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**REPRESENTATIONS, POWER AND CONTRADICTIONS: THE WOMEN'S  
COMMUNAL MOVEMENT OF MORAZAN, EL SALVADOR**

**By**

**Roxanna I. Duntley-Matos**

**A THESIS**

**Submitted to  
Michigan State University in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
for the degree of**

**MASTER OF ARTS**

**DEPARTMENT OF ANTHROPOLOGY**

**1996**

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## **ABSTRACT**

### **REPRESENTATIONS, POWER, AND CONTRADICTIONS: THE WOMEN'S COMMUNAL MOVEMENT IN NORTHERN MORAZAN, EL SALVADOR**

**By**

**Roxanna Duntley-Matos**

Studies by Golden and others have seen an encouraging trend towards gender equality in the women's communal movements that have arisen as a result of the war in El Salvador. Other studies however, have observed important and patterned problems faced by women's movements that have arisen in times of political crisis.

This field study, set in the previously guerrilla controlled zone of Northern Morazán, El Salvador, investigated these views inductively and found the latter to be true. The findings were then analyzed in the light of various theoretical models in order to understand and explain the forces that produced a faster rate of demise of women's organizations when compared to men's. Two models were created as a result of fieldwork observations and of an analysis of the interpretations presented by the groups interviewed. They include internal and external forces acting on the women's movement as well as the dynamic relations between them and the men's organizations. The interplay between the forces described in the models point to future trends of development in the women's organizations, in which the negative trends predominate.

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**To my two year old son, Daniel Alejandro Cubero-Matos,  
the sunshine, hope and inspiration of my everyday.**

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## ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This thesis is a result of the inspiration, cooperation, and friendship of many women of El Salvador who believed that their accomplishments, problems, and concerns needed to be expressed. I thank them for their trust, and I hope that this work contributes to further our understanding of the challenges faced by women's grass roots movements.

My research would not have been possible without Professor Leigh Binford's invitation to join his research team nor without his economic support. My analysis of the data benefited from the honest, and valuable advice of the following faculty members: Dr. Joseph Chartkoff (Michigan State University, Dept. of Anthropology), Dr. Joseph Spielberg (Michigan State University, Dept. of Anthropology), and Dr. Pedro Maligo (Michigan State University, Dept. of Romance Languages). I would also like to thank Dr. George Mansour (Michigan State University, Dept. of Romance Languages), Dr. Maligo, Dr. Spielberg, Dr. Chartkoff and Dr. Scott Whiteford (Michigan State University, Center for Latin American and Caribbean Studies) for believing in me enough to "scrounge" monetary support from the most unimaginable places on campus, so that I could finish my graduate studies at MSU.

Finally, in terms of the actual writing of my thesis I owe my fondest and greatest gratitude to Prof. María Magdalena Matos Serrano (University of Puerto Rico, College of General Studies), who, thanks to her great insight, love, and faith in me (her daughter) patiently read and critiqued my thesis

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more times than she would care to remember. Many thanks also go to my little brother David K. Duntley Matos, who, not so patiently, labored on the computer to copy my diagrams. I am grateful for his constant repetition that the idea of a diagram is clarification and simplicity. I would also like to thank my husband and friend Marvin Cubero-Chacon for his encouragement and help in getting through the final details.

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## PREFACE

The field work experience which I undertook in El Salvador brought out the problem of how to view the mutually transforming relation between the observer and the observed, the ethnographer and the "other". This problem, central to anthropology and constantly experienced by field researchers, is nevertheless seldom explored, probably due to the influence of the much touted objective method of the natural sciences. The latter is usually thought to be the *sine qua non* of all sciences. The following is an account of how I experienced and dealt with this issue, offered both in order to clarify my approach to the research at hand and in hopes of contributing in some degree to the discussion of this important topic.

### The Field Work Experience

The first images that come to mind when I think of El Salvador are enveloped in sensations of strangeness, confusion, and wonder. Upon arriving in this beautiful country, I was immersed in contrasts and ambiguities stemming from my own identity, from expectations created by the literature about the country, and from the movies of violence that I had seen. Somehow, I felt that I was part of this "new, yet old world" while, at the same time, I was alien to it.

