The Intersection of Work and Gender

Central American Immigrant Women and Employment in California

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This article examines the intersection of U.S. employment and gender relations in the family lives of Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrant women and how immigration experiences affect gendered perceptions of work. It is based on intensive interviews with 26 Salvadoran women in San Francisco and 25 Guatemalan-ladinas and indigenous women in Los Angeles, complemented with ethnographic observations. The study shows that immigration affects gender relations, sometimes transforming and other times affirming them. Such changes do not depend automatically on entering paid work but on important social processes of working outside the home in the new context. A partial explanation can be found in the interaction between the structure of opportunity that these Central Americans encounter and their own social position, such as their ethnicity and class. This analysis prevents a universalizing of the employment experiences of immigrant women and a portrayal of these women's experiences in simple or unidirectional terms.

This article examines the effects of immigration on gender relations among Central American women. I focus on these women's experiences in relation to the immigrant men's situations and assess how immigration affects their gendered perceptions of work. Building on the work of others (Glenn, 1986; Zavella, 1987), I examine the differential effect of U.S. employment for Central American men and women and how this, in turn, affects these immigrants'

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perceptions of work. This approach allows for a more complex examination of how gender relations are transformed or affirmed through contemporary immigration, as sociocultural patterns and broader forces are configured differently across time and locales. Clearly, changes that occur in gender relations as a result of the immigrants' entry into paid work can no longer be seen as simple or unidirectional. Nor are these changes simply the result of earning a wage. There are important social processes of U.S. employment that alter gender relations between men and women.

Empirically, this article is based on the experiences of recent Salvadoran and (indigenous and ladina)[1] Guatemalan immigrant women in California. The 1980s brought about the greatest population movements in contemporary Central American history (Torres-Rivas & Jiménez, 1985). These movements occurred as the politico-economic stability of the region was shaken when the regimes of some countries—particularly those of El Salvador, Guatemala, and Nicaragua—engaged in military confrontations. During this time, many Central Americans migrated to neighboring countries, Mexico, and the United States. Despite the political turmoil prevailing in their homelands, Central American immigrants were not treated as political refugees by the U.S. government, a contradiction on which some researchers of Central American migration focused (Jones, 1989; Stanley, 1987; Ward, 1987). Other researchers examined the psychosocial trauma among these immigrants (Aron, Corne, Fursland, & Zelwer, 1991; Guarnaccia & Farias, 1988), their participation in the labor force (Repak, 1995), and the social processes of community building (Hagan, 1994; Mahler, 1995; Menjívar, 1997; Rodríguez & Hagan, 1992). But, in spite of the predominance of women in Central American migration, their specific experiences have not been placed at the center of analyses (for a few exceptions, see Hagan, 1996, and also studies with a sociopsychological bent such as Aron et al., 1991; Guarnaccia & Farias, 1988).

The study participants discussed in this article migrated recently from Guatemala to Los Angeles and from El Salvador to San Francisco. On their arrival, both groups encountered similarly disadvantaged contexts of reception—hostile immigration policies, stiff competition in the labor market, and local communities with few resources. The context of reception is vital, as it shapes the structure of opportunity for men and women in different ways. Also important is an analysis of how these immigrants' diverse backgrounds—including specific sociocultural aspirations and ideologies—contribute to transform or affirm gender relations as these immigrant women enter paid work in the United States.

The majority of these women worked for an income in their own countries before migrating to the United States, so earning a living is not new for them. What is novel is their entrance into U.S. paid work in a new and different social, economic, political, and cultural context brought about by their migration. I argue that these new conditions carry great potential for gender relations—either transforming or affirming them. I seek to examine these women's perceptions of how, through migration, their lives as income earners within the

broader context of gender relations may have changed. These results do not depend solely on the women's abilities to earn incomes but on the social processes of working outside the home as conditioned by the new context. This study may help isolate analytically the effects of immigration on gender relations without conflating migratory effects with entry into paid work. This research will add to the body of research that examines immigrant women with premigration paid-work experience (see Georges, 1990; Grasmuck & Pessar, 1991). With the increasing feminization of the workforce around the world, insights gained from these studies may enhance our understanding of a growing immigrant population.

Furthermore, even though I analyze the experiences of Central American women—Guatemalan and Salvadoran—it must be emphasized that this is not a homogeneous category. The differences between these groups and between the ladina and indigenous among the Guatemalans preclude a universalization of experiences for these women. Thus, because the "social location" (Zavella, 1991) of these informants is diverse, examining their experiences allows us to tease out elements that pertain to gender, class, nationality, or ethnicity. The social location of families (i.e., where they are situated in relation to social institutions that allocate resources) results in different family characteristics such as gender and marriage patterns (Baca Zinn, 1996, p. 175). Differences in social location are important to discern because they often get fused with issues pertaining to gender, particularly when immigrant women are characterized as a homogeneous and unified group. Situating these identities within a broader context—politics of reception, local labor market conditions, and the organization of the receiving community—helps to convey the dynamic and fluid nature of gender relations. Broader politico-economic and sociocultural factors are patterned differently across time and locale and, as such, generate a multiplicity of experiences. And, although patriarchal ideologies are more general and may even be universal, their local expression varies according to the social characteristics of the immigrants and historical specificities of their migration. Thus, each immigrant group is confronted with their own dilemmas in gender relations and their reconfiguration.

Evaluating the gains and losses of immigration for these women represents a highly subjective enterprise. To minimize an outsider's bias, I will present their experiences and assessments of their predicaments in their own voices. Situations that an observer might deem oppressive may actually represent forms of liberation for the women involved, and vice versa. Bachu (1986) and Foner (1986) in their studies of Ugandan Indians in London and of Jamaican women in New York, respectively, point out that immigrant women evaluate their current situations in comparison to what they left behind, a point also echoed by Morokvasic (1984, p. 894). Moreover, immigration brings about changes in gender relations that have complex and uneven effects; it presents women with opportunities and, at the same time, imposes constraints (Morokvasic, 1984; Tienda & Booth, 1991). Often, a gain in one sphere results in a loss in another

(Kibria, 1990), making it difficult for women to provide unambiguous assessments of their new predicaments. In this regard, Pessar (1995) reminds us that "respecting and acknowledging the subjects' multiple and sometimes contradictory voices gives us license to explore the inconsistencies and ambivalence in their words and actions" (p. 45). Thus, although this approach adds complexity to our observations, it captures the immigrants' social worlds more accurately.

Even though the work I present here focuses on the experiences of the immigrants in their places of destination, to make sense of what happens there, it will be useful to examine events that occurred prior to the immigrants' arrival. After discussing the data sources and the methodology employed, I provide a brief overview of the contexts of both exit and reception, followed by the immigrants' accounts organized around two main areas: these immigrants' perceptions of U.S. employment and their consequences for gender relations in families.

