts, and, after a second meeting with Maria Luisa, we concluded that the study took in both areas, which made it difficult to filter information specifically for Tetela. Maria Luisa did refer me to the Archives Department in the Government Palace on the center square. There I purchased a document "Plan Municipal de Desarrollo de Cuernavaca, Morelos" (Municipal Development Plan for Cuernavaca,

Morelos) which contains detailed information on all aspects of development in the municipality of Cuernavaca. A visit to the Department of Tourism turned up little apart from a couple of maps of the city and the state.

The State University of Morelos seemed to be a logical place to enquire about studies carried out in Tetela. Having been informed that the University did not have a Social Sciences faculty, I was then referred to the School of Nursing - to the Director, Olivia. I felt that perhaps some of the nurses may have carried out their practicum in Tetela. Although interested in my research, Olivia was unable to be helpful, as, to her knowledge, no health-related work had been carried out in Tetela. She did, however, refer me to "La Secretaria de Salud" (The Health Secretariat). Following that lead, I met with the doctor in charge of Health Region 1 in Cuernavaca, which included Tetela. His information was rather general, and although he provided some statistics, all in all, they weren't very useful. On some accounts, his information contradicted what I heard from the women in Tetela.

After my attempts to collect documented information, it was obvious that such written information is not the priority it is in Canada and the U.S.A. We place such heavy emphasis on the written word. Other cultures do not, neither do they have the technology or personnel to generate it.

Back to Tetela

My second visit to Tetela, based on Eva's suggestion, resulted in an increase in contacts, initially through her immediate family -her sister, Ofelia, and her mother, Josefina. Josefina has been one of the women at Santa Catalina church who had indicated her willingness to speak with me. This first contact took the form of some informal chatting and a walk to the spring, from where drinking water is collected. We were joined for the walk by Remedios, a friend, and by Graciela, her niece. My contacts had expanded considerably.

Accepting an invitation to visit Remedios' house I there met Blanca, a young women from a neighbouring house. At this point, all of the women indicated their willingness to be interviewed in a more formal manner at a later date. The initial contact had the desired "snowball" effect. Eva, who had been to do the laundry returned while I was talking with the other women, so our contact was renewed.

The progression of contacts from this point took place quite casually - Evas' daughter, Lupita and her children, dropped by the house while I was there; Filipa was at the river doing laundry when I accompanied Blanca one day; Petra was referred to me by Filipa; and Petra helped me to establish a contact with Luisa. Apart from these women who were central to the research, I also met their children, other relatives, friends and comadres. The circle continued to spread.

Research Methods

From the outset, I had planned a participatory approach to this research. Through this approach I'd hoped to involve some of the women themselves in the process of information-gathering, analysis and evaluation. After an initial meeting, my plan was to train approximately six women in some basic interviewing skills, and with their input, formulate the questions to be asked. The research team - myself and the women - would then conduct interviews with 2 or 3 women each over a 4 to 6 day period. Findings would then be compared and data partially analysed. In a final meeting of the research team, the group would discuss the process, and the effects on the team, on the women interviewed and on the community at large. The discussion of the use of the information gathered would be done with a more representative community group.

Two main factors made the participatory approach unworkable in this situation. First, time was severely limited. It is well documented by writers (Maguire 1984; Kirby and McKenna 1989) that participatory research is a very time-consuming process. In my situation, I did not have the luxury of time. Second, the women had very limited writing skills. Most had not completed primary school, and some were almost completely illiterate. Interviewing would have had to be carried out orally, or a search made for women in Tetela, who had the necessary skills, and interest, to carry out a written interview format.

As these women have a long work day, the extra investment of time may have been

a deterrent to the participatory approach. However, I am not convinced of this as some of the women indicated interest in doing and learning something new to break their routines.

My interest in a participatory approach to this research had been sparked by a course in "Community-based Research" which I took early in the summer of 1991 shortly before my field research in Mexico. Due to the afore-mentioned constraints, I had to modify my approach and endeavoured to work cooperatively with the women's daily schedules. Therefore, the time I spent in Tetela varied from day to day. I did not remain in Tetela overnight on any occasion.

One of the methods for data collection which I did employ took the form of a semi-structured interview. (See Appendix A for interview questions). Times for the interview were arranged with each woman, at her convenience. Permission was requested to use a tape recorder and in all cases the women cooperated, seemingly not bothered by it at all. At least I didn't detect any nervousness or hesitation in their responses. Although I had prepared 14 possible interview questions, these were modified in many cases, and further questions added spontaneously, depending on the path the interview took. The interviews often led into continued informal chatting about various issues.

Participant observation proved to be a major way of gathering information about the

women. In this situation, it had the advantage of being unstructured and flexible. The women accepted that fact that I was interested in observing their day-to-day lives and, with their help, together we created many situations in which I observed them in their daily routine. Those situations included being at the river during laundry time in the morning; accompanying the women to the market; going with the women to their places of work outside the barrio; accepting an invitation to a picnic; sharing early morning cups of tea and coffee; relaxing in and around their homes; and observing the little amount of free time some of them had.

Analysis of documents gathered in Cuernavaca helped set the scene for a wider view of Tetela and of Cuernavaca. As mentioned, locating relevant documents was often time-consuming and frustrating. Very often, documents and records were simply not available. Two documents that were particularly helpful were: Plan Municipal de Desarrollo de Cuernavaca, Morelos, published by the State government of Morelos, and sold for 5,000 pesos (about CDN\$2.); and, Estudios Socioeconomicos por localidad del Municipio de Cuernavaca, 1988, compiled by the State government Department of Statistics, and photocopied by me with their permission.

Some researchers (Kirby and McKenna 1989) view photo-taking as giving a narrow perspective of a situation. They argue that the perspective is that of the person taking the photos. On the other hand, Bunster (1985) took a different approach to photography. In her research on market sellers and domestics in Lima, Peru, she took

polaroid photos of the women at their daily work. She then used these photos as "conversation starters" to encourage the women to speak about their work and their lives. For Bunster, this unusual approach achieved its purpose and did not alienate or upset the women. In my case, I used my camera extensively after consulting with the women about its use. It was clear when photo-taking was appropriate and appreciated, and when it was not. In some ways, it helped to establish a rapport with the women. Several requested copies of the photos of their children in particular, and these requests were honoured. Reviewing the photos taken also assisted me in identifying some of the details, and recalling some of the incidents that were not explicit in my field notes. In some cases, the photos even gave me another view of a situation which caused me to think about my original comments.

