DEMOCRATIZATION AND POPULAR WOMEN'S POLITICAL ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract:

This paper analyses the unprecedented growth of popular women's organizations in Guatemala through the late 1980s and early 1990s. It is argued that although the economic crisis and violent repression which accompanied democratization did cause destabilization of women's socially constructed gender roles this did not lead to a mass-based political mobilization of women. To understand the top-down formation process of popular women's organizations which has occurred it is crucial to consider the strategic orientation of the popular movement in the context of democratization, as well as the growing influence of feminism and the international women's movement. The paper concludes with a discussion of the general characteristics of the organizations which emphasizes their political location within the popular movement.

Introduction

From the mid-1980s to the mid-1990s, an upsurge in popular women's political organizing took place. At the conclusion of my field research in late 1993,[1] there were approximately twenty such organizations located in Guatemala City,[2] as well as a growing number of poor women's neighbourhood associations in the marginal, shantytown areas of the city, and a significant number of women's organizations and collectives in the countryside. Through the 1990s these women's organizations have taken on an increasingly significant role in civil society and the politics of the popular movement, yet there is relatively little information available about them.

The central premise of the discussion presented below is that democratization and the growth of women's organizations are integrally related, but importantly, not in a causal manner. Democratization --understood as a process of repression and controlled political liberalization-- has been fundamentally rooted in economic crisis and has affected women's lives in gender-specific ways. I argue that the overall effect has been the creation of the conditions for the potential politicization and mobilization of women around issues affecting their gender identity. The ongoing and pervasive culture of fear in Guatemala inhibited, however, the spontaneous combustion of this potentiality into mass-based organizing.

The growth of women's organizations in the 1980s and 1990s rather received its impetus from other political forces, including the demonstration effect of other mothers groups in Latin America, the international and regional impact of feminism, and the political strategy of the popular movement in contesting democratization. The combined effect of such forces has been the creation of a cadre of women leaders who initiated the formation of women's organizations in a top-down manner. The article concludes with a brief overview of the character of popular women's political organizations.

[2] This paper is concerned with popular women's organizations and does not attempt to consider professional middle-class women's organizations such as associations of women journalists, and so forth.

While the Grupo Feminino Pro Mejoramiento Familiar --GRUFEPROMEFAM-- (Feminine Group for the Improvement of the Family), a women's organization related to the labour movement, was founded in 1986, it was between 1988 and 1992 that organizing really took off. In 1988 three women's organizations formed: Tierra Viva (Living Earth), COMFUITAG (Women's Committee of the Labour Federation of Food and Allied Workers/International Union of Food and Allied Workers' Associations of Guatemala), CONAVIGUA (National Coordination of Guatemalan Widows). In 1989, Grupo Guatemalteco de Mujeres (Guatemalan Women's Group) officially formed after a year of preliminary work. In 1991, four women's organizations formed: CENTRACAP (Centre for Domestic Workers); Niña Madre (Child Mother); the women's unit of the NGO IDESAC (Institute for the Socio-Economic Development of Central America); and, after two years of preliminary work, Mujer y Vida (Women and Life). In 1992, another four women's organizations were established: Comisión Nacional de Mujeres (National Women's Commission); the Women's Committee of UNSITRAGUA (Trade Union Unity of Guatemalan Workers); Mujer de Esperanza (Women of Hope); and FAMDEGUA (Guatemalan Families of the Detained and Disappeared). In addition, the following four groups formed (no dates available): the women's unit of the NGO FUNDESCO; Colectivo de Estudios Feministas (Feminist Studies Collective); Comité de Mujeres de Primero de Mayo (Women's Committee of the First of May labour federation); Superandonos Juntas (Overcoming Together).

1. The Process of Democratization

The importance of economic crisis to the process of democratization in Guatemala is discussed in detail by other contributors to this volume. What I would like to emphasize are the social and political repercussions which have stemmed from the contradictions embedded in the superimposition of industrialization on the predominantly agrarian economy in Guatemala. In effect, the outcome of the economic crisis which came to a head in the late 1970s was severe social crisis.   By this time, however, the Guatemalan military had developed into an extremely powerful institution with significant economic interests. Due to its inability to pursue a proactive strategy towards the economic crisis, the capitalist class capitulated in responding to the societal crisis rooted in the deteriorating economic situation by relying on the military to turn its repressive capacity on society in a pact of domination.