DATA AND METHOD

The data used in this study come from intensive interviews done in Spanish with 26 Salvadoran immigrant women in San Francisco and with 25 Guatemalan immigrant women in Los Angeles, complemented with participant observation in both locations. These immigrants were "recently arrived"; that is, they had been in the United States for no longer than 5 years when I first interviewed them. Fieldwork in San Francisco took place from approximately 1990 to 1994, and in Los Angeles from 1994 to 1995. Even though the focus of the study is on the women's stories, I also interviewed and spoke informally with many men during the course of the fieldwork. I conversed informally with these immigrant women's friends, neighbors, family members, and on a few occasions, their employers, too. I met with community leaders and workers, including Catholic priests and evangelical pastors who complemented greatly my informants' own stories.

I contacted my informants through language schools, clinics, community organizations, and churches located in various neighborhoods with high concentrations of Central American immigrants. These places also provided me with an opportunity to gather important observations because I spent many hours in these locations. During this time, I helped my informants with translations, car rides, filling out forms, or with any information or advice I could provide. Some reciprocated these small favors with kind invitations to eat special meals at their homes or to celebrations such as birthdays, baptisms, or weddings. This allowed me to gain an in-depth look at the social world of my informants and provided me with invaluable opportunities to ask about their perceptions of their lives. Although I took steps to ensure that my informants would represent different sectors of the Salvadoran and Guatemalan populations by contacting them in diverse places, the small number of informants in this study and their characteristics are not meant to be representative in a strict statistical sense.

Thus, it would be inappropriate to attempt to generalize directly from these observations to all Guatemalans or Salvadorans in the United States, much less to all immigrants.

The 26 Salvadoran women had a mean age of 31, and 9 years of education. Half of them mentioned some knowledge of English, although none were fluent speakers. Almost half were either in consensual unions or legally married. The class backgrounds of these immigrants was varied: Some were students in El Salvador; others were teachers, clerks, factory workers, and secretaries; and one was a housekeeper and another a street vendor. All the Salvadoran women had been working full-time or part-time prior to their migration.[2] They came from all regions of the country, many from the capital city where they had migrated prior to leaving for the United States. In San Francisco, they lived in and around the Mission District, the predominantly Latino section of the city.

The 25 Guatemalans include two sociodemographically and culturally different groups—14 ladinas and 11 indigenous women.[3] The mean age for the ladinas was 30 years, and 33 for the indigenous women. Two thirds of the Guatemalan women—almost equal proportions of ladinas and indigenous—were either married or in consensual unions. On average, the ladinas had 8 years of education, whereas the indigenous women had only 4 years. A quarter of the Guatemalans mentioned some knowledge of English, but none spoke English fluently. Compared to the Salvadorans, both groups of Guatemalans were less urban. The ladinas came from towns and cities in eastern Guatemala, and the indigenous women came from the western highlands, mostly from the Kaqchikel region, but some were from El Quiché. All the indigenous women and two thirds of the ladinas had earned incomes in Guatemala. Their class backgrounds, while varied, were not as diverse as those of the Salvadorans. The indigenous women mostly worked weaving merchandise to sell, and the ladinas worked as clerks, housekeepers, and owners of small businesses. There were a couple of former students among the ladinas, but none among the indigenous women. All the indigenous women were bilingual in Spanish and either Kaqchikel or K'iche.[4] The ladinas lived primarily in Hollywood and south-central Los Angeles, and the indigenous were concentrated around Pico-Union and Westlake, both areas immediately west of downtown Los Angeles.

CONTEXT OF EXIT AND JOURNEY

Many Central Americans have brought with them memories and traumatic experiences stemming from the political upheaval in their countries, making the context and circumstances of their exit of particular importance in shaping their lives. The politico-military crisis in Central America received more international attention than the socioeconomic reverberations that affected all sectors of those societies with different degrees of intensity. Within an environment of generalized violence, however, women become particularly vulnerable as

victims of assaults, rapes, and kidnappings (Martin-Forbes, 1992; Menjívar, 1993; Seller, 1981).

The crises of the 1980s can be generally traced back to the early years of independent history in Central America and, more specifically, to the developmental years of the 1950s. Governments and local elites attempted to transform these mainly agro-exporting societies into industrialized ones through policies of import substitution in a vacuum of broader structural reforms (Menjívar, 1993). The resulting economic boom benefited only a small group, further impoverishing the urban and rural poor. This polarization magnified the already marked class differences. The number of dissatisfied groups that had been adversely affected by or altogether excluded from the development process increased over the years, and by the 1980s, this culminated in an armed conflict fueled by outside intervention and institutionalized violence. These events drove thousands of Central Americans from all sectors of society to abandon their usual places of residence. It has been estimated that up to one third of El Salvador's inhabitants were displaced by the 12-year war, many of whom migrated to the United States. Estimates range from 8% of the country's population (Lopez, Popkin, & Telles, 1996) to close to 20% (Montes & García, 1988).

The Guatemalan armed conflict started much earlier and extended approximately 30 years. In addition to generalized social change and accompanying conflict in the region, indigenous communities in Guatemala went through profound transformations in the 1970s, most notably as progressive forms of organization were instituted and ideologies disseminated (i.e., cooperatives, unions, theology of liberation, etc.) (Stepputat, 1994). The government army responded with repression and engaged in counterinsurgency campaigns, mainly in the indigenous-populated western highlands where it believed forces promoting social change had sympathizers. The result of this campaign was the destruction of many villages and the displacement of between a half million and a million people (Manz, 1988). Many of them fled as refugees to neighboring areas such as southern Mexico, but a significant number made their way to the United States. These U.S.-bound, indigenous Guatemalans were joined by non-indigenous migrants who were not only motivated by the economic dislocations during the crisis but also by their direct suffering from the rampant violence during that period.

Because most of these immigrants undertake their journeys without either a Mexican or a U.S. visa and, therefore, are forced to travel by land, the trip from either Guatemala or El Salvador to the United States is plagued with vicissitudes and the uncertainty of an eventual arrival. Most of the men and women with whom I spoke commented on the perils of the trip: the abuses on the part of immigration officials in Mexico and, in many cases, the unscrupulous coyotes (smugglers) whom they hired to bring them into the United States. Many of these immigrants' harrowing experiences during their journeys left them with more or equally severe trauma than the violence in their countries had caused. This trip is particularly dangerous for women who, in addition to extortion and

robberies, are exposed to gender-specific crimes such as sexual assault and intimidation. Sometimes, however, women are able to negotiate better treatment by using their vulnerability as women to appeal to compassionate persons.

CONTEXT OF ARRIVAL

Several factors of the Central Americans' arrival impinge greatly on the lives of both male and female immigrants, ultimately shaping the ways they relate to each other. Government reception policies, local labor market opportunities, and the receiving community's organization combine to mold the structure of opportunities available to immigrants. As Portes and Rumbaut (1996) note, the context of reception channels immigrants in differing directions, often altering the link between individual skills and expected rewards. As we shall see, the receiving context has a powerful homogenizing effect on these Central American immigrants. Even though their class backgrounds are diverse, their insertion in U.S. society is similar. Furthermore, the context of reception affects men and women in different ways.