Prior to arriving in Mexico, an extensive literature review enabled me to understand the situation of women in shantytowns and to direct my thinking towards questions I wanted answered, and issues I wanted to explore. The review gave me a theoretical basis into which I was able to assimilate the practical experience of the research.

Woven together with the methods used above was the daily informal interaction with a cross-section of people in and around Tetela. This helped to broaden my view of the community. It also served to help me piece together at least in part, some of the intricate reciprocity networks on which such a community is so dependent.

Tetela del Monte: Setting the Scene

Tetela de Monte, henceforth to be referred to as Tetela, combines the features of a shantytown in an almost semi-rural setting. It is one of the many squatter settlements in and around the city of Cuernavaca, the capital of the state of Morelos. The view from the ridges of Tetela are spectacular - to Tres Marias, Tepoztlan and downtown Cuernavaca. Even the air feels fresh and clean.

Cuernavaca is located approximately 80 kilometres south-west of Mexico City. It is a city with a formidable industrial sector, and a lively tourist trade. The population of the city, which, in 1990, was approximately 602,000, has increased considerably in recent years due to a number of factors. First, after the 1985 earthquake in Mexico City, many people moved from Mexico City to Cuernavaca where earthquakes are not so devastating. Second, because of the decentralization policy of the Mexican government, many companies, factories, as well as Federal government offices, have located in Cuernavaca, thus offering employment opportunities which have attracted workers not only from the State of Morelos, but from adjoining states. Third, the tremendous growth of Mexico City has caused a marked increase in pollution, crime, traffic congestion and strain on basic services. Cuernavaca has therefore become an attractive alternative to Mexico City residents, although in the last few years, Cuernavaca itself has begun to experience some of these same problems on a smaller scale. On weekends and during holiday periods, the population of Cuernavaca

doubles with vacationners from Mexico City. Many Mexico City residents also have homes in Cuernavaca which they frequent on these occasions.

Therefore, considering the above, it is not surprising that people have come to Cuernavaca in search of jobs - as factory workers, as domestics, as labourers, as restaurant help, and as sellers of all manner of arts and crafts to the ever-present tourist. Tetela is made up of people such as these.

According to the Department of Statistics in Cuernavaca, the 1990 population of Tetela was 756. Lomas de Ahuatlan, the section of Tetela in which I was carrying out my field research is home to approximately 52 families, each with an average of 6 to 7 people per family. This makes a total of about 310 to 370 people.

The barrio of Tetela is situated on the northern edge of Cuernavaca, about 6 kilometres from the downtown area. It is set into a steep ravine, one of the many that are geographical features of the area. A river runs through the bottom of the ravine. The soil is mainly rock and sand with a shallow layer of top soil of a yellow colour.

Houses, made from lamina sheets (pressed cardboard and crushed wood scraps), some adobe, and some brick, are built into the side of the ravine and along the ridge. Earthen floors are common, and houses vary in size, with an average of one or two

rooms.

Residents of Tetela suffer from a lack of basic services. Water is either carried from a well (natural spring) or from the one and only tap on the other side of the ravine in the barrio of Tlaltenango. The walk to the spring takes about 10 to 15 minutes along a rough track. The spring itself has been cemented off to ensure its relative cleanliness.

There are no sanitation facilities in Tetela, and no garbage collection. As a result of this, many people throw garbage in the river at the bottom of the ravine. Those living on the ridge tend to burn it. As one of the women said about the need for essential services, "For the health of our children we need all of these things..."

Dirt tracks constitute the walkways in Tetela. A cement bridge spans the river at the bottom of the ravine, and another small cement bridge, constructed by the residents themselves, ensures safe passage across a deep gully half way up the steep slope. In the legal sense, electricity doesn't reach Tetela, although most houses have it. The word "prestada" is used to indicate that the electricity has been "borrowed" from across the ravine by running wires from one house to another.

Communication by telephone is severely restricted as only one public telephone is available and that is located on the other side of the ravine. Mail is not delivered

into Tetela. Residents often have mail sent via friends or family who live outside the barrio. Some of the women receive mail care of the homes in which they work as domestics. Outside Tetela, on a semi-main road, public transportation in the form of mini-buses (called "rutas"), carry passengers to and from downtown Cuernavaca and to other areas of the city.

According to the women, health services and care in Tetela are not available. One of the women explained to me that, "Doctors and nurses don't come in here because people are too poor and can't pay." Levels of nutrition and food intake vary according to the family and their financial resources. Staples are tortillas and beans. Other foods eaten include eggs, rice, some vegetables, and chicken and fruit occasionally, but always in small quantities. Bread also figures in the diet, as does coffee, but not much milk. The women certainly realize the importance of milk for their children and whenever possible include it in their diets.

Schools are located outside the barrio. Most adults with whom I spoke hadn't finished primary school so that their literacy skill were basic. Others could not read or write at all.

Economic activity within Tetela is almost non-existent, with only one woman selling candy and soft drinks from her house. A few small shops across the ravine and out onto the main road sell food and other basics. As prices at these places are usually

high, most shopping is done in the central market in downtown Cuernavaca.

A couple of roughly-cleared soccer fields on the flat of the hill serve as the only visible recreation areas in Tetela, although children make their own informal games around their houses. Some of the houses do have small black and white television sets.

The Women: Sharers of knowledge

In the course of my fieldwork, I interviewed and interacted with six women, their families, friends and acquaintances. Four of these women are domestics; one is a shop assistant; and another takes washing and ironing into her home. Their ages range from mid-twenties to late fifties. Four are currently married and two are widows. All except one, have children with numbers ranging from 3 to 10. In two cases, the husbands have regular jobs as labourers. One of the husbands works irregularly, and the other one doesn't work at all. Most of the women have lived in Tetela for a number of years, with one woman having been there all her life.

During the course of my interaction with the women, I came to know and appreciate certain aspects of their daily lives. I also admired their courage - their will to keep going in circumstances that, in all ways, provided barriers and stumbling blocks to

their survival. Apart from that, I liked them - their smiles, their chatter, their willingness to answer questions, their curiosity about my work and situation, and their honesty in sharing their thoughts and feelings. I knew that I would become personally involved in their lives, as my feeling were touched from the outset.