My trip on the bus from the Capital to the zone of Morazán sent me into a vortex of images of a time gone by. They were memories of Puerto Rico, my homeland, but memories which I had not actually lived. Without realizing it, I had internalized images from a late nineteenth century novel depicting

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my country's past. Zeno Gandía's La charca filled my mind as I saw the Salvadoran women scrubbing their clothing patiently against large boulders while the clear foamy river water splashed against them. The women were barefoot or wore rubber sandals and a slip that covered from their waist down to the bottom of their knees. It is strange that as I looked down on them from the bus and absorbed the reflections of the radiantly green vegetation, the first question that came to my mind was not "Who are these people?" but rather, "Who am I really?"

Here I began to grasp the spirit of Tyler's description of post modern anthropology (1986). He defined it as an evocation of participatory experience rather than representing the "Other"; as a return to common sense reality; as fragmentation in style, reflecting the experience in the field which is itself fragmentary and, by elimination of the "subject-object nexus", as a rejection of the possibility of dominance of one over the other.

In my field work as well as in the current process of writing this thesis, I have found myself struggling to understand the women I have interacted with without "normalizing" and dominating them. In the attempt to understand them, I realized that while I was in the field many things seemed frustratingly fragmented and even disappointing, yet during that whole time I felt pressured to make sense, to find patterns and explanations of what I saw. Whatever I learned always seemed to result in a self evaluation as well as an evaluation of the people I interacted with. This continuous combination of "self" and "other" has made the analytic process quite confusing and difficult.

The specter of "Normalization of the Other" (Pinney: 147), characterized by comparison, differentiation, hierarchization, homogenization and an ultimate exclusion of the "other" has followed my every step in the ethnographic experience. The risk of transforming their

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"otherness" into a "sameness" defined by my interpretations and experiences has always been dangerously present.

Many times, after the interviews, I was disappointed with myself because I felt I was not quite "getting it" even though I did not really know what "it" was. After pushing to the back of my mind certain interactions and conversations which I considered of little relevance to "my interests" I came to an important realization. The reason I was not satisfied was that I had not, until that moment, really sat down to listen to the women and to their concerns, not mine. Suddenly, a different reality opened up before my eyes and ears. This is probably the most important lesson I have learned as a student of culture thus far: my agenda as an anthropologist could not be satisfied unless I put their agenda and concerns first. This all seems obvious now, but it has made me understand that the role of investigator is inherently plagued by a certain detective-like arrogance that results from putting the "other" on "the spot" to answer questions.

In spite of care not to impose my views on the informants, I found that by ignoring many things that they were telling me (and which I should have realized they wanted me to ask them about), I was in fact doing what has been so criticized of our discipline: the creation of a culture that the anthropologist wishes to see, rather than the description of one that the informants and the people wish me to engage with.

At times, I have questioned the power that has been attributed to anthropology in representing the "other" because to some extent it ignores the power and agency of the men and women it describes. I, for one, often felt powerless before these people as I was being transformed by them. I also began to shed what I now interpret as my own inclinations of seeing the women as helpless and needy. In other words, I was engaging, at least in my

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way of thinking about the women, in the paternalistic attitude that I have criticized in the other foreigners. However, after some time, I felt more at ease when I realized that the women and I had a mutually manipulative interaction as well as one of mutual admiration. The interesting part is that we both seemed very aware of the other's attempt to manipulate.

My manipulation of them was based on forming questions in such a way as to get the information I wanted from them, even when that information might make them uncomfortable. Their resistance was revealed in their silent smiles, overly general comments, whispers to each other excluding me from their interactions, long monologues of party rhetoric, or just polite agreement to whatever I said. They had already undergone numerous "interviews" with foreigners and seemed quite competent in their ability to handle themselves. Their manipulation of me stemmed from trying to get funding, gifts, or my loyalty to their particular interests, whether they be individual or factional. I resisted by telling them I was a poor and slightly miserable student, who was economically dependent on Dr. Binford (the general Project Director), and I added that I could not take sides in disputes.