Although Salvadorans and Guatemalans were fleeing violence in their countries, they were not accorded refugee status by the U.S. government, who instead treated them as economic (mostly undocumented) immigrants. U.S. policies on Central America had more to do with these immigrants' treatment than did their motivations and conditions of exit. Once on U.S. soil, Salvadorans and Guatemalans could apply for asylum, but fewer than 3% were actually granted such a status (National Asylum Study Project, 1992). Relatively few of these immigrants qualified for amnesty through the Immigration and Reform Control Act of 1986 because the bulk of them migrated after the 1982 cutoff date. In practice, this meant that many Salvadorans and Guatemalans were ineligible for assistance for their resettlement regardless of the conditions of their exit.

During the time I was conducting fieldwork, some Salvadorans were granted temporary protected status (TPS), guaranteeing them the right to work; however, this temporary status had to be renewed every 18 months and expired in December 1994. Those who had been denied asylum earlier and those who had been granted TPS became eligible to resubmit asylum applications. The Immigration and Naturalization Service (INS) considers these applications on a case-by-case basis, and it is expected that fewer than 10% will be granted asylum. Immigration policy toward Salvadorans seems more ambiguous than ever because the INS announced that, although there will be no massive deportations, a blanket amnesty will not be granted. Of the Salvadoran women in this study, only 11 had documents—either permanent residence or TPS. The majority were undocumented, with few prospects for obtaining legal status; this was likewise with the Guatemalans. Only 5 of the Guatemalan women in this study had documents. In both groups, however, more men than women had documents.[5] Guatemalans were not granted TPS; they were only allowed to resubmit asylum

applications. The legal status of these immigrants considerably narrows their employment opportunities and the availability of resources. This, in turn, strongly affects their social relations and has important repercussions on gender relations and expectations.

In efforts to fill the vacuum of official resettlement aid, community members (mostly middle-class, White, politically active U.S. citizens and newcomer Central Americans themselves) set up community organizations to address the needs of newly arrived Central Americans. This organized response focused on emergency assistance, food and shelter, free clinics, job search strategies, and legal services. These organizations depend on private donations for the most part; and, as their financial difficulties have grown in the midst of an economic crisis, they are not able to provide services at the same rate as they have in the past.

As the local labor markets of both San Francisco and Los Angeles experienced a boom in the 1970s and 1980s, the Central American immigrants found opportunities in low-wage services. These labor markets were segmented by gender, as Central American women procured jobs mainly as domestic workers or as janitors in new hotels and office buildings. In Los Angeles, women found low-paying factory jobs as well. In both cities, men found jobs as janitors, as gardeners for increasingly affluent professionals, as busboys in the booming restaurant business, or as construction workers. However, as this boom gave way to the recession of the early 1990s (compounded by the 1989 Loma Prieta earthquake in San Francisco and the 1992 riots in Los Angeles), even these low-paying jobs became scarce. The result has been increased job competition among newcomer immigrants and, for immigrant men, a shift toward day labor from low-paying formal jobs (Chinchilla & Hamilton, 1992, p. 87).

All the participants in this study were either looking for work or employed. Those who worked held low-paying temporary or part-time (usually both) service jobs, and many worked without documents. Interestingly, more women than men were employed.[6] This situation may be indicative of the demand for domestic jobs that, as Repak (1995) observed, are available even in recessionary times (p. 103), or it may reflect how gender ideologies play out in the local labor markets (Menjívar, 1997, p. 110). Men do not work in domestic jobs. Their work in gardening, construction, and restaurants requires them to be more visible than if they worked inside a home as most women do. In a tight labor market, when the employers are supposed to be held accountable by the INS, it is easier to fill domestic jobs with undocumented women because that type of employment is harder to regulate. Although women may work more hours and may even earn more than men do, the lack of control inherent in domestic work often translates into job instability. Besides, when both men and women work, men earn more than women do. However, as we will see in the following section, this situation carries significant consequences for gender relations.

EFFECTS OF U.S. EMPLOYMENT

Employment has been seen as a source of women's increased bargaining power and control over resources, which, in turn, is believed to be the basis for personal liberty and more egalitarian relationships within the home (Benería & Roldán, 1987; Safa, 1995). However, a close examination of the cases in this study suggests that the situation is more complex. For these immigrant women, entry into paid work in the United States is not an unqualified indication of empowerment and improved status within the family.

In general, for these women, particularly for the ladina Guatemalans and Salvadorans, earning an income in the United States has had uneven consequences. Patriarchal gender notions have been somewhat relaxed primarily because of the precarious conditions in which these immigrants live. Some ladinas mentioned that they feel "stronger" in the United States; however, most of the women's evaluations of their new situations do not reveal a straightforward correlation between work and emancipation. For example, Esperanza, a ladina, explained,

> Here we are all equal, we both work [for an income], so we both have to do stuff at home, there's no way around it. But I can't really say that it's better here or there, because there I didn't work [outside the home] this much. Here I earn more, but there I worked less.

Some found that U.S. employment has improved their self-esteem, if not their social status. Rosa, a Salvadoran, explained,

> We are all humans so we all change a little in another country. . . . Maybe it's the lifestyle. Here, the man and the woman, both have to work to be able to pay the rent, the food, the clothes, a lot of expenses. Probably that . . . makes us, the women, a little freer in the United States . . . the ones who work. Because maybe yes, in El Salvador I didn't feel as secure as I feel here. In this country if you are courageous and have strength, you can get ahead by yourself, with or without him [a husband]. There are more opportunities for the person who wants to get ahead . . . no matter if it's a man or a woman. Then, possibly, I would say that's why here the woman doesn't follow the man more.

In contrast, indigenous Guatemalans tended to be less ambivalent and commented on the fact that the new environment provided different possibilities for both men and women. As Miriam, a K'iche, put it,

> I have earned a living since I was 9, so work is part of me, and here it's the same. But other things are different here. In Guatemala everything is harder for us . . . maybe because we are poor or because . . . we are different. . . . People think that because we wear *traje* [traditional indigenous clothing] we can't think or something. But here no, it's different. Here you can do something with your work, there are possibilities, opportunities for us. Here I feel more equal to everyone [nonindigenous]. . . . This is better for both men and women, I would say.

Miriam's viewpoint may be related to gender relations that are relatively more egalitarian among indigenous Guatemalans than are those among ladino Guatemalans or Salvadorans. Comparisons of gender relations between ladino and indigenous Guatemalans have emphasized the greater male dominance among ladino men, whereas indigenous gender relations have been characterized as more egalitarian (Bossen, 1984; Loucky, 1988; Maynard, 1974; Wolf, 1959, 1966). Also, because Miriam perceived better opportunities in the United States in comparison to what she faced in Guatemala as an indigenous person, the gender component of her experience took second stage.