In my discussions with the women, three main themes emerged: their work, both paid and unpaid; their families; and their well-being and hopes for the future. These themes will now be dealt with separately and in detail.

The women and their reproductive work

It is in the shantytown setting in Tetela that the women carry out their roles within the household. What follows is a description of the main features of women's domestic work in Tetela.

Food preparation and all that it entails, as well as the shopping, cooking, serving, and cleaning up afterwards, probably is the most time-consuming of the domestic tasks. Because of lack of shops in Tetela, and of the high price of food in the small nearby businesses, as well as the lack of refrigeration, most women make daily trips to the market to buy food. This entails a long walk - about an hour - to the nearest market, or a bus ride to the central market in Cuernavaca. Whether or not the women take

the bus to the market also depends on the availability - and amount - of cash on that day. This was a decision that Blanca made daily. Filipa also scheduled her market trips around the availability of money. As she worked in the downtown area, Luisa was able to buy food items daily from the market on the way home from work. Not only are shopping trips long, but the purchases are heavy and are often carried while walking. Children also prolong the shopping trip, and where possible, the women leave young children in the custody of their older siblings, or with neighbours.

Once food is purchased, it has to be prepared. Some houses have gas stoves with one or two burners while others rely on outdoor fires. In all cases, the women are the first ones in the household to get up in the morning for the purpose of preparing breakfast for husbands and children, and other household residents. Most start their day around 6am.

As lunch is the main meal of the day in Mexico, its' preparation is more time-consuming. Types of food eaten at lunch vary from household to household with some only eating the staples - tortillas and beans. Some of the women prepare soup for lunch made with vegetables and/or rice. On my trip to the market with Blanca, I observed her buying lima beans and cilantro to make into a soup for her childrens' lunch. In some cases, when money is available, small pieces of chicken may be added to the soup, and, on occasion, fruit such as bananas, is purchased as a treat. The women rely on help from their daughters, daughters-in-law, and other female

members of the household, during food preparation. Petra and her two daughters shared the task, while Ofelia and her sister, Eva, worked together to prepare lunch for themselves and their elderly mother.

Often in the evening, leftovers from lunch, or coffee and bread are eaten. The evening meal in Mexico is always lighter than the one at mid-day, and some of the poor only have a cup of coffee.

Apart from regular meals, women are often expected to prepare meals at any hour at the whim of male members of the household. Filipa is in such a position. Her son and son-in-law are taxi drivers, and often return to the house in the early hours of the morning. She is expected to get up then and prepare a meal for them.

All actions related to food and its preparation are governed directly or indirectly, by male members of the household. The amount of money the woman has dictates what and how much she will buy, and meal times are structured around the male's working hours. Those women in extended households and some of those involved in paid work gain some satisfaction from the purchase of "extras" like milk and fruit from time to time with their own money. On one particular day, Blanca was waiting for her husband to come home at lunch time and give her some money, so that she could go out and buy some food in order to prepare the meal.

Along with food preparation, laundry takes a great deal of time and energy daily. The situation in Tetela is particularly onerous with regard to the washing of clothing. One of my first impressions of Tetela was of Eva coming up the side of the hill carrying wet laundry in two large (commercial-size) plastic buckets hanging from a wooden yoke across her shoulders.

The women have to walk down to the river to do laundry, which is normally done each morning. Blanca does laundry every day, while Filipa does it each day except Sunday. I went down to the river on a couple of occasions to chat with the women and to observe while they did their laundry. Getting to the river while carrying clothes, buckets, laundry soap, and scrubbing brushes and cloths, is not an easy task. It involves a steep descent down a rocky path to the river. That part of the river has a number of large rocks of varying sizes on which women do their laundry.

Once at the river, the women wade into the water up to their knees and take up their positions near particular rocks. The clothes are put into one of the large buckets with some soap powder and water, and are then taken out, item by item, and scrubbed by hand on the rocks with bar soap. Some women use a brush for scrubbing the clothes; others use a sort of scrubbing cloth; and some use their hands. Once scrubbed, the clothes are put into another bucket; given a second wash; and finally rinsed directly in the river.

This is heavy work and usually takes the women two to three hours. On one of my trips to the river, I watched Filipa washing men's suit jackets and a suede jacket by hand. I noticed how thorough and particular Blanca and her daughter were, especially with collars and cuffs. Blue jeans were scrubbed two or three times. The women rely on help from their daughters when they are on school holidays. Laundry time is then shortened by about an hour. While doing laundry, a number of the women attend to personal hygiene - washing themselves and their hair. Once finished, the wet laundry is then carried back up the steep track from the river to the house where it is hung to dry outside on wire lines, or simply hung over barbed wire fences which sometimes divide areas of household land.

Of course, dry laundry then needs ironing which is another of the domestic tasks of the Tetela women. Again, some, like Filipa, have help with this from daughters and other female household members. Conditions under which this is done are far from ideal. While at Filipas' house one morning, I saw her daughter-in-law ironing while sitting on the end of a bed and balancing the ironing on the top of a box.

Necessary to the survival of the household and even heavier than carrying wet laundry is the task of water collection. In Tetela this is done at three different locations depending on the distance of the source from the house and the purpose for which the water is to be used. First, there is a tap, as mentioned, across the ravine in the barrio of Tlaltenango. To reach this tap entails descending into the

ravine, crossing the cement bridge and then walking about three-quarters of the way up the other side to the tap. The advantage of this water is that it can be used for drinking. Second, there is the well (natural spring), also previously mentioned, which is a 10 to 15 minute walk along the ridge and down into a smaller gully where the spring originates. Again this water is suitable for drinking, but runs more risk of being contaminated than the tap water. Third, water is often collected in the section of the river where the women do their laundry. Both tasks are done simultaneously. The water collected in this situation is only used for washing dishes and hands, and watering plants and fruit trees.