The extremity of the repression which ensued and its general consequences are also discussed in detail in other contributions to this volume. It is important to note here, however, that the national security strategy pursued by the military through the early 1980s had as its longer-term objective the political liberalization of Guatemala. Thus, by 1984 the military had begun implementation of the final phase of its counterinsurgency plan, which was the limited political liberalization or "opening" signalled by the election of 1985.

In effect, due to its virtual stranglehold on civil society achieved through "pacification" the military had less and less need formally to run the state in its institutional dimension of regime. For the military, the limited political liberalization of the mid-1980s had as a necessary precondition the antecedent period of deliberate, brutal and extreme violence of the early 1980s. In this is found the explanation for the apparent anomaly that it has been the military that initiated political liberalization which culminated in the election of a civilian president in 1985. Formal liberalization -- which has been packaged and marketed by the military as democratization-- was always understood to be part and parcel of the national security doctrine promulgated in the early 1980s

which declared politics to be an extension of war.

Given the extreme decompression of political and civil society achieved through repression it is important to consider what opportunities for popular resistance and contestation may have simultaneously been generated through the processes of democratization. This is, then, to evaluate whether unforeseen consequences of these processes may have opened windows of opportunity for popular forces to emerge or re-emerge. My concern here is with how the strategy of the military to found political liberalization on societal contraction realized through violent repression has had the effect of creating a *potential* for a politicization and mobilization of women unprecedented in Guatemalan history.[3]

2. Women's Work in Guatemala: Caretaking and Caregiving

To understand this it is necessary to consider briefly the social construction of gender in Guatemala. Women have historically been deemed responsible for the work entailed in the reproduction of the family as a social unit. This has meant that the family has been the locus of the social construction of women's identity. In the gendering of women's identity in terms of the family are contained two general and related types of women's work: the caregiving work necessary

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[3] While there has always been some participation of women in the politics of the popular movement in Guatemala, this has usually been within the structure of male-dominated organizations. For a brief discussion of women's organizations from 1950 to 1980 see García and Gomáriz, 1989, 205, 208. As the authors discuss, the few predecessors to the women's organizations of the 1980s and 1990s were the Alianza Feminina Guatemalteca (Guatemalan Feminine Alliance) which formed between 1944 and 1954, and the Unión de Mujeres Guatemaltecas (Union of Guatemalan Women) which formed in 1975.

to the maintenance of the social relations of the family, and the caretaking work necessary to the physical maintenance of the family.

In understanding the construction of women's gender in Guatemala, the categories of caregiving and caretaking are employed rather than the more usual reproductive and productive work categories, for the latter tend to be correlated with the private and public spheres, respectively. This is not meant to suggest that the understanding of women's roles in terms of the work they perform as contained in the reproductive/productive schema is unhelpful or unimportant. Rather, in choosing to distinguish two broadly different types of women's work --caregiving and caretaking-- two key points about the Guatemalan situation are emphasized.

One is the blurring of the distinction between reproductive and productive work --and hence, of the private and public spheres-- which is emerging in the context of crisis and globalization. For in the case of Guatemala, women's responsibilities to maintain the family --usually understood as reproductive work in the private sphere-- has led to a large flow of women into the informal economy as the need for more income generation in the family unit has increased in the context of economic crisis and neo-liberalism. While this work may be understood within the framework of productive labour and the public sphere, this misses a crucial point which is that the women themselves understand this part of their work as integral to their roles in the family, and the private sphere.

The second point is that in choosing the categories of caregiving and caretaking work the significance of women's attitudes towards their work and social roles is stressed. For as is discussed in greater detail below, it has been through the impact that repression and economic crisis had on the *perception of and social relationship to* their work and roles that the potential for women's politicization and mobilization was created. This potential then arises from the view that has emerged amongst women of the popular classes that both repression and economic crisis have negatively affected their lives by destabilizing their ability to perform their work. This is to say that the potential for women's politicization has been created through the ways in which women have interpreted the significance of, and concomitantly, attributed meaning to, the effects of repression and crisis on their lives.