"HERE ONE EARNS ALMOST TO SUPPORT ONE'S HUSBAND": WOMEN AS MAIN EARNERS AND ITS CONSEQUENCES

As indicated earlier, an important aspect in the experiences of these immigrants is that women often work longer hours than men do and, thus, may earn more than the men even though the women are paid less for their work. Oftentimes, women are the major contributors, or even the sole earners, in a household. It must be emphasized that the important fact here is that some women work while their husbands or partners do not. This situation, where the men's authority is reduced as a consequence of the women's increased economic contributions, has been observed in other groups (Kibria, 1994; Kudat, 1982; Lamphere, 1987), and it has been noted that this may lead to conflict. Similarly, in this study, I argue that when women become the main providers they do not gain more authority automatically, and it often brings serious, negative consequences for them. Many times, men turn to drinking out of frustration at failing to fulfill their socially expected role. This creates conditions ripe for domestic violence. In the words of Lolita, a Salvadoran,

> The Salvadoran man continues to be macho here. . . . The man becomes dependent on the woman. The woman goes to work, not the man. But men bring machismo with them, and the woman takes on more responsibility. . . . When men see themselves like that, they drink and that only brings a lot of problems home. . . . The women end up suffering a lot because the men let their frustrations out by beating the women. I have not seen a family that is in good shape yet.

When these women assess their predicaments, they often do so in ambiguous ways. The case of Amparo, a self-described housewife in rural El Salvador who used to make tortillas and raise chickens for sale, exemplifies this pattern. In her words,

> There [in El Salvador] one earns to help one's husband, here one earns almost to support one's husband. The men don't like this because they can't order around the house anymore. For women it would be better if they [the husbands] worked more because that's why they become very irresponsible here. There they have to earn because it's their obligation. Here they think "oh she can [earn] so I don't have to."

> So there are positives and negatives, everything has advantages and disadvantages.[7]

However, ethnicity introduces an important qualification in this respect. Perhaps because indigenous Guatemalans start out from a more egalitarian point, indigenous men do not appear as threatened as the ladino Guatemalans or Salvadorans do when the women are the main, or even sole, earners. In some cases, indigenous men even encourage the women to get ahead. The case of Hermelinda, a Kaqchikel, exemplifies this point. Her husband Jacobo, a day laborer, has not been successful in finding a steady job even though he goes to stand at the "corner"—the place where day laborers congregate to wait for prospective employers—every single day. Hermelinda, on the other hand, has been baby-sitting almost since she arrived and, thus, has been financially responsible for the household. In fact, 2 days after Hermelinda gave birth, she had to resume baby-sitting two children because this was the only source of stable income they had. She also does embroidery to sell when the children she baby-sits are gone. Jacobo confided that he is personally worried about this situation and would like her to stop working, not because his "reputation as a man is at risk," but because he wants something different for both. Recognizing the value of her work, he explained,

> I want her to stop baby-sitting, not because I don't want her to work . . . she's always worked, but because I don't want to get stuck. There are many opportunities here and she is smart in business and she can learn English quickly. Only if she learns English can she find a better job, and we can get ahead. It upsets me to find her at home all the time, when she could be doing something better.

Whereas the women's increased ability to procure jobs became an affront for some ladino Guatemalan and Salvadoran men, indigenous men saw it as an opportunity for both to get ahead.

SOCIAL CLASS, ASPIRATIONS, AND THE MEANING OF WORK

Many ladina Guatemalans and Salvadorans, particularly those with middle-class aspirations, see paid employment as an economic necessity, as a temporary strategy to get ahead. This point underscores Fernández-Kelly and García's (1990) observation of the Cuban women who saw their garment jobs as transitory in order to recover or attain a middle-class status. With few exceptions, these Central American women mentioned that the only reason they work is that they could not live on the husband's income alone; with a more comfortable life, they would opt not to work. Their husbands agreed and expressed their frustration at not being able to be the sole providers (in some cases, for not providing at all) for their families. In the words of Julio, a Salvadoran,

> Believe me, I feel as if my hands are tied, and my head ready to explode from the tension and disappointment. I don't want to be a *mantenido* [supported] by the wife. I don't feel like a man, I feel like a lady, and excuse me, but that's really terrible, insulting, for a man who's used to providing for his family.

Some of the women who worked as housekeepers mentioned that they could not understand why some of their female employers, in spite of "having money," continued to work. Alicia, a Guatemalan, commented,

> If I were Mrs. Brooks, I would spend my days sitting at home reading, *paseando* [going places], waking up late. No, instead of that, no, she goes out to work every single day. These Americans have customs that one never understands.

The point here is that these women do not see their work in a liberating light but only as a way to meet the survival requirements of their families. Clearly, these women's entry into paid work is predicated on their husbands' or companions' lack of adequate earnings, but once the economic status of the men is reconstituted, the women wish to withdraw from employment.

For indigenous women, on the other hand, even though work is an economic necessity as well, historico-cultural factors prompt them to see it in a different light. Rosa, a K'iche, said,

> Work is a part of life for both [men and women] here or in Guatemala. . . . Well, for us [indigenous people], it is. The man always has things to do, and the woman, too. In Guate[mala] I wove and sold my textiles and he worked the land. Here he works in different things, and I make food for sale and baby-sit. A woman always has to be busy, always has to work. She is more appreciated if she works hard. There's even a saying that the idle woman gets the devil in her head.

In contrast to ladina Guatemalans and Salvadorans, indigenous Guatemalan women's entry into employment does not depend on the economic vulnerability of men. Thus, they do not desire to withdraw from employment once the men regain their economic positions because these women have a different sociocultural perception of work. They do not share with the women in the other two groups the same ethnic- and class-specific perceptions of work and aspirations.

I had the opportunity to observe how earning an income gives some women a measure of independence with regard to spending. They dispose of it in ways that reinforce middle-class (and, to some extent, ethnic-specific) gender ideologies that many women aspire to and consider ideal. Some of my ladina Guatemalan informants invited me to a crystal party (similar to a Tupperware party) one Sunday afternoon. The Salvadoran woman who was selling expensive pieces of crystal emphasized how beautiful these pieces would look in their houses. The women, most of whom bought small pieces (for which they had to pay in installments), pointed out that they may not have beautiful homes in which to display the pieces now, but that it felt good to use them to adorn their humble dwellings

either in Los Angeles or back in Guatemala. These women, all ladina Guatemalans of modest origins, joked about an unspecified time in the future when they could be "housewives" and spend time decorating their homes in the style of their employers' homes instead of going to work. In the course of the conversation, it was revealed that the money they would use to purchase the crystal was from their own earnings. Apparently, their husbands—all were recent immigrants, and all but one were working temporary jobs at no more than the minimum wage—considered these "women's things." The husbands either did not understand why the women purchased the crystal or thought of it as an outright waste of money. For the women, on the other hand, these expensive pieces of crystal might symbolize a desire for middle-class status, particularly in the absence of middle-class financial resources.