One of the more common sights in Tetela at almost any hour of the day is people going to collect water. Where possible most people do this in the morning - the sun is not so strong, and the water is then collected to start the day. This task falls, in the main, to women and female children. While at the laundry spot with the women, I observed Filipa collecting water there. She carried two large buckets of water on a yoke, and I could see her straining under the weight as she tried to lift the yoke on her neck. This water was for the plants. Filipa returned for a very large plastic container of water which she struggled to lift onto her shoulder, and Ruth, her daughter, returned for two other plastic jugs of water. What struck me most about this task was the sheer heaviness of it. I could see that Filipa was strained to the limit trying to lift the yoke and buckets with her shoulders. Once she had managed that, she still faced a very steep rocky climb up the hill to reach the path to her house.

Even accessing her house which was one of those built further down into the ravine, was not an easy task.

However, I did see some men and older boys fetching water. Blanca said her 10 year old son Jose Luis did fetch water once I pressed her about his domestic responsibilities. I also met Dona Marcis' handicapped grandson on the way to fetch water from the tap in Tlaltenango, and Evas' adult son who was staying with her temporarily returned early one morning from a trip to the well while I was there. Nevertheless, as mentioned, this is still considered primarily a job for women and girls.

Going hand-in-hand with the collecting and carrying of water is the similar process of fuel gathering. In Tetela, most houses have some form of gas burners on which to cook but these are seldom used, except in the rainy season. The main reason for their disuse is the cost of the gas cylinders. It is less expensive from a purely monetary point of view to walk up towards the mountains and collect wood for use on open fires. The poorer the household, the more it relies on wood, which adds yet another dimension to women's domestic work.

Because of the location of Tetela and the type of soil in the area, trees are not very common. Therefore, to collect wood, the women have to walk long distances towards the mountains where trees grow on the foothills. Some women combine this task with the collecting of wild mushrooms which grow in the same area and can be used to

supplement the family diet.

Although continued physical labour of this type affects the health of many of the women in Tetela, there is a surprising lack of available health care in any form. Dona Josefina, one of the elderly residents, is ill. She constantly has an aching head and her back, at the base of the spinal cord, is very sore. Her right leg feels tight. About two years ago, she had what she calls an "attack" on her way to collect wood, and she collapsed. She has been unable to get satisfactory medical care to deal with her problems.

On an early visit to Tetela one morning, I climbed the hill to where Ofelia and Eva share a small house with Dona Josefina, who is their mother. As I scaled the last, particularly steep section, I looked up to see Ofelia sitting on the ridge of the hill near the house giving what looked like a massage to the foot of a young man. As it turned out, this young man had twisted his foot badly the previous night while walking along one of the paths. Ofelia said she was massaging his foot "to put everything back in place."

Some points need to be made about health care as a reproductive role for women and the particular situation in Tetela. In the course of conversations and interviews with the women, it became obvious that the health of their families while being important to them, was also their responsibility. Second, through various

conversations with the women, I discovered that many of them had personal health problems. Eva had an aching jaw that throbbed constantly and interfered with her sleep. Filipa said that her nerves were constantly on edge which made her short-tempered with the children. Apart from that the doctor has told her that she has a tumor. Ofelia and Eva both had colds during the weeks I was there. Ofelias' cough sounded dreadful, no doubt aggravated by her smoking. Third, medical care to low-income communities, as espoused by the doctors at "La Secretaria de Salud" in Cuernavaca, in reality didn't happen in Tetela.

A number of women asked me about their health problems, thinking that I may have some medical knowledge. Unfortunately, band-aids and bufferin are my limit.

In conversations with Dona Josefina and Ofelia on separate occasions, I became aware of the women's lack of basic knowledge about the functions of the body, and the reliance of some of them on traditional medicines such as teas made from herbs and leaves. In the first instance, Dona Josefina was explaining to me that her "comadre" had been vomiting blood for a couple of days. Her family had encouraged her to seek some medical attention. Dona Josefina said that her "comadre" had missed her period, which was due at this time, so she felt that the blood she was vomiting was her period gone wrong.

In the second instance, I'd observed Dona Josefina walking down from the house to

collect some grass. When she returned with it, I asked her about it. She told me that this particular grass was used for medicinal purposes and to cleanse the skin. One placed it under the clothing directly on the stomach. It was also used to wipe over the neck and arms. Once away from Tetela I made further inquiries about this and was informed that some people believe that this grass helps ward off evil spirits, and keeps one safe. Dona Josefina was one of the oldest women I met, and was probably well into her eighties, which may have a bearing on her beliefs and understanding.

Because of the location of Tetela on the side of a steep ravine, accidents often happen on the narrow rough pathways. Several months ago Ofelia had slipped and fallen down the slope, breaking her leg. She had to be carried out by relatives and friends and taken to the public hospital for treatment. Her leg still gives her problems, and from time to time I could see that she was limping. As she walked along the path early one evening, Remedios was gored by a bull that had strayed from the mountain ridge. Again family and friends came to her rescue, but the scars are still visible on her leg and arm. Under such circumstances, kinship and "compadrazgo" become invaluable networks of support.

There is no shortage of children in Tetela. As my research coincided with school holidays, I had the pleasure of interacting with the children in and around their houses. Because the children were out of school, child care became an even more urgent responsibility for the women. Many of them left their children with friends

and relatives while they went to their paid work, or did the shopping. Some were left in the charge of older siblings. This was not always a satisfactory arrangement. On one occasion when Blanca and I returned from the market, her two youngest children were crying. They said that the eldest one had been hitting them on the head and pushing them around. This situation placed further stress on Blanca. Although she realised how much longer it would take her at the market if the children accompanied her, this current situation was far from satisfactory.

By examining the women's reproductive work, we see several issues emerging. First, the work is physically and emotionally demanding. Second, it is time-consuming. Third, it is expected that women will carry out domestic work - that is their role. Four, help with domestic tasks is minimal and usually comes from daughters or other female family members. Five, it is necessary for the survival of their households. Six, it restricts their access to, and their choices of, paid work. Seven, it is hampered by lack of basic services and extremely difficult living conditions. Eight, it is made more difficult by insufficient financial resources. Finally, it is carried out according to the dictates of a male-dominated society.