3. Democratization and Its Impact on Women

The period of repression had a specific impact on women, above all, because the violence perpetrated by the military in the late 1970s and early 1980s constituted an attack on the social relations of the family. As in many other Latin American countries, the widespread and arbitrary atrocities committed by the military in Guatemala left virtually no one untouched or untouchable. They were perpetrated in a seemingly arbitrary manner which went far beyond reprisal for political involvement, to encompass an attack on people with virtually no involvement in politics. Designed to terrorize the population into acquiescence, the repression succeeded in this goal. Importantly, however, the mass scale violence of the repression also appeared to the majority of the population as inexplicable and unjustifiable. This societal response has led to a politicization of the violence and repression, as political space opened through the political liberalization and created some scope for the expression of popular discontent.

In that they are predominantly responsible for the social relations of the family the disappearance or murder of husbands, fathers, sons, and daughters threatened and undermined the ability of women to perform their caregiving and nurturance work in the maintenance of family relations. As the caregivers and nurturers of the family, the lives of women as wives and mothers were drastically affected by events which they were unable to rationalize or justify. The impact was particularly marked for the women relatives of disappeared victims of the repression, for the ambiguity generated by the uncertainty of death prolonged their feelings of loss and grief. Thus, as a consequence of the uncertainty entailed in the disappeared, the restabilization of women's attitudes towards their caregiving work has been inhibited. In this manner, then, the extreme level of human rights violations entailed in the repression became a concrete, lived issue around which women could potentially be politicized and mobilized.

The economic crisis underlying the process of democratization has also had particular repercussions for women's lives. In some ways these effects have been more complex, given the multi-faceted nature of the economic crisis and the factors which have intersected it, such as the violent repression, the policies of neo-liberalism which ensued in the later 1980s, and extant patriarchal structures. In general, however, the socio-economic effect of this crisis has been the severe impoverishment of the majority of the Guatemalan population. While this decline in the standard of living has had many societal repercussions, the family as a social unit has been particularly affected.

For my purpose here, two general trends are worth highlighting. For one, as prices have risen and real wages have declined it has given rise to the financial need in families for more than one income. Furthermore, these economic pressures have also led to the disintegration of family units as increasing rates of alcoholism, domestic violence, and abandonment have taken their toll. Women have been acutely affected by these trends. Both the increasing financial needs of the family and the disintegration of the family unit have contributed to a drastic increase in the work entailed in women's caretaking of the family. Indeed, the work of a great number of women as caretakers of the household has greatly expanded to encompass direct and frequently total responsibility for income generation and economic provision for the family. In the case of families affected by abandonment, abuse, and alcoholism on the part of the husband, the women in these families have effectively become single heads of households. In light of the growing necessity for multiple family incomes this trend to family disintegration and female heads of households has meant that those who have fallen into the most extreme poverty have generally been women and children.

The stress experienced by women from the amplification of their work and responsibilities has been further exacerbated by related dynamics. As discussed above, the period of repression and the economic crisis in Guatemala have been fundamentally related: repression was part of a broader strategy to control societal conflict without addressing the roots of the economic crisis which generated this conflict. One result of the violence has been that thousands of women were left widowed, another form of family disintegration that has left further numbers of women as single heads of households. Because of the loss of their spouses, these women were immediately forced to take on the responsibility to provide for the economic welfare of the family. Importantly this dynamic between economic crisis and repression had repercussions for other women in the family unit as well. Very frequently daughters came to be expected to contribute to the generation of family income, and were often sent off at very young ages to work as domestics in private homes. Again, this effect led to further dissolution of the social relations of the family.

The advent of a neo-liberal policy approach to economic crisis in the latter half of the 1980s has also exacerbated the effects of economic crisis on women. While the Guatemalan state has historically undertaken and supported extremely limited social welfare measures, it was nevertheless the case that some institutions and state policies existed which provided the populace some minimal social security: most of these were legacies of the two democratically elected governments of the "ten years of spring", from 1944 to 1954. In the late 1980s even these limited institutions and policies came under attack.