"BUT WE REALLY HAVE THREE FAMILIES TO SUPPORT": MIGRATION PATTERNS AND THE SEPARATION OF EARNINGS

There are other cases where paid work in the United States may signify greater freedom for women in terms of spending money, but at the same time, it may carry negative consequences. Such situations are linked not merely to earning wages and being able to spend them but to a specific migration pattern. As is the case of other immigrants, many Guatemalans and Salvadorans were separated for several years from their partners by the migration of one of them before the other. During their time apart, it was not uncommon for these immigrants to form new unions in the United States, chiefly *acompañándose* (cohabiting) with partners who already had children from previous unions.[8] These U.S.-established unions were significant for my informants. Among the Salvadoran and ladina Guatemalan women who were in unions (whether legally married or acompañadas), slightly fewer than half were or had been in U.S.-established unions. Although there may be indigenous women who established these unions, I did not come across any. Nonetheless, among ladina Guatemalans and Salvadorans, it is a significant pattern that deserves attention, particularly in relation to notions of the family and gender relations. Also, this practice is slightly more common among people who were in consensual unions in their countries than among the legally married, and it must be noted that it did not emerge first in the United States. Historically, among rural, poor (mostly landless) men in El Salvador who made a living as seasonal workers, it was not uncommon to form new unions in the places where they went to work because it was difficult to move their entire families (Menjívar, 1992).[9]

According to informants in these unions, given the difficulty of both migrating from those countries and regularly visiting their families back home, it only made sense to find new partners in the United States. It is noteworthy that the women and men in the U.S.-established unions often have separate financial objectives: Many are responsible for their own families in their countries of

origin or in the United States and, therefore, are much more likely to keep their earnings and expenditures separate. In these cases, the women feel that it is imperative to earn their own incomes in order to spend them as they please, especially when they support families back home. Estela, a ladina Guatemalan who works 7 days a week cleaning houses, explained that she will keep on working at this rate due to her responsibilities for her children back home. In her words,

> I can't stop working even if my husband works because, if he supports me, I won't be able to send money to my children. Besides, he can't give me enough money because he has his own family to support. If both of us work, both of us can dispose of money and do with it whatever one pleases. It'd be different if we only had one family, but we really have three families to support . . . and because we're poor, we need to work more.

Maintaining separate finances, however, may actually worsen the women's burden, particularly for ladina Guatemalans and Salvadorans. Some of the men, already feeling constrained by their own inability to command adequate earnings and realizing the women's potential to support the households, have responded by evading their own financial responsibilities. Ethnic differences need to be drawn here again, as this pattern is more common among ladina Guatemalans and Salvadorans than among indigenous Guatemalans. And, although this pattern has encountered fertile soil in the United States given the inability of men to fulfill their socially ascribed role, it predates migration. For instance, Maynard (1974) analyzes two types of patriarchy in Guatemala: a "responsible patriarchy" among indigenous groups and an "irresponsible patriarchy" among ladino Guatemalans. Although men are seen as dominant in both groups, indigenous men are more likely to provide regular support for their families, whereas ladino Guatemalan men seemed less reliable. For the Salvadoran case, Adams (1959/1976) found that women headed approximately 33% of urban and 20% of rural households in the late 1950s in El Salvador. Recent estimates of the national rate of female-headed households in El Salvador range from 27% (García & Gomáriz, 1989) to a high of 40% (Carter et al., 1989), compared to only 15% in Guatemala. Unlike the Guatemalans, the Salvadoran rate was high before the conflict began. And, even in the most conservative estimate, the Salvadoran rate is the highest in the region (García & Gomáriz, 1989),[10] due primarily to the previously mentioned historical pattern of seasonal migration among landless, or nearly landless, men.

The case of a Salvadoran couple, Chentía and her husband Don David, demonstrates this pattern.[11] Chentía works for a janitorial company where she is able to make $11 per hour, a high wage by the standards of Salvadoran immigrants, plus a substantial insurance package that covers her entire family. Don David is the manager of the building where they live rent free in addition to his monthly salary of $600, though Chentía was not sure exactly how much Don David was paid. When I first met them, they both mentioned that they shared the

household's expenses equally, and Don David boasted of his responsibility, even though he noted that he earned less than she did. However, when I met alone with Chentía a few weeks later, she confided that Don David does not contribute a cent to the household expenses. In her words, "I am supporting him entirely, he doesn't even give me money to buy soap. He puts all his money in the bank, and I have to support him. But I won't do this for long. I don't need him." Chentía's situation might have been further complicated by the fact that she only married Don David in hopes of obtaining a green card, which Don David knew. She pointed out that Don David might not have been contributing to the household in order to make her "pay" for the marriage. As soon as Chentía obtained TPS with help from a community organization, she left Don David.

Similarly, Irma, a ladina Guatemalan, mentioned that she was tired of her consensual partner's excuses for not contributing to the household expenses. Although Irma's partner did not have a steady job, Irma thought he could contribute from the money he had earned from a few odd jobs he had in the previous months. She had been thinking about leaving him to go live with a female cousin who shares an apartment with another woman and her children. In this case, the eventual formation of this female-headed household was probably linked to the increased potential of the women to support their households, but more directly, it had to do with the men's economic instability. This point underscores findings that household formations among U.S. minorities are more affected by the economic vulnerability of men than by the economic well-being of women (Fernández-Kelly & García, 1990; Pessar, 1995).

DIVISION OF LABOR WITHIN THE HOUSEHOLD

The effects of women's employment on the household division of labor are varied.[12] Some studies have documented a reaffirmation in household gender relations (Goldring, 1996), others have demonstrated greater participation in household chores by husbands or partners (Foner, 1978; Guendelman & Perez-Itriago, 1987), and still others, notably Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994), present a complex picture linking negotiations in household work to different types of migration. This study does not offer a simple, straightforward answer, for these arrangements are linked in various ways to broader institutions and to the social position of the immigrants and, as such, present a multiplicity of experiences. The attitudes of the husbands toward women's paid employment are not uniform either. Some, evidently, are opposed to the wife working outside the home because it has the potential to diminish household services; it also serves as a reminder that the husband cannot be the sole provider. Others appreciate the financial contribution that their wives bring in because it allows for both to survive in the United States and, importantly, to send money back home. And still others are ambivalent about the women's entry into paid work in the United States, as this has often meant more than simply a chance to earn money, and the men find it difficult to weigh the pros and cons. Although it is difficult to

ascertain exactly what may contribute to the variation in the men's responses, my observations indicate that ethnicity and class may affect these attitudes. Ambivalence or opposition to a working wife seemed to be a particularly important issue among the ladino Guatemalans with aspirations for middle-class status, for whom it was a matter of prestige to support their wives.