If all of the above sounds like a "catch 22" for shantytown women, it is. Many of these issues can be explained by focusing on the household and the gender relations there. In other words, certain tasks are assigned on the basis of gender and are not negotiable. Society accepts the fact that women are the ones responsible for domestic

tasks, and this idea is perpetuated by the ideology around the importance of motherhood in Mexican, male-dominated, society, and which keeps women on a continuous guilt trip in relation to the welfare of the household. Lack of basic services which contribute to the demands of time and physical labour reflect the Mexican governments inability to deal with ever-increasing poverty, especially among women. The suffering of the poor is obviously not a priority as Mexico forges ahead to establish its credibility on the world stage. It remains to be seen for how long the marginalized masses will support a government whose capitalistic policies keep them struggling for a livelihood. Insufficient financial resources reflect the failure of the "trickle down" theory which was to provide economic benefits to all segments of the society. In other words, the poor are pushed into jobs with low pay - insufficient to sustain their households. Lack of cash impacts severely on women in the household, forcing them to economize even more, and, ultimately to seek paid work themselves.

The women and their productive work

As previously mentioned, of the six women I interviewed, four are domestics; one is a shop assistant; and the other takes washing and ironing into her home. The earnings of the domestics seemed to average about 2,500 pesos an hour (approximately CDN\$1. at 1991 exchange rates) as did the money received by the

woman who does washing and ironing from her home. The shop assistants earnings are unknown to me, but I'm sure they would be higher than those of the domestic workers. When asked about their earnings, the domestics felt that the money they are paid is too little in relation to their hours and the amount of work they are expected to do. Earnings from washing and ironing are irregular, as is the work itself. Overall, the hours worked by the women varied, and depended mainly on the availability of the work and their own domestic situations.

The domestics

Of the domestics, Blanca works 4 hours a day, 2 days a week. She would like to secure more work but is unable to at present. Her responsibilities include sweeping, dusting, cleaning the furniture and the floors, cleaning the bathrooms, and washing the dishes. She is not responsible for meal preparation or laundry as the "senora" takes care of those tasks. Blanca is the only domestic in the house and she works directly with her employer. Blanca told me that her husband didn't want her to go out to work, but, as his wage as a labourer is insufficient, she has no choice.

The scene is somewhat different for Eva, a widow who works 8 hours a day, 6 days a week. It takes Eva half an hour to walk from Tetela to the private home where she works. On most mornings, Eva has already done her own laundry at the river before setting out for her paid job. Her responsibilities at the house are much broader than

those of Blanca. In the first instance, Eva is expected to wear a uniform with an apron. She explained to me that, on arrival at the house, she first changes into the uniform and then starts her work. She washes any dirty dishes left from the night before; prepares and serves lunch; and attends to any visitors who may come (that is, serving cold drinks, coffee, etc.). Eva puts clothes in the washing machine while she prepares lunch, and then in the afternoon, hand wrings the clothes and puts them out to dry. Once lunch has been cleared away and the dishes washed, Eva begins the ironing which she usually does for the remainder of the afternoon. Another domestic works in this house with Eva, and is responsible for the cleaning.

Meal preparation and gardening are not included in Ofelias' domestic job which she does 2 to 3 days a week for 4 hours a day at a private house about 20 minutes walk from Tetela. As Ofelia and I walked there one morning, she explained to me that her responsibilities include cleaning, washing clothes and washing dishes. Apart from that, she usually does the ironing on Thursdays.

For 6 days a week and 4 hours each day, Petra carries out domestic tasks in a middle-class home, located in a condominium-style arrangement about 15 to 20 minutes walk from the barrio. Her job involves house cleaning and sweeping; washing and ironing clothes; and gardening which is usually done on Saturdays.

Of the four women who work as domestics, two indicated that they had good

relations with their employer. Petra who had been working at the same house for 6 years, felt comfortable phoning her "senora" if she was unable to go to work and together they usually made alternate arrangements. Petra found that she had to do this when the children were sick or some other family emergency arose. For this reason, Petra felt that she was better off as a domestic than as a factory worker, for although the factory workers wages are higher, they had less flexibility. Ofelia also felt comfortable with her employer who had even given her the keys to the house. This, for Ofelia, was an open display of her employers confidence and trust in her. Like Petra, Ofelia had the option of calling her employer if, for some reason, she was unable to work on a particular day.

Blanca and Eva had somewhat different relationships with their employers, and indicated that their employers were less understanding. Blanca was particularly concerned as she has to approach her "senora" about taking Rene, her youngest child, to work with her in the coming year. Blanca has no other option as she couldn't leave Rene, a 3 year old, at home unattended. She was hoping that the "senora" would agree to this arrangement. Eva seemed to fare worst and my impression was that she was treated more like a servant than the others. Eva explained that her employer could be "a bit difficult" and at times "mean-spirited". She recounted one incident when she (Eva) had wanted to phone her daughter in Mexico City using the phone at the house and paying for the call, but the lady of the house wouldn't allow it.

Both Blanca and Petra had secured their jobs via contacts with family members - a sister-in-law and an aunt - who had heard that domestic help was needed in those particular households. In Ofelias' case, a friend recommended her to the lady of the house. Ofelia said that she rarely has trouble finding some kind of work because people come looking for her. She told me quite proudly, "They have confidence in me."

All four women worked out of necessity - for survival - to support themselves and their households. They indicated that they had no choice but to work. Petra really summed up the situation for all of them when she said, "It's necessary. We're in a very critical situation. None of the money meets our needs." Ofelia and Blanca commented on their need to look for more work. What they had was not sufficient and even providing the bare necessities of life like food and clothing was difficult. Petra and Blanca worked to help their husbands whose wages were not enough to cover the family living expenses. When asked whether they enjoyed their work, all replied favourably, saying that their employers leave them alone and don't bother them as they go about their work. Blanca qualified her response by saying, "As I didn't study, I have to do this work. I didn't finish primaria." Eva, the eldest woman, had worked all her life and said she was used to it. She'd rather be working than sitting around trying to fill in the day. Petra's work gave her the satisfaction of helping her husband, and apart from that, she enjoyed gardening so didn't mind doing that kind of work on Saturdays in the senoras' garden. Petra was grateful that

she was able to work, "...I give thanks to God that I can work and I have the satisfaction that I can help my children."