The impact on women of economic crisis, repression -- and subsequent neo-liberal policies -- has been intensified by structures of patriarchy in Guatemalan society which have only served to limit the ability of women to respond to the increased pressures and work placed on them, as highlighted above. In Guatemala, patriarchy has historically been culturally constructed and expressed in *machismo*. The economic repercussions for women of *machismo* have been many and have all contributed to effectively exclude women of the popular classes from most paths to economic advancement. Among the most notable effects of *machismo* has been the exclusion of women from education. The result has been a shockingly high level of illiteracy among women --and particularly indigenous women-- and a low level of socially and economically valued skills. Both the low levels of education and skills women have been able to achieve have severely limited the possibilities for women to improve their standard of living: most women have been limited to the margins of the

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economy in highly exploitative work and frequently physically dangerous work, such as street-vending and domestic work in the informal sector, jobs in the *maquiladoras*, prostitution, etc. Again, this economic circumscription of women's lives has only served to further exacerbate the trend toward the feminization of poverty discussed above.

To summarize briefly, it has been argued that the period of violent repression and the economic crisis underlying the process of democratization in Guatemala has had important implications for women. Women's socially constructed gender identity has been dramatically affected as their caretaking work in the physical reproduction of the family has expanded at the same time that their ability to perform the caregiving work in the family has been undermined. The net result has been that most women in the popular classes have experienced, through the impact of violence and/or economic crisis, a destabilization of their socially constructed gender roles and identity. In that this impact has been overwhelmingly negative for women these processes of democratization have thus generated a population of women with a consequent *potential* for politicization. It has been argued, however, that women's ability to respond politically to the effects on their lives of economic crisis and subsequent neo-liberalism has been constrained by certain effects of these processes. Furthermore, the pervasive culture of terror has functioned to inhibit political participation, even for the desperate relatives of victims of human rights abuses and the disappeared. It is thus important to stress that despite the extremity of the impact of violence and economic crisis on women a spontaneous combustion of widespread, grass-roots politicization and mobilization of women was not generated.

4. The Influence of International and Regional Dynamics on the Process of Democratization

The potential for the politicization and mobilization of women did not then produce a necessary outcome. Indeed the potential created

for the political mobilization of women may well have remained dormant if it had not been for the influence of other factors shaping the Guatemala political environment. Two such factors are here considered: 1)the influence of women's growing politicization in Latin America, and, 2)international and regional manifestations of feminism. The argument made below is that the upsurge in the formation of women's political organizations which began in the latter half of the 1980s must be understood as an *historically specific* process.

One phenomenon which had a demonstration effect in Guatemala was the growth of women's political organizing to protest the human rights violations perpetrated by military regimes in the 1970s and early 1980s (Alvarez 1990; Jaquette 1991; Jelin 1990). For example, the mothers' groups which formed in Argentina, Chile, and El Salvador to contest those disappeared in the dirty wars quickly developed international reputations for their human rights work.

The new awareness of women's potential political contribution was reinforced by other regional political developments. For example, the Guatemalan situation paralleled that of Nicaragua in a number of important respects, where an armed insurgency has also struggled against a right-wing regime. As a result the promotion of women's political support of the revolutionary struggle by the FSLN in Nicaragua through the Association of Women in the National Situation (AMPRONAC) --which in 1980-81 became the Association of Nicaraguan Women "Luisa Amanda Espinoza" (AMNLAE) -- was observed carefully by revolutionary leaders in Guatemala. Over time, therefore, the large participation of Nicaraguan women in AMNLAE had a demonstration effect on the popular movement in Guatemala, illustrating the role that women's political organizations could play in a revolutionary movement.[4]

The demonstration effect in Guatemala of women's politicization in the region was restored further by the growing influence of feminism in

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[4] A. Criquillon (1995, 209-37) discusses in detail the development of a women's movement in Nicaragua and its relationship to the FSLN through the late 1970s to the early 1990s. See also Barbara J. Seitz (1992, 162-174).