The effect we had on each other as we interacted was really quite interesting. It was clear that the women considered me a weakling, and frankly after a while, I started wondering myself. For example, there was one time when I went to see the work the women were doing on their "new vegetable plot". When I began to help them one of the women noticed I was sweating and panting more than everybody else. Then she came out with the prodigal comment "Roxanna, it's not the same thing to lift a pencil as it is to lift a shovel, is it? All the women gave a hearty laugh and I had no choice but

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to “grin” (sarcastically) and, pretending to feel pride and strength, demand that they hand me the shovel. Of course, I didn’t last long.

It was thanks to these women, their stories and life experiences, that I began to perceive my own past as a Latino woman differently. For the first time, I noticed a machismo exercised towards them, a machismo that I had previously thought was only exaggerated “feminist rhetoric”. I had heard of machismo before meeting them, but I was unaware of ever having personally experienced it.

The women also seemed to have been affected by my presence in some curious ways. At times they expressed a wish for me to be more like them, and at others they seemed to want to imitate me. For example, they often asked why I never wore skirts, and told me how nice I would look. Yet, as time went by, they began complimenting me on how well certain slacks looked on me. Later, some of them began to wear pants when they went to the office, and showed me pictures of themselves wearing jackets and jeans when they went to represent the WCM in Mexico. It seemed to be a sign of status for them and possibly one of achieved women’s liberation as well.

My cultural immersion was also difficult and entailed various steps of integration because of the sensitive political and historical nature of the area. I sensed a general atmosphere of distrust for any newcomers who had not participated in the twelve year revolution either directly or through international solidarity programs. To make matters worse, I could not even claim (as most other foreigners in the area could) to be in a “project” whose purpose was to improve the educational, hygienic or technical level of the combatants and civilian population.

The fact that my identity seemed confusing to them also made it difficult for me to gain their confidence. They did not seem to think of me as

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a "gringa" yet they saw how I could speak like one when involved with the research team. They knew I was Puerto Rican, and that in itself made many feel uneasy because of the reputation that Puerto Ricans have of being involved in the US. Armed Forces when their government decides to invade other countries. As a foreigner interested in women's organizations, I was automatically pegged as a feminist and had to deal with their ambivalent feelings towards the concept.

The fact that Dr. Binford brought some money to support a corn mill project which was non-existent when we arrived (and later never developed), allowed us to have some clout and to stay temporarily in the WCM building. I ended up staying there permanently and Dr. Binford made other arrangements for himself.

My unknown status in the town led me to decide that the quickest way to integrate with the organized women would be to associate with the foreigners who were doing actual projects for the different organizations. An interesting interaction developed between the internationals and the Salvadorans. It was not unusual to see the internationals trying to outdo each other in helping the Salvadorans and, in so doing, assuming what I consider to be a false possessiveness and paternalism over them. In fact, upon my arrival, I was more carefully scrutinized and interrogated by the internationals (mostly educators) than by the Salvadorans. Yet, it was thanks to these solidarity group members that I was able to attend the first few WCM meetings, and to begin socializing with, and interviewing the women.

The Morazanian women were used to foreigners representing them for others and in fact they seemed to welcome it since that was the way to get funding from international aid organizations and solidarity groups. I am not sure if they thought they were handing over their power to internationals by

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asking them to represent them. Actually, because of the way the women ultimately handled their affairs, it seems more likely that they felt they were not altogether, powerless since the Women's Council was the one to decide, in practice, in practice, where and how the little money it actually received was going to be used.

For the women, it was puzzling to realize that in many ways I knew less about women's issues than they did, and that I made a strong attempt to refrain from advising them as to actions they should take under particular circumstances, or from representing them publicly. At one point, I was asked by some foreign women to speak about the WCM for a Spanish radio broadcast and I turned down the invitation. This was not an easy thing for me to do because, professionally, I felt pulled in two directions. In one I strove for "objectivity" even though I knew it could only be achieved to some degree of approximation. In the second, I was pulled towards wanting to join them and become an activist. Many times it was difficult for me to keep a critical mind and not revert to justifications of everything that did not seem to be working according to their (my?) social ideals. I encountered this difficulty even after I left El Salvador, while analyzing the data. How I finally tackled this problem is presented in chapter II under Methodology.