The case of Mayra and Ricardo, a Salvadoran couple, serves as an illustration of a transformation in the household division of labor that can be interpreted as resulting directly from Mayra's employment in the United States and how she and her husband perceive it. Mayra worked full-time as a primary-school teacher in San Salvador before she migrated; however, she always saw her income as "complementary" to Ricardo's. In the United States, they both work full-time, but their views have changed—perhaps due to the social perception of her work in El Salvador and the financial challenges in the United States of trying to sustain a family on one income. Ricardo explains,

> Here we both work equally, we both work full-time, and we both have responsibilities at work. If she is asked to stay at work late, I have to stay with the children, feed them, care for them. In El Salvador it was different. I never touched a broom there [laughing] so don't tell anyone you saw me here like this. . . . There, everyone knows that if a woman is married, she has family responsibilities, and that comes first. So if she needs to quit working because of her family, OK, nobody suffers too much. Here, no. If she quits, we don't eat. That's the truth. Everything is so expensive here: rents, food, hospitals. . . . We don't have insurance so you can imagine. So she has to work like me, I don't help her [financially], and she doesn't help me. It's equal.

In this case, this new perception has translated into real gains for Mayra in terms of the household division of labor. As Mayra explains,

> Now he washes clothes, cleans, sweeps, and even feeds the girls if I'm not home. I am surprised because in El Salvador he never entered the kitchen. But this is another country. Sometimes I laugh when I see him, but I don't tell him anything so that he won't be embarrassed.

Mayra's cousin Rosa María is not so convinced of the changes in Salvadoran men's attitudes and offered this explanation:

> I believe men help because it's so easy here. Back [in El Salvador] I had to sweep and mop, here it's only the vacuum. There I had to wash by hand, then iron even the sheets. Here, no, you have washing and drying machines. So it's not the same when one says that men do household chores here. Here it is like playing.

The case of Margarita, a ladina Guatemalan, further exemplifies changes in the household division of labor. In her case, however, she relates it to her new position as a wage earner, as she did not work outside the home in Guatemala. She told me that "he [her husband] was the one who worked in Guatemala. I was

the housewife. He used to decide everything . . . and I would do everything, but everything, at home. But things changed here." When I asked her why, she replied,

> Because I think that in this country one [the woman] has to work like the man. Over there he used to tell me not to work, but here I have to, otherwise we can't survive. So the man and the woman change. . . . They have to. So now he takes care of the children, even gives them a bath. You may think this is little, but this is a great transformation for him. . . . In Guatemala he would not even get up to get a glass of water, I had to do it for him. Here he even cooks for himself sometimes! The change is like night and day.[13]

But the change, or its perception, is, of course, rooted in what happened in the past. Thus, according to my indigenous Guatemalan informants, the men's attitudes had not changed very much. It is not that indigenous men regularly engaged in household chores in Guatemala, but that "they accommodate to the conditions," as Hermelinda, a Kaqchikel, put it. In her case, her husband would help out at home in Guatemala when Hermelinda could not do everything on her own. So the fact that in the United States he washes dishes, does the laundry, cooks, or irons even after getting home from work (or looking for work), does not surprise Hermelinda. In her words,

> Sometimes he gets home and wants to wash the dishes, and I tell him no, you're tired. But he says that I'm tired because I have been home taking care of the children that I baby-sit. The truth is that we're both tired, so we try to lighten each other's burden a little. . . . So this is the same, here or there [in Guatemala]. What's different is the [actual] work that needs to be done.

WORKING WOMEN'S BALANCING ACTS

Women's access to regular employment may lead to greater leverage in negotiating assistance with household chores. But when the woman is the sole earner as a result of the man's inability to earn regular wages, it often has the opposite effect, particularly for ladina Guatemalans. Although it may happen among indigenous Guatemalans, I did not observe it in any of the cases in this study. But as the case of Hermelinda, above, suggests, perhaps because indigenous Guatemalans start out from a more egalitarian point, the fact that the woman works when the man cannot does not tend to have the negative consequences that it has for the other groups. Contrary to what one might expect, among the ladina Guatemalans (less so among the Salvadorans) when women are the sole providers for the household, they often have to do all the household chores as well. In these situations, entry into paid work in the United States reaffirms gender relations—either ideologically or practically—and both the men and the women become active agents in this process. In a way, this serves to assure the men, conceivably threatened by the women's improved economic opportunities, that they still hold authority.

The case of Nora, a ladina Guatemalan, exemplifies this point. Nora takes care of an elderly Mexican American woman who has allowed Nora and her family to live with her. Nora finds this extremely taxing because it is a 24-hour, 7-days-a-week job. In addition, she does all the household chores; only when she is exhausted does she ask her children to help her out. She seldom leaves the house—not even to attend mass on Sunday—and feels her life is *esclavizada* (enslaved). Her husband lost his job as a construction worker when he demanded to be hired legally after he became a permanent resident. Although he has been unemployed for more than 6 months, he almost never lends a hand with household chores. Nora seems convinced that it is her duty to do all the housework because, in Guatemala, she used to be a housewife, and thus, she was used to that. Her husband, however, instead of taking steps to increase his participation in household chores, is seeking a solution more in line with his views. He explained, "I am thinking of moving to Reno. I have heard that there are plenty of jobs for men there, so Nora won't have to work and will only take care of the children, as it should be." Nora smiled in approval of her husband's statement.

Other women made a conscious effort to avoid making their husbands or partners feel inadequate, as mentioned by Antonieta, a ladina Guatemalan. Antonieta works from 3 p.m. to midnight as a waitress in a downtown Los Angeles cafeteria. Although she usually stays after the place closes to clean up, she does not get paid overtime for it. Her partner tries hard to find regular employment but has only found temporary jobs. Before Antonieta leaves for work, she prepares her partner's dinner and makes sure the house is clean. Apparently, he does not like reheated dishes and prefers Guatemalan-style meals, so she must cook everyday because he will not accept a sandwich or a ready-made meal. Sometimes, when Antonieta returns home, she washes the dishes from her partner's dinner, though often she leaves them for the next day. Even though Antonieta recognizes the superhuman character of her efforts, she does it all because

> it's the way it should be. The woman has to take care of the house. . . . If I work, that's because I have to. But I don't want to make him feel as if I'm the man of the house. . . . It's not right. . . . It creates problems . . . because it's not normal.

This point parallels the balancing act that Kudat (1982) discusses in her study of Turkish women.

In these cases I have presented, both Nora and Antonieta see their position as main or sole earners as temporary—and somewhat aberrant at that. Thus, they do not upset what is perceived as normative, that is, orthodox arrangements in the household division of labor, even if they are cognizant of the great burden that their double shifts represent. Still, for other women who are aware of their double shifts, particularly legally married women, the objective is different. Carmen, a Salvadoran, explained,

> I kill myself working all day and come home to keep on working, it's very tiring. . . . But when one is married, has children, I say to myself, one has to see that the household doesn't disintegrate, that we stay united.