Guatemala. Indeed, various dimensions of feminism --at the level of ideas, embodied institutionally and legally, and expressed in political movements-- all heightened the growing awareness of women's potential contribution to the popular struggle. The growing influence of feminism reflected several related developments through the 1970s and 1980s, including the growth of an international women's movement and the work of the United Nations during the UN Decade for Women. Both of these forces of feminism helped to promote a growing international awareness of the specificity and importance of women's problems. In the field of international development one concrete political outcome of this growing interest in women's issues was an emerging policy prioritization of "women in development" on the part of both non-governmental development organizations and state donor agencies. This nascent interest also came to be politically symbolized in the elaboration and codification of the UN Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination Against Women.[5]

Underlying the emergence of the international women's movement was the development of national and regional women's movements. In Latin America the spread of feminism has been simultaneously evidenced and promoted through the series of Latin America and Caribbean Feminist Encounters (*Encuentros Feministas*) which began in Bogota in 1981 (Miller 1991, 235).[6] Importantly, an increasing number of

Central American women participated in these Encounters, particularly in the one held in 1987 in Mexico.[7]

This participation heightened the exposure of Central American women to the growing force of Latin American feminism and generated a developing gender perspective on the political problems and issues they faced. Central American women began to perceive and act on the need to develop a feminist position specific to their regional realities, and began to undertake joint action initiatives to address issues and problems of common concern. For example, they organized their first Central American Women's Encounter (*Encuentro Centroamericano de Mujeres*) in August, 1989, in which all five countries were represented. The purpose of this Encounter was to review and assess the *Esquipulas II* accords from a women's perspective. At this Encounter the women decided to form a Permanent Assembly of Central American Women for Peace (*Asamblea Permanente de Mujeres Centroamericanas Por la Paz*). The establishment of this Assembly prompted the formation of the Coordination of Women's Groups of Guatemala (COAMUGUA [*Coordinadora de Agrupaciones de Mujeres de Guatemala*] in 1989. The purpose of COAMUGUA was to strive to create political space in Guatemala for women's specific demands and to coordinate the participation and representation of Guatemalan women in the regional Assembly.

Central American women continued to recognize and address the specificity of their regional issues in subsequent Central American Encounters: encounters were held in Honduras in August, 1991, and in Nicaragua in March 1992. As well, they undertook responsibility for

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[5] For a discussion of the significance of the UN Decade for Women to the general growth of feminism in Latin America see Miller, 1991. For a concise statement regarding the early general position adopted by the UN towards women see: United Nations Office of Public Information, 1978, ch. 5. This convention was signed on 18 December 1979. Guatemala ratified the convention on 29 June 1982. Significantly, this Convention is widely used in the popular education work of the women's organizations to justify and legitimize their demands for women's rights.

[6] The Encounters have been held as follows: 1981, Bogota; 1983, Lima; 1985, Santos (Sao Paulo); 1987, Taxco, Mexico; 1990, Argentina; San Salvador, 1993. For a discussion of these Encounters in relation to the growth of feminism in

Latin America see Miller, 1991, especially chapter 7.

[7] Given the extremely limited resources of most women's organizations the ability to travel overland to the Encounter in Mexico was a very important factor in encouraging the participation of Central American women generally, and Guatemalan women specifically, since Guatemala shares a border with Mexico and transportation is relatively good.

organizing and hosting the Sixth Latin American Feminist Encounter, which was held in El Salvador in November, 1993.

It is important to identify who were the "women" in Guatemala affected by this growing influence of feminism. Generally, they were women so situated as to be exposed to broader political developments like the growing impact of feminism. In concrete terms this meant women of the popular classes who were able to attend the politically progressive and intellectually oriented environment of the University of San Carlos. Historically, San Carlos has been a site of radical political opposition grounded intellectually in Marxism. In the late 1970s and into the 1980s, however, some women within San Carlos came also to be influenced by these broader international and regional dynamics of feminism which slowly gained ground in the university milieu. Some of the Central American women who had participated in the regional Feminist Encounters were Guatemalans and they brought the new ideas to San Carlos. This growing feminist activism was reinforced by the development and dissemination of Latin American feminist literature. As well, the resources made available by international agencies operating in Guatemala such as UNIFEM supported this activism. Given their policy mandates to promote women in development these organizations began to encourage popular awareness of gender issues and offer support in the development of gender analysis skills. Some women faculty members and students began to work collectively to develop an analysis which incorporated both class and gender, and stemming from this analysis, to promote awareness of women's issues. This occurred particularly within the faculty of social work and the discipline of sociology where both women faculty and students are concentrated. An immediate result of this process was the formation of women's study circles, feminist collectives or working groups, and the increasing effort of women to challenge the class-dominated ideology of the powerful university students' movement and the control of this movement by men students. In the longer-term, however, the extremely important outcome has been the formation of a cadre of relatively highly educated women with an analysis of class and gender, politicized around women's issues as manifested in the Guatemalan context, with

budding leadership skills which would enable them to form women's organizations, and the political conviction that such organizations were necessary to make the fight for women's issues a priority.