In keeping with the observations made here and in terms of the style in which the thesis is written, I have chosen to use the first person to make it clear to the reader that the anthropologist is not an all-knowing, omnipresent force. Rather, I am an individual trained in anthropological methods derived from North American perspectives that inevitably form part of the ideological and cultural baggage that I carry. It is from this perspective that I am undertaking this analysis.

Chapters:

ONE. Introduction

TWO. Method

A. General

B. Data

C. Problems

THREE. Brief Survey of  
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A. The Situation

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FOUR. Review of  
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FIVE. Brief Survey of  
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## CHAPTER ONE

### INTRODUCTION

This study, carried out from July 7 to January 1, 1993, is an integral part of a broader research project by Dr. Leigh Binford, which focused on the socio-political history of the guerrilla-controlled zone of Northern Morazán, El Salvador, during the last 20 years. The goal of his research was to study the history of peasant organizations in that geographical area. He wished to analyze the effect that the war experiences of the peasant might have had on their "social consciousness so as to make possible new forms of organization and cooperation" (Binford 1992a: 5). In order to gain the necessary information, Binford focused on the Development Council of the Communities of Northern Morazán and San Miguel (PADECOSMS). I worked on the Women's Communal Movement (WCM). PADECOSMS has been the umbrella organization of Morazán in charge of representing the northern Morazanians before the government, the army and international relief organizations (Binford 1993: 12). The WCM was the first women's communal movement of Morazán.

My research on the WCM followed similar lines to those of Binford. I hoped to find out if there had been a significant change in gender consciousness as a result of the war among the women who had organized, and whether this consciousness or lack thereof was affecting the development of the movement as a whole. I also expected to analyze the structural factors

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that facilitated or impeded the organization's growth. Furthermore, on the basis of this analysis, I expected to be able to make projections about possible future developments of the movement and its effects on the larger class struggle for democratic participation.

My interest in this subject has been sparked by contradictory views and important unexplored aspects regarding gender presented in anthropological literature about community movements and women's organizations in Latin America. The issues about women's place in society, their needs, and their right to be acknowledged as equal participants have seldom been prominent in the agendas of the broader revolutionary movements, or of the women's groups the Left has organized (Sargent 1981). The struggle for democracy has been understood as applying only to a class struggle. Women's participation in the revolution has been warranted in so far as it was needed for structural support and in so far as the women would limit their participation to representing a subordinate economic "class" that crossed gender lines.

This situation implies, erroneously, that women have been equal to the opposite sex within their class in terms of their social value, participation, needs, and acknowledgment. As expressed by Hartmann and others (Sargent 1981), the socialist movement is based on Marxist principles, which emphasize class conflict in socio-economic terms ignoring gender issues while they perpetuate and manipulate gender differentiation and discrimination. This movement has not taken into consideration women's subordinate status and socio-economic burden within society nor has it addressed the issue of how their subordinate status can affect the class struggle for democracy and social justice in the long run.

The Salvadoran Revolution, however, has been depicted as contradicting the more usual patterns of gender subordination. Many leftist

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researchers have looked at the Revolutionary movement with great hope because of its innovative ways of constructing democratic institutions and of implementing a social democratic model of alternative development called "Local Popular Power". This model appeared to be based on the creation of cooperatives and communal organizations characterized by a highly participatory and decentralized democratic system and operated within and by the peasant sector (Binford 1993).

In spite of this, the latest research on the communal organizations representative of this model has revealed, contrary to the expectations, a largely centralized political system, a less than effective communication between the base and the boards of directors, and patterns of organization disintegration. In the search for clues to causes for the difficulties faced by the women's organizations in Northern Morazán, the Northeastern community of El Salvador chosen for this study, it became necessary to review literature on community development and the obstacles that tended to undermine it.

Adams, Foster and Wolf (in Adams 1962; Spielberg 1968) published various studies which revealed mechanisms in community organizing that prevented long term associations. Notwithstanding their important contributions, I found an essential factor missing in their analyses. The gender-based hierarchy and power that exist within a community, and the mechanisms which allow for their continuity, affect the organizations which are created within this hierarchy differentially. There was no mention in these works about this issue, and therefore, the questions of why and how gender-specific organizations are created and how they are affected by their position within a gender-stratified society, were ignored.