Carmen's words echo a statement by a Dominican informant in Pessar's (1995) study that Pessar interprets as an illustration of the struggle working-class women face (pp. 43-44). Moreover, efforts such as Carmen's to maintain the conjugal unit are related not only to the women's fears that they will be left financially incapacitated if they separate from their husbands but also to the social meaning of a marital union. In the case of many Central Americans, the conjugal unit is an idealized family pattern—a symbol associated with middle-class standing and a luxury that cannot be shared by all. Female-headed households, on the other hand, are commonly associated with lower-class background (Bossen, 1984, pp. 161, 289; Ferrán, 1974).

EMPLOYMENT AND GENDER IDEOLOGY

From my observations, the potential effects of paid work in the United States on gender relations for the women in this study cannot be discussed in purely economic terms. Possible advantages do not seem to stem directly from the economic gains of employment but from the particular social process that accompanies it. For many women, it is not the sole act of working and earning wages that brings changes to their worlds but the social organization of their work. The lives of most of these immigrants are structured so that they do not actively interact with the wider society; instead they live, shop, and socialize mainly with other Latinos. However, the organization of women's and men's work differs, and it exposes them to dissimilar worlds where they observe behaviors and practices and take in new ideas. The work women perform allows them to observe practices and behaviors beyond their immediate groups, which they may selectively incorporate in their own routines. Besides, women are typically more enthusiastic about embracing values that would enhance their position (Foner, 1997). This is not a crude form of assimilation, for these women do not claim to abandon practices they bring with them and become "Americanized," but a more subtle social process that takes place as they come into contact with the world of their employers.

Baby-sitting, cleaning, and caring for the elderly are tasks that are accomplished individually, presenting isolating experiences that keep these women away from other Latinas. Women are not isolated from one another as they gain access to jobs through networks with fellow Latina women, but they spend many hours laboring alone.[14] However, at work, these women—particularly live-in domestics—are more exposed to their employers' middle-class patterns of behavior (particularly within the household). Whereas the social organization of

work exposes women to progressive changes in gender relations, work serves to reaffirm for the men the gender orthodoxy brought from home. The work men tend to do—gardening, construction, restaurant services—brings them in close contact primarily with other Latino men and, thus, does not so readily allow them to observe novel gender relations. This is particularly the case among the more educated ladina Guatemalans and the Salvadorans, who may see it as socially feasible to adopt some of their employers' behaviors. According to Lolita, a Salvadoran with a college degree who was a labor organizer in her country,

> We have to reeducate the people, in various ways, starting with the men. Imagine, I work with a couple, caring for their baby. She's Jewish and he's Irish. I like the way they are with each other, very understanding. He helps in the house, and they seem happy. She and I talk about these things. I ask how she did it, and she laughs. But just to see how they live, it's exemplary, and it shows the happy side of being married. Why can't Salvadoran men learn from this?

The case of Ana Ruth and Mauricio, a Salvadoran couple, further exemplifies the ladina Guatemalans' and Salvadorans' desire to adopt U.S. gender relations that they witness in their workplaces. Ana Ruth has been cleaning houses for three Anglo families for 2 years and reports that she sees a lot of what she would like Mauricio and her to "imitate because it's good." For instance, she recalls how the husband of one of the families minds the baby and cooks dinner because the wife routinely stays at work late. "Americans have good customs. . . . I see it a lot in the houses where I work, and it'd be nice if we could live like them." Mauricio does not quite see it that way and laughs whenever Ana Ruth brings up the topic. He jokes that Ana Ruth "gets her head full of things because she watches too much TV," and he teases her by suggesting that she "is trying to imitate her employers, she thinks she'll become a gringa. . . . It's foolish." Ana Ruth does not give up and adds,

> Little by little he'll see other things, like I did. When I came here I had other ideas, but I have seen other things around me. One learns good things here. The problem is that Mauricio hangs out with our people, and you know how macho they are, the Salvadorans, Nicaraguans, and Mexicans, and they fill his head with garbage.

Similar to the Dominican women in Grasmuck and Pessar's study (1991), these women were attempting to pattern more egalitarian relationships with their partners based on what they perceived as the American model. But, once again, ethnicity introduces an important qualification here. Indigenous Guatemalans (and perhaps others with similarly disadvantaged backgrounds) may perceive their social worlds as too distant from those of their employers and, thus, may not consider incorporating some of those behaviors into their own. Besides, as it has been widely documented (Bossen, 1984; Loucky, 1988; Maynard, 1974; Wolf, 1959), indigenous women already experience relatively more egalitarian gender

relations and, thus, may not see the need to incorporate many changes into their families.[15]

The future, as well as the present, does not hold clear answers regarding the consequences of migration for gender relations. Some women see a definite advantage in remaining in the United States. They see the benefit as not so much improving their own social position in the household but as providing opportunities for their children. Others, particularly those trying to attain or reclaim a middle-class status, believe that it is more feasible to attain this goal in their own countries if they are able to return with enough savings. And still others, given the uncertainty of their legal status and its consequences for their overall economic prospects in the United States, believe that the best course to take would be to return home, in spite of perceived gains in the United States. Although no one I interviewed was actually planning to return home, several men and women were paying off mortgages for houses or plots of land they had bought in El Salvador and Guatemala, as they thought such investments ensured future security.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

My intention in this study was to understand the intersection of U.S. paid work and gender relations in the family lives of Central American immigrant women. Earning an income in the United States has had ambivalent consequences for the social status of Central American women; they have experienced both benefits and losses. It appears that immigration has contributed both to reaffirm and to transform gender relations. In my view, a partial explanation for this ambiguity can be found in the dissimilar, albeit severely constrained, structure of opportunities that Central American men and women encounter in the United States. The structure of opportunity for these immigrants is shaped by restrictive immigration policies that deny them security of residence and rights to work and by the dynamics of the local economy. Within this general framework, however, men and women face dissimilar conditions. Gender ideologies and the local labor markets in San Francisco and Los Angeles place the mostly undocumented women in a relatively favorable position with respect to access to paid work, whereas their male peers do not fare as well.

The dynamics of the local labor market, therefore, have facilitated these immigrant women's opportunities for work; they often work more hours and even earn more than men do. The consequences of this situation, however, reflect the women's vulnerability rather than their independence; it does not automatically benefit women and sometimes ends up reinforcing gender subordination in families. Gender ideologies rooted in social and cultural prescriptions qualify the link between women's employment and a potential increase in their status within the family. If the men feel threatened because they cannot fulfill the socially ascribed role of the breadwinner, the women experience losses. These men often respond by diminishing their own responsibilities, thereby

creating great burdens—physically and financially—for the women at home. Furthermore, the social organization of the work to which these men and women have access exposes them to dissimilar practices and ideologies. Employment as domestic workers gives women the opportunity to witness relatively more egalitarian gender behaviors that they perceive as beneficial and wish to incorporate in their own lives. For men, employment in gardening, construction, or restaurants serves to reproduce orthodox gender ideologies because it brings them close to peers with such views. This differential exposure affects the women's and men's perceptions of gender relations in families. Thus, the effects of immigrant women's employment do not depend mechanistically on the ability of the women to earn wages. It is the social process of employment that alters gender relations among men and women.