These developments had an important effect on the shape of the popular movement: it led to the political organizing of women around women's issues. Such organizing occurred in several ways. For example, a number of the politicized and skilled women students very frequently came to work for development-oriented Guatemalan NGOs in order to fulfil the practicum requirements for their university degrees. Through this work they gained practical experience in organizing and community development. They frequently also became frustrated with the lack of gender analysis informing this work and the discrimination they experienced personally in their work. Their dissatisfaction often led them to become involved in the formation of women's organizations where they would be free to control both the philosophical and practical aspects of their work.

Feminist ideas were also well received by women political activists, especially those in the trade union movement who were receiving similar stimulation from another direction at the same time. The union federations in Guatemala with ties to international unions[8] were experiencing the trickle down effect of the impact of feminism and the women's movement at the international level. Consequently, the promotion of female leadership

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[8]   FESTRAS-UITA (*Federación Sindical de Trabajadores de la Alimentación, Afines, Servicios y Similares-Unión Internacional de Trabajadores de la Alimentación y Afines* [Union Federation of Food, Allied, and Service Workers-International Union of Food and Allied Worker's Associations]) is only one example in Guatemala of a union federation with international linkages. It is a member of the International Union of Food and Allied Worker's Associations, with headquarters in Geneva. The history of FESTRAS-UITA is complex. In June, 1986, COFUITAG (*Unión Internacional de Trabajadores de la Alimentación y Afines-UITA-Guatemala* [International Union of Food and Allied Workers-UITA-Guatemala]) was formed. In 1991 COFUITAG evolved into FESTRAS-UITA.

was slowly being encouraged both ideologically and financially in some of the locals by union internationals. The result of these reinforcing influences was the generation of another body of women leaders within the popular movement. These women have been very active in forming women's committees within the union federations and various affiliated and autonomous unions.

More generally, the political strategy pursued by the popular movement in the context of political liberalization served to create an environment conducive to the formation of popular women's political organizations. In its effort to mobilize in the wake of the repression of the early 1980s, the popular movement struggled to force a wider opening of the limited political space that had been created by holding a presidential election. By demanding respect for rights and freedoms, as well as the institutions to safeguard them, the popular movement worked to create space for the political participation of civil society.

The period of political liberalization thus served to focus the attention of the popular movement on the need to expand political participation in order to contest democratization. It was in this environment, then, that a handful of women leaders emerged and formed women's organizations which would undertake the work necessary to transform the *potential* for a widespread politicization of women into *concrete organizing initiatives*. The leadership skills and acumen of these women enabled them to access the international financing increasingly available for women's development initiatives and use such resources for the establishment of women's organizations.

5. General Characteristics of Women's Organizations

The actual processes of the formation of the women's organizations have varied quite significantly, lending to each a distinct organizational character. Despite this specificity, however, there are a number of features which the organizations share in common. The following overview of these features is meant to illuminate their general nature.

One such common feature is the *emergent nature* of the organizations, a feature which reflects the processual nature of formation. All the women's organizations have formed over time: often a period of several years passed between the initial inception of an organization and its actual public establishment. Thus, despite the fact of official dates of establishment, it is important to recognize that the formation of these organizations has been generally a slow and ongoing process. This has most often been because of the time involved to search for and obtain funding for the organizational initiatives imagined by the women leaders. On this point it must be recognized that without exception the women's organizations are financially dependent on international funding. Such funding was often crucial to the actual establishment of the women's organizations. The degree of funding and support that the organizations have secured varies considerably and this generates tensions and rivalry amongst the organizations. Often the reasons for the support of specific organizations have more to do with dynamics in the North, rather than realities in Guatemala.