The creation and development of organized women's groups which have sprung from revolutionary movements in Latin America have tended

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to follow certain patterns in their conception, purpose, structure, and activities (Jelin 1990: Sargent 1981). For the most part, their concern has been to emphasize the struggle for human rights, to protest violations by the government military forces, and to act as clandestine couriers across prohibited borders .

The twelve year Salvadoran revolution was fought to achieve economic and social equality among all Salvadorans. Certain aspects of the concern for social equality, such as land agreements, disarmament and human rights violations were the object of lengthy debates after the January 16, 1992 Peace Accords. In dealing with these issues, however, it has been a slow and painful process to take into consideration or even define the place of women in the Salvadoran society as one characterized by inequality and powerlessness. There is the widespread belief in the zone controlled by the Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front (FMLN), and among solidarity groups, that women, because of their participation in the war, have achieved near- equality with the men. There is also the belief that they were given the opportunity to develop technically and educationally as much as the men. The literature about socialist movements and their awareness of women's issues mentioned previously throws doubts on the validity of these views. Through the study of women's organizations in Northern Morazán, I hope to make a contribution in this area.

The purpose of this thesis is to scrutinize the assumptions of gender equality and to find out if and how such a feat has been achieved in a country that has been described by many of its own members as extremely "machista". Given the force of "machista" or patriarchal ideology, my hypothesis was that the attainment of gender equality was at least doubtful and, at most, incipient.

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Since machismo is notoriously prevalent in the military, this zone of Morazán is of particular interest because it was under the directions of the People's Revolutionary Army (ERP) and was known, at least during the seventies, to be more militarily and less politically oriented than the other four revolutionary organizations of the FMLN (Binford 1993: 8-9).

This is also the birthplace of the Women's Communal Movement. This region lent itself particularly well to carrying out research so as to determine if traditional patriarchal ideology had truly given way to participatory democracy in the women's ranks, thanks to their displacement from the private to the public sector, as suggested in the Change of Spheres and Roles theories. These theoretical constructs will be analyzed later.

The specific questions that I will explore with regards to the Women's Communal Movement in Northern Morazán are the following:

1. How much sway did patriarchal ideology have before the creation of the Women's Communal Movement?
2. What led to the Movement's creation and affected its functioning?
3. Has it been an effective agent in limiting or making patriarchal ideology inoperative and in addressing women's concerns? Why or why not?
4. What can we expect from the women's movements of Morazán in the future with regards to strategies for participatory democracy?

In order to answer these questions, I will examine the social role and position of the organization as it developed in the previously Controlled Zone of Northern Morazán, and the outside influences that it has been subjected to. I will analyze the causes and factors affecting the situation of organized women and the purpose of the creation of the Women's

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In this undertaking, I have found the Social Ideology Approach to be the most appropriate for understanding what I believe to be essential gender-specific forces that could explain the differences as well as the similarities between the problems facing the women's and the men's organizations. According to Bourque and Warren (1981: 76-77), this approach attempts to explain why women's subordination has not been

ameliorated by women's acquisition of economic positions traditionally defined as masculine, and will not necessarily disappear in social experiments working towards alternatives to class based capitalist society. This approach seeks to understand sexual hierarchy as a product of culturally created social ideologies and the material conditions of women's and men's lives.

This approach asserts that, although both men and women are exploited in class-based systems, the women within a particular class are subordinated to the men of that same class. Gender differences persist through class, ethnic, and racial distinctions. This is why gender should be accorded equal importance with the previous factors when analyzing cultural change.

As such, the Social Ideology approach focuses on the beliefs which mold peoples' perceptions of the world and the society in which they live. Moreover, it takes into consideration the social institutions created by these beliefs and which, in turn, help to empower and perpetuate them.

I found this theory particularly effective in explaining the gender inequities that my research revealed and which went beyond class considerations and the uprootedness and chaos produced by the twelve year war.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### METHODOLOGY

#### A. General Framework, Interview Objectives, and Methods

As previously stated, the focus of my thesis is to determine if indeed the women's organizations of Northern Morazán have engaged in truly participatory democracy, overcoming patriarchal ideology as a result of the war, and to explore the causes and effects this situation. The five questions presented previously framed the specific aspects of the problem that I wished to pursue.