The shop assistant

Luisa is in a rather different position when compared to the women who work as domestics. For 6 days a week and 5 1/2 hours a day, she works at Merceria La Moderna, a small haberdashery shop on the main street in downtown Cuernavaca. She is a sales person, selling ribbons, lace, embroidery thread, and other items for sewing and needlework. When not serving customers, she is required to cover buttons and buckles which are also sold in the shop. Luisas' job at La Moderna seems fairly secure as she worked there for 6 years before she was married, and has been back there again for another 4 years. Luisa appears to have a good relationship with her employer and with the other two women with whom she works. They share the responsibilities amongst the three of them. There is no doubt that Luisa works to support her family of three children and her husband who doesn't have a regular job. She stated quite clearly, "We need the work to survive." She went on to comment that because food and basic commodities are so expensive - as well as notebooks, pencils and school uniforms for the children - it was necessary for her to work in order for the family to make ends meet. Luisa does not have the flexibility of the domestics, but she probably has more security and a higher wage. For Luisa, work also serves as a "distraction" from the house.

The home-based worker

Filipas' work is irregular. Currently she does washing and ironing for one woman. Ironically, she is the one who probably needs the money most urgently, as her husband rarely works and when he does the money is spent on drinking. She secured this work through some relatives of her husband because "they knew I was in a critical situation and are helping me in this way." Her married son who lives with her, along with four other children, occasionally gives her a small amount of money for preparing the lunch - "something, but not much." Filipa made it clear that she has to work to earn money to survive. Even so, often by mid-week she is stranded without money and is forced to borrow from her older sons. This makes her feel even worse - "...it hurts my soul."

The flower seller

Although I didn't conduct a formal interview with Reyna, I did have a couple of informal conversations with her. She is a single self-employed mother of three children who sells fresh roses door-to-door in a well-to-do neighbourhood close to Tetela. She leaves her house early in the morning to catch the bus to the main market in Cuernavaca where she buys the roses each day. She then returns to the neighbourhood to sell them. Reynas' job is essential to the survival of her household as she is the sole wage earner. She is away from the house for most of the day, and

the children must organize themselves for school. In the school holidays, the children remain in or around the house by themselves day after day. As Reynas' house is somewhat removed from the other houses in Tetela, this causes her added anxiety and stress. There are often strangers loitering around the barrio. Unfortunately because of Reynas' work hours, I was unable to connect with her at a convenient time for both of us.

Overall, the women agreed that their paid work was necessary for daily survival. Without it, they would not make ends meet. There would be less food and clothing for families, and for the widows, Ofelia summed up the situation by saying that, "We are alone. We have to work." In most cases, contacts for this work were made through extended family ties or friends which again reinforces the importance of these kinship networks. Regarding assistance with their productive work, on occasion daughters are taken along to help, but in the main, the women work independently with definite tasks to do. They value being left alone and do not like to be bothered by their employer. Most women feel positively about their work as they are accustomed to working for a living. They view it as a means of helping their families and do not question the expectation that they work outside the home while at the same time attending to household chores.

It seems that for these particular women in Tetela, there emerged several barriers to their participation in better jobs. The most noticeable barrier is the constraints of

their domestic work. Mobility is limited because of child care responsibilities. Choices of jobs are restricted for the same reason. A second barrier is lack of education and training, as expressed by both Blanca and Petra. Age is a barrier in two cases - that of Ofelia and Eva, both in their 50's and working as domestics. Male expectations of the women's role also places stumbling blocks in the way of better employment. Filipa is so directed and controlled by the males in her household that it would be very difficult for her to work away from the house. Also Blancas' comment about her husband not wanting her to work, is noteworthy. Can that be taken as an indication of her husbands' concern or of his control? As mentioned in an earlier chapter, there is still the expectation in Mexico that, once married, a woman doesn't work outside the home because she has a husband to support her. Put to the test in poor neighbourhoods, this theory proves unrealistic. Marriage therefore can also be considered as a barrier to outside employment for women. Their class situation also poses a barrier for these women. In the social structure of Mexico, shantytown women are at the lowest level. Therefore they are seen as workers for the system not owners of the system. In a conversation with Blanca, she mentioned that people outside the barrio often mistrust the shantytown women, but Blanca felt that it was best to be honest so that she would get a good reference from her employer when seeking a better job. Poverty is a barrier in and of itself. Also, colour/race cannot be entirely disregarded as a barrier. Many shantytown women have darker complexions than those of middle and upper class Mexicans. Interestingly, the television coverage given to Salinas' PRONASOL project, mentioned earlier, is one of the few times

when "brown faces" have been shown as representative of Mexicans. Is the government finally acknowledging that poverty is also a race issue? Ill health, often a result of living in such poor circumstances, can prevent shantytown women from working regularly. Illness can take the form of physical ill health; mental and emotional stress; or just complete "burn out". Although the women rely on their family and friendship ties to make contacts for better jobs, those sources have their limitations. Therefore lack of information about other job opportunities could also pose a problem in seeking better employment.

To sum up, the women in Tetela work as domestics, shop assistants, home-based workers, and vendors because of a combination of the barriers discussed above. The demanding combination of their paid and unpaid labour helps to keep them segregated from the mainstream of society and focused, almost exclusively, on survival.

The women and their community work

It was mainly during the course of informal conversations with the women and their friends that I discovered that some of them were involved in community projects. I suspect that others were too, but that wasn't brought to my notice. Filipa, the one who seemed to me to be completely overworked already, was the prime mover

behind the delivery of lamina pieces for the houses. It took her several trips to check at the PRI office, and a number of days waiting for the delivery. She and her daughter-in-law took it in turns to wait on the roadside out of Tetela for the delivery. While one was waiting, the other attended to domestic chores back at the house. These lamina pieces were for the benefit of the whole community and Filipa had taken on the responsibility of making sure they were delivered and distributed. Filipa told me during one of our conversations that she was hoping to organize the neighbours and collect money for a water tank which would save the daily trips to the well, but she didn't think she'd have much success with this venture. Petra and some of her friends attended a meeting held by the municipal authorities to discuss the land situation in Tetela. Whenever I spoke to Petra, I found that she was very politically aware and interested in what was going on outside the barrio. Because elections were forthcoming, Reyna was helping distribute information from a booth set up by the PRI. I have no idea whether or not she was paid for this. Ofelia mentioned to me that one Sunday the whole community was going to a nearby barrio to help install a cement drainage system. The men would be doing the work on the system, and it was the women's job to prepare food and take it along to be served to the men. This was a perfect example of socially accepted gender roles within a community project.

Certainly it was evident that the main barriers to women's participation in community organizing was lack of time and male attitudes. Several of the women had definite

ideas of what needed to be done to improve the community but they had neither the time, the information necessary to tackle the problems, nor the political clout to make significant changes.