For example, Tierra Viva, the one explicitly feminist organization in Guatemala, has garnered significant support from various feminist organizations in the United States because it reflects back to these organizations of the North their own feminist principles, priorities, and identity. Tierra Viva is, however, criticized in Guatemala for its middle-class politics -- that is, feminist agenda -- and for being out of touch with the realities of the *pobladora* --the women of the poor, marginalized sectors of society.

The funding received by CONAVIGUA is also a source of tension among the women's organizations. Since the 1980s has also been a decade of burgeoning Northern consciousness about indigenous peoples, the identity of CONAVIGUA is doubly appealing to funders in that it articulates both the issues of "women" and "first peoples". Not surprisingly, CONAVIGUA has received tremendous international support. In California the Marano County solidarity organization focuses its work specifically on CONAVIGUA and sends American women with needed skills and expertise to support the organization on four month stints. CONAVIGUA has also been the focus of a huge solidarity campaign by women's organizations in Norway.

This campaign raised enough money to buy a house in Guatemala City for the offices of CONAVIGUA. This is unprecedented amongst the women's organizations, most of which struggle to meet the rental payments on inadequate office space. Visiting the offices of CONAVIGUA is indeed an object lesson on this issue: it is completed outfitted with the latest high-technology office equipment, including FAX machine, an extensive computer network, paper shredder, etc., most of which the CONAVIGUA women themselves do not care to know how to use (they hire a *ladina* woman office manager).

It is also important to recognize that a publicly declared date of establishment and naming of an organization does not mean that the women's organizations are generally solid, dense, and firmly entrenched. The organization are, indeed, still very much in a state of flux --or a process of becoming-- in that organizational identity is evolving. This is indicated, for example, by the frequency with which objectives, mandates, etc., are redefined. It is important to note that, again, this common fluidity reflects the relationship between the Guatemalan women's organizations and the system of international funding and international donor agencies. In fact the fluidity of the organizations is provoked by the precarious financial situation of the organizations and their chronic need to seek and secure international funding. This chronic financial instability makes both staffing and programming decisions very much contingent on successfully obtaining international funding, where such success is often determined by the ability of the women's organizations to perceive funding priorities and translate this into project proposals.

A chronological analysis of promotional pamphlets and other materials of the organizations reveals sometimes subtle and other times dramatic changes in organizational identity. These changes are frequently driven by the perceived demands of international funding agencies in developing funding applications and proposals. The women's organizations strive to word what they want to do in the current language of the North. Whether it be WID, WAD, GAD, "the building of civil society", the "deepening of democracy", etc., the women's organizations must package their own ideas about what they want in a fashion which appeals to Northern funders. This is absolutely essential and recognized, since the women's organizations

generally maintain themselves through project funding, skimming off such funds the bare minimum amounts of money necessary to maintain the operations of the organizations.

Another related feature of the women's organizations is the top-down nature of their formation. This reflects the central role played by key women leaders in the formation process. In effect highly politicized and conscientized women have made conscious decisions to establish women's organizations. As a consequence, the process of formation has not been an initiative emerging from a grass-roots base with a consequent mass mobilization of women.

This top-down process of formation has had implications for the general structure of the organizations, which in turn affects many other aspects of their functioning. The organizations are not built on a mass membership base, but are rather composed of very small nuclei of fairly exceptional women --exceptional both in their relatively high level of education and their visible leadership role in a *machista* society. The nature of this small, elite structure has a number of ramifications: it affects the ongoing organizational development process, the nature and structure of decision-making, and the relationship between the organizations and the broader population of women in the popular classes.

The ongoing organizing process within each organization is driven and directed by this small cadre of women who feel ownership of, and responsibility for, the organizations which they have essentially created. Their visions of an organization are highly influenced by the more general understanding in the popular movement of the need to develop participatory ability in the *pueblo*, and by their practical work experience in promoting such participation through the use of popular education strategies. Reflecting the vision of organization that the women leaders have, these organizations are primarily focused on building organizing capacity in a larger group of women at an intermediate level. This is to say that their effort is not immediately directed at mass mobilization: this is a goal assessed as too advanced given both the relative strength of the organizations and the need to slowly build participation in a society gripped by the culture of fear. The goal, then, is rather to build the capacity of an intermediate stratum of women to organize

further women at the community level. Thus the work of these organizations is focused on developing the participatory abilities of women: this has involved, above all, the promotion of a sense of self-worth which will enable women to act politically on the anger that arises from their new feeling of self-valorization. Drawing from practical experience, the popular education project of formation and skills training is the approach used by all the women's organizations in developing women's political participation.