Macrostructural forces affect relations within a family or a household. These forces, however, manifest themselves differently as they interact with the social position—determined by class, ethnicity, and nationality—of the immigrants, as it differentiates benefits and rewards available to them. The cases in this study indicate that the social position of the immigrants does make a difference with respect to how immigrant women's paid work in the United States is perceived and how household arrangements are negotiated. Ladino Guatemalan and Salvadoran immigrants often value orthodox middle-class gender ideals such as stable and legal unions where the men are the financial providers and the women guard a unified family and domesticity. Yet, they often live in unstable situations and in poverty that preclude them from realizing such ideals. In these cases, the material conditions in their lives undermine what otherwise would be ideal—the upholding of patriarchal family roles. For indigenous Guatemalan immigrants who hold relatively more egalitarian notions about gender relations, the potential benefits of immigration for women may not be materialized. They have restricted access to institutional resources and must toil in unregulated jobs that pay little and offer few opportunities for social mobility.

This study has explored only a few aspects of the immigrants' social positions, and it has offered only a glimpse of the complexity in gender relations. The intersection of other social characteristics and dissimilar contexts is likely to generate a variety of experiences at different points of time and place, even for the same immigrant group. A lesson to be learned might be that this plurality of experiences precludes a universal answer applicable to all immigrant women. However, these explorations may prove fruitful avenues for research, as they may offer more nuanced assessments of the effects of immigration on gender relations and, thus, reflect more accurately the immigrants' social worlds.

NOTES

1. The term *ladina* or *ladino* denotes the nonindigenous Guatemalans, mostly mestizos (but also some European descendants) who have been culturally Hispanicized. The indigenous population of Guatemala makes up more than half of the total population of the country.

2. Salvadoran women have a long tradition of labor force participation (Carter, Insko, Loeb, & Tobias, 1989; García & Gomáriz, 1989; Ministerio Público de El Salvador, 1983; Nieves, 1979). The rate of employment in formal activities reached 37% in 1988 (García & Gomáriz, 1989, p. 115), and it might have been up to 40% by 1990. Their participation in the informal sector is also substantial and, in some cases, surpasses that of men. Among nonindigenous Guatemalan women, the labor force participation rate has been reported at approximately 27.6%, whereas among indigenous women it is close to 20%. This lower reported rate for indigenous women is due to the underreporting of their employment in agricultural and artisanal activities (García & Gomáriz, 1989, p. 198).

3. In addition to marked demographic differences, these groups differ in sociocultural characteristics including, as we will see later, important aspects of gender relations. In fact, ladino Guatemalans and Salvadorans share similar patterns of gender relations that differ from those among indigenous Guatemalans.

4. These names are usually spelled in the literature as *Quiché* and *Cackchiquel*. The spellings I use are those used by the Guatemalan Ministry of Education and indigenous groups themselves in Guatemala.

5. Of the Salvadorans I interviewed (including the 24 Salvadoran men not in this study) who had some form of documents, more than half were men. I did not interview Guatemalan men independent from the women in this study (I only interviewed those that were related to my female informants), but in the lives of these women almost twice the number of men had documents.

6. It becomes difficult to evaluate this difference quantitatively because during my fieldwork (which lasted close to 4 years among the Salvadorans and about 1 year among the Guatemalans) only a handful of my informants were able to keep their jobs for long. The great majority (of both men and women) worked temporarily, which does not allow me to provide an exact number of how many more women than men worked because, so often, both would be out of a job. However, the women consistently were able to find jobs more quickly than the men were. And because of the nature of women's jobs (i.e., caring for the young and the elderly), they seemed to be able to hold on to their jobs longer than the men could hold on to theirs.

7. Even though in Amparo's experience men become irresponsible in the United States, one must not forget the fact that this is also a problem that many women in El Salvador face, particularly single and divorced mothers (see Baires, Marroquín, Murguialday, Polanco, & Vásquez, 1996).

8. Some studies have found that migration increases the chances for union dissolution. Landale and Ogena (1995) discuss the prevalence of marital dissolution among Puerto Rican women who have migrated to the U.S. mainland.

9. Unfortunately, there is very scant information on family formations and formal and consensual unions in El Salvador, particularly prior to the ensuing conflict; thus, direct comparisons with the U.S. situation cannot be made.

10. In Central America, as in other regions, the type of marriage is related to class background, with most middle- or upper-middle class marrying legally, and the poor in both urban and rural areas remaining in consensual unions. Bossen (1984) found that 90% of marriages in a middle-class suburb in Guatemala City were legally contracted, as opposed to approximately 40% in poorer locations, with both indigenous and ladino Guatemalan populations (pp. 161, 289).

11. There is a reason why I do not refer to them equally. Don David was in his 70s, so like everyone else, I called him Don David out of respect. At first, I started addressing Chentía with either *Niña* (the colloquial Salvadoran word to convey respect for a woman of any age) or *Doña*. But she did not want me to use these forms of address because she said that she was young, "not old like him." As their relationship deteriorated, she emphasized their 24-year age difference more and more. Often, she would use the age difference to get back at him, and it was an area where Chentía could "win."

Don David, for his part, made snide remarks about her "youth." This got much worse for Don David when Chentía left him and married a man much younger than her.

12. Even though it is very difficult to assess what goes on with the household division of labor, even with participant observation, I will discuss it because it was an area that my informants invariably brought up in our conversations about changes in gender relations.

13. Even though Margarita's life in Guatemala may appear to have been under the control of her husband, she was the one who took the initiative and made all the arrangements to migrate (with help from her brothers who were already in the United States). After 11 months, she sent money for her husband to join her. The point here is to reiterate that gender relations are uneven and complex, and even if one area of these women's lives may reflect a strict patriarchal ideology, another one may reveal more egalitarian grounds.

14. Hagan (1996) finds that the networks of live-in domestics are limited in their assistance potential and that many of these women end up isolated from the rest of the community.

15. Another factor that may be operating here is that a strong value in Guatemalan indigenous culture is the preservation of a distinct sociocultural identity. The indigenous Guatemalans have been resisting cultural encroachment by other groups for five centuries, and thus, they may be more equipped to resist the easy incorporation of U.S. customs and ideologies. The ladino Guatemalans and Salvadorans, on the other hand, may be less resistant because their cultural identities in their countries have not been threatened, and consequently, they have less experience resisting cultural encroachment.

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