The women and their survival strategies

Productive and reproductive work are the main survival strategies for women. Productive work gives them much-needed cash for basic needs, and reproductive work nurtures and sustains their families on a daily basis. The women coopt assistance in both of these areas from their children - mainly their daughters. This is for sheer survival too. As Filipa told me, "If Ruth (her daughter) won't help me, who will?"

Coupled with these strategies, the women rely on other ways to continue their constant battle for survival. As has been mentioned and discussed earlier, kinship and compadrazgo networks provide much needed support in a variety of situations including child care, job contacts, health care and financial assistance. For example, Dona Josefina and Dona Marci, two elderly women, are long-time comadres, sharing the raising of a few turkeys and consulting each other about their ailing health. Luisa and Petra, much younger women, are also comadres. This relationship has been established for many years as Luisa is godmother to Petras' children.

As individuals, women employ various strategies like Dona Josefina and her turkeys for extra food and/or extra cash. Petra tried to raise a few chickens for the same purpose, but, as she explained to me, "The person who spends more time at home is able to do these things, but in my house, its not possible because I go out to work." Filipa had planted some fruit trees near her house, and at some distance has a small plot of corn which had been growing well. Then, one morning, Filipa took me over to the corn plot to show me the damage which had been done by some cattle that had strayed down from the ridge during the night. There was not an ear of corn left. Filipa was so upset and I sensed and shared her feelings. All of that work for nothing, and still the struggle must go on.

How do the women survive the constant mental and emotional stress of such difficult circumstances? Their religious beliefs - their faith in God - gives them some comfort and strength. In separate conversations, both Petra and Filipa mentioned their faith as an important part of their lives. That same faith also helps to perpetuate the ideology surrounding their position as women in Mexican society, and helps to keep them marginalized. Those with small black-and-white television sets often snatch a little time to escape their daily struggles through the make-believe world of the soap operas, while others, once a week, meet with friends to play cards in the shady courtyard adjoining Petras' house. Even Filipas' efforts to grow some flowering plants around her house indicate the need for mental and emotional diversion from the overwhelming demands of daily living.

The women and their aspirations

Aspirations know no boundaries of class, race, gender or culture. Shantytown women have hopes and dreams. Because many of their aspirations are directly related to their daily lives, how realistic are they in that context?

Blanca feels that the work she does - both paid and unpaid - is too much. She's tired all the time. For her, a chance to rest and to go out walking "just for fun" are her wishes. Moving out of Tetela would make life better, she said, there'd be less work and everything would be closer at hand. In Blancas' current position with three children and her husband working as a labourer, her chances of moving out of Tetela seem bleak. It was only a few months before my arrival that Blancas' house had been burnt to the ground. They were living in a one-room tin and lamina house borrowed from an uncle while Concepcion, her husband, with the uncles' help was constructing a new house of much the same size and with similar building materials. Both Blancas' and Conceptions' lack of education is a barrier to their ability to secure better jobs. Blanca cannot read or write, although she is currently being taught free of charge by a teacher from the school her children attend. The demands of domestic chores and the need to engage in paid work limit Blancas' chances for rest and relaxation.

Eva, one of the domestics, expressed her desire to earn more money. She was the most vocal about the small amount she is being paid. In Evas' words, "...with only a little money I feel very restricted. With a little more, I'd be able to live better." At 58 years of age, Evas' chances of getting another better-paying job are slim. The problem of rising unemployment resulting from industrialization policies makes even domestic work highly prized. Perhaps Eva could move horizontally to a better-paying domestic position, but other factors such as distance from Tetela, availability of transportation and the physical aspects of the work would all be constraints to this option. Apart from that, horizontal movement leaves the oppressive structures untouched.

Starting a small business is Ofelias' goal. By "small business" she means a stand on the narrow cobblestone street that leads into Tlaltenango, across the ravine from Tetela. Ofelia explained to me that she'd sell Cokes and Sabritas (a brand of potato chips/crisps), and perhaps picadas (snacks made from tortillas, topped with grated cheese, chili and onion). I could tell that she'd given this idea some thought as she pointed out that the Coke truck delivers as far as Tlaltenango so she could buy the Cokes directly from the truck. Evidently a vendor (as Ofelia would be) has to purchase three cases of Cokes daily - previously it was only one case per day. Ofelia feels that three cases would be quite easy to sell. Obviously Ofelia sees street vending as an improvement over her job as a domestic. Perhaps it would give her more freedom and more cash, as her domestic job entails only 2 to 3 days work a week for

4 hours a day. The area in which Ofelia envisages setting up her stand is already home to a number of vendors selling soft drinks, candy, pencils, plastic toys and household utensils, so Ofelia would certainly face some competition. It is well-known that in Mexico, street vending is the major occupation of women in the urban informal sector. The street vending would be more time-consuming than her domestic position. It would, like the domestic work, be an extension of her household responsibilities as she would have to prepare and cook the picadas at the stand. One of the problems she would encounter would be raising the capital to begin so that the Cokes and snacks could be purchased. Ofelia is well-known and well-liked in Tetela, so perhaps that would enhance her possibilities of regular customers, and maybe even initial financial assistance from her kinship networks.

More education is Petras' dream. She sees education as a way of changing her present situation and of offering her the possibilities for a better life not only for herself, but, more importantly, for her children. Petra completed primary school and had a job as a secretary before she was married. While in that position, she learned some English. In my conversations with her, it was obvious that she has a better knowledge and understanding of the world at large, than the other women. Petra feels that because she lives in such poor circumstances, her possibilities and opportunities are limited. She sees poverty as a barrier to increasing her chances for educational advancement. Adult education classes are available but because of the pressures of combining her paid and unpaid work, time for Petra to attend such

classes is almost non-existent. Also, Petra would need a tremendous amount of family support, especially from her husband, to do this.

At 36 years of age, Luisa, the shop assistant, has lived in Tetela all her life. Perhaps that is one of the reasons she felt that her life was satisfactory. She didn't have any hopes or dreams - or at least she didn't express them to me. Her response was, "We're OK - more or less."