The organizational development of the women's organizations, then, is not about building a membership base. It is rather about developing and promoting women's participatory capacity, with the longer term goal of fomenting further, independent women's organizational initiatives, whether within the shantytown communities, the church, unions, etc. From this it can be seen that the work of the women's organizations to build the capacity of women to participate politically is part of the broad political project of the popular movement to strengthen civil society.

At times, however, this effort to promote women's empowerment and skills development takes on a clientelistic nature. This is an important issue and warrants some discussion. The power relations embedded in the women's organization are complex. On the one hand, the nuclei of women leaders who formed the women's organizations have generally continued on to direct and control the organizations. Again this reflects the impact of their political formation within the popular movement. Here, as in broader Guatemalan society, the model of decision-making and authority is hierarchical. Strong leaders make decisions autonomously and issue directives which are followed. This is generally the process within the women's organizations as well. Decision-making is not democratically undertaken but rather reflects the ideas of the leaders. For example, within the all important process of generating funding, bare lip-service is paid to the idea of consultation with or input from the women clients of the organization.

On the other hand the thrust of the work of the organizations is toward the encouragement of self-valorization in women, with the goal of enabling the independent exercise of agency, decision-making, and further political organizing initiatives by women. So while the projects designed to achieve this goal are determined and elaborated in an hierarchical manner, the projects themselves aim to foster in women the opposite process.

Another shared characteristic of the women's organizations is the political posture of double militancy. This, too, reflects the process of the formation of the cadre of women leaders. As has been argued above these women emerged out of the popular movement. Importantly, this movement is composed of activists and organizations from a number of sectors of civil society: the labour sector, the student sector, the religious sector, the indigenous sector, the human rights sector, the non-governmental organization sector, etc. Thus, while these women have commonly taken on the issue of gender for themselves personally and in their political work, they have done so while located within a sector of the popular movement.

This political posture of double militancy reflects the impact this formation had on these women leaders. In effect their personal politicization - a complex intellectual, psychological and emotional process - occurred in this sectorally structured environment in which a sense of allegiance is deeply embedded. Thus, this formation has generally produced in the women a conviction about the utility of this structure for the Guatemalan context. Furthermore, it has produced in the women leaders a conviction about the importance of this structure for the Guatemalan context. Consequently, rather than fomenting the growth of an autonomous, radical women's movement, the women leaders have tended to relate their understanding of gender to deepening class struggle, by developing an understanding of the specificity of the problems of poor women of the popular classes.

Another reason for the willingness of the women leaders to work within this structure is their belief that the struggles for class, gender, and ethnicity are fundamentally interconnected, and that consequently the building of a women's movement must be as part of -- rather than separate from or in opposition to -- the general struggle of the popular movement. This belief is reinforced by their perception that in the present conjuncture in Guatemala it is imperative not to further divide an already fragile movement. For these reasons, then, these women leaders have made a strategic

decision to work within the structure of the popular movement for a recognition of women's problems and women's rights.

The implication of this conviction and political strategy is that the identity of the organizations created by this cadre of women are embedded in, or meshed with, the identity of the sector of the popular movement in which they are located. The women's organizations, then, are more accurately described as organizations of women workers, of indigenous women, or women students, and so forth. This tie to the popular movement is one which binds tightly, given the long history of struggle for survival of the movement. As a result the women's organizations do not form an autonomous women's movement but rather reflect a politics of double militancy.

6. Conclusion

The growth of popular women's political organizations in the 1980s and 1990s was not in any way a necessary or predictable outcome of democratization. It must rather be explained through an historical and empirical form of analysis that strives to illuminate the interplay of economic, political, and social dynamics in Guatemala, and the contradictions contained within them. In particular, the analysis presented above has focused on exploring the impact on women of such contradictory dynamics. I have argued that in Guatemala economic crisis spawned democratization, that this process had gendered repercussions, and that these repercussions were articulated into women's politicization and organizing through the influence of feminism and the political orientation of the popular movement.

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