On the other hand, Filipa expressed a wish for a stove and some furniture - "not fancy furniture" - and just the necessary things at the house. With these conveniences, she feels there'd be less work like the multiple daily trips for wood and water. To make this a reality, Filipa recognized her need for more money. She has been looking for more paid work but so far has been unsuccessful. Filipa's situation is probably the most difficult of the women with whom I spoke. With no support at all from her husband, and minimal support from her adult children, she is almost totally reliant on money given to her sporadically, by her son and son-in-law. The small amount she earns from washing and ironing is certainly not sufficient to sustain the household. While on one hand realizing that she needs more money which means more work, she said, "I feel tired. I long for the time when I don't have to work so hard." In other words, perhaps Filipa, like other shantytown women are waiting for the day when resources are distributed more equally among all sectors of Mexican society; when gender inequalities in the household and outside are challenged and

restructured; when social and cultural ideologies around women's roles disappear; when class barriers are not an issue in employment opportunities; when marriage provides nurturing and support rather than oppression and domination; and when the government recognizes the desperate plight of shantytown women and adjusts its outward-looking policies to focus on the needs of its own population. Surely, it is only by addressing these social, economic, cultural and political barriers at the individual, community and national level that some relief to the current situation will be forthcoming. Those at the policy-making levels of government must be aware of the urgency of the situation for poor women, and be prepared, in consultation with shantytown community groups, to work together to find appropriate solutions.

The aspirations of the shantytown women - less work, more money, better housing, time to rest, more food, fair treatment, more opportunities for education, basic services, and time to enjoy life - are not very revolutionary. Seen in the context of a country intent on pulling itself into the ranks of "first world" nations, the inequalities and oppression experienced by poor women stand in contrast to a modern, streamlined, industrialized society. The women's aspirations should be attainable. In all cases, within the framework of the current situation, they are not.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION

The daily lives of the shantytown women in Tetela del Monte present a complex pattern of interwoven activities for the specific purpose of survival. Viewed through the framework of socialist feminism, the private and public dimensions of their marginalization are revealed. In the context of Mexican society, this revelation goes virtually un-noticed and unheeded. This is because shantytown women and their contributions to the functioning of society remain invisible. Their courageous and persistent survival efforts are overshadowed by class, gender and cultural discrimination, and only lip service is paid to attempts to dismantle these structures which keep shantytown women subordinated, restricted and oppressed.

By looking at shantytown women's work, survival strategies and aspirations, it becomes evident that these three issues are inter-linked - all, in fact, are survival strategies, even the aspirations. In other words this illustrates quite clearly that shantytown women are not only propelled by their need to survive, but, at the same time, restricted by it. The constant, unrelenting pressure of survival forces them to manage productive and reproductiv tasks. It prompts their involvement in community groups and projects which are basically designed with community well-being in mind. It conditions their aspirations. It directs their lives.

In this thesis I have shown how economic changes and policies supporting these

changes have increased the gap between rich and poor in Mexico. Agricultural policies have forced small farmers, especially women, off the land and into the urban areas to seek employment. As migration to the cities increases and unemployment rates rise, more people are forced into informal sector jobs. I have shown how the informal sector with its low-paying, insecure jobs is expanding, and that women make up the largest percentage of workers in that sector. They find employment as domestics, traders, street vendors and marketers. Most of the women in these jobs combine this paid work with their reproductive tasks simply to ensure the survival of their families. The main aim of this thesis was to examine the way in which these women organize their lives on a day-to-day basis and to point out the strategies they employ for survival.

By conducting a case study of one shantytown, I was able to provide an understanding of the way women confront class and gender structures and patriarchal ideology on a daily basis. Focusing on productive and reproductive work as well as the ideology surrounding gender roles within marriage and the family, I showed that poor women carry the heaviest burdens and are the most oppressed. My research also brought to the fore the strength of these women as they shouldered these burdens and continued to aspire to better conditions for themselves and for their children.

Any solution to this situation necessitates a radical change in national structures and in the mindset of middle and upper class Mexicans. If, at the President's decree, the

national media can focus attention on poor Mexicans in order to promote grassroots projects of dubious repute, then why can't the media highlight the contributions that poor women make to their country's growth and stability? At the same time, why not refocus the themes of the fotonovelas and soap operas? Because of their wide appeal, promotion of the positive roles of poor women would reach people across the nation. Are such ideas so revolutionary?

Perhaps they are, considering that the umbrella under which these repressive systems operate is patriarchy, manifest through a male-dominated capitalist society intent on accumulation at any price - even the dignity and self-determination of its citizens. It is therefore not only the needs of poor women which must be articulated in solidarity with women of other classes - those needs are painfully evident to anyone who steps into a street in a Mexican town or city. More importantly, the human-ness of shantytown women as citizens, workers, family members, and participants in all aspects of Mexican life must be acknowledged and affirmed.

Further research could begin with a study of the relationships between the shantytown women and their employers. In my research, I noted that some of those relationships were positive - at least there was some degree of trust, consideration and understanding. In other words, how do the "senoras" really feel about the women they employ? How were their attitudes formed? Is mutual support possible, and under what conditions? This could be the basis of exploring the issue of solidarity

amongst women of different classes by looking at the situation of both middle/upper class women and shantytown women, and how they inter-relate. Certain commonalities shared by both groups may allow the formation of a stronger voice for women in Mexican society.

The time for this may not be right for all of Mexican society, but for shantytown women, it is long overdue.

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

1. Can you tell me, in your own words, about the work you do during the day, from when you get up to when you go to bed?
2. Of the work that you've described, what part is paid work?
3. How did you get this work/job?
4. Describe for me exactly what your paid work involves, and how many hours of the day you spend at it.
5. Where do you carry out your paid work? Describe the location, and the responsibilities of any other people involved with you in that work.
6. Can you tell me your reasons for doing this work?
7. What effect does the time you spend at this work/job have on your household responsibilities?
8. Is this work necessary for your survival? Without the money earned from this work, what would be the consequences, if any, for you and your family?
9. Do you, personally, enjoy doing this work? Why?
10. Let us change the subject to unpaid work. Explain to me about your unpaid work. What does it involve and how many hours a day do you spend at it?
11. Does anyone help you with your unpaid work?
12. How necessary is this unpaid work to the survival of your family?
13. What are your feelings about the amount of work - paid and unpaid - that you do?
14. If you had the opportunity, what changes would you make to your work day?

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