Morazán offered an ideal testing ground for various anthropological and "native" theories which had attempted to understand communal movements in general and women's organizations that emerged from revolutionary movements in particular. According to the Change of Spheres theory, for example, the extreme conditions of war seemed to have propelled women from the private sphere of family and domestic duties to the public sphere of political and military action. This, in turn, seemed to have created the necessary conditions to promote and maintain women's movements on an equal footing with men's. My study, however, contradicted the last view by observing, among other factors, a faster rate of disintegration in women's organizations than in men's.

The characteristic that made Morazán a fitting region for the testing of these theories was the fact that it had been a revolutionary-controlled zone

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during the war and that as a military zone it was likely to have retained elements of the traditional machista or patriarchal ideology put to the test under the extreme conditions of war. The fact that Morazán is a relatively isolated area, however, posed a methodological problem since I would

eventually have to place my findings within a wider context than Morazán in order to analyze the larger theoretical implications. This problem was tackled primarily in two ways: by enlarging the outer scope of the study through the consideration of the socio-historical background of the war and of other women's movements in El Salvador, and by widening the inner scope of the study in Morazán so as to include, among others, women in the base of the movement, leaders of the WCM, male combatants, male leaders, and women outside of the WCM. The analysis was further expanded through the review of the literature and the analysis of the theories in the last chapter.

With regards to other women's movements in El Salvador, I took account of the accomplishments, problems and structure of other Salvadoran women's organizations. The problems faced by these organizations would give me clues as to what I could expect of the WCM which had fewer economic resources and was integrated by members with less formal education. For the organizations in the Capital I employed structured interviews focusing on their origins, purpose, problems, and accomplishments. The view of women and the role of feminism in the revolution as described by these organizations was of special importance since it gave me some insight about the current tendencies in ideology in the country and their possible effect on the WCM.

In order to study the Women's organizations in El Salvador, I first gathered information about some FMLN-related women's organizations

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whose offices were centered in the Capital. I chose the following four organizations: CONAMUS, described to me by other organizations as having the strongest ties to the FMLN, especially the FPL; the DIGNAS (Women's Association for Dignity and Life) who were described as being the most radical women's organization of socialist inclinations, and who originated with the RN; the AMS (Association of Salvadoran Women) which represented the ERP and preceded the Women's Communal Movement; and the CEF (Center for Feminist Studies). The CEF was not an organization but rather a center devoted to giving seminars on feminist theory and on the situation of women in the country.

After my encounter with members of the organizations in the Capital, I engaged in participant observation and structured interviews to gain information and insights about the life histories and socio-economic situation of the women in the WCM as well as of other women of the community. The interviews dealt with the following themes:

1. Life histories of campesina women
2. Religious beliefs and structure
3. Women's political involvement
4. Women's economic information
5. Women's socialization
6. Women's health problems
7. Life histories of female combatants
8. History of the WCM and its problems
10. Hopes and dreams of the women
11. Male perception of women
12. Female perception of the WCM

Women of Morazán outside of the WCM organization were interviewed to gain a wider spectrum about the women's situation outside of the organization office. I wish to compare their sense of gender consciousness, their view of the role of women, and their economic situation to that of the organized women. Interviewing female combatants allowed me to tell whether or not those women actually felt that they had been on an equal level with men during the war, and whether their accomplishments had been acknowledged and rewarded as much as the men's. Members of the Congregation of Christian Mothers and women who were employed by the PADECOSMS office either as health workers or as cooks for the public "comedor" or dining hall were also interviewed by me. My goal was to see if there was a difference in the level of consciousness about women's issues and rights and about their ability to exercise those rights depending on the organization they were affiliated to or worked for.

Finally, I interviewed men and women about their perception of women's roles and treatment during the war, and about their opinion of the Women's Communal Movement. I hoped that this information would reflect the current ideology concerning gender differences and would show whether or not there had truly been a change in the way women are viewed and treated in this "new society" and the way they now see themselves. I wanted to make sure I would get something other than the limited positive public discourse prepared by the organizations and leaders for international solidarity members who were being brought in for monetary and political support.

For interviews of members in and out of the office, I often had to hike to their homes and stay overnight since many were over a couple hours walking distance. I did not live with a family for an extended period of time,

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and this limited my ability to observe family life first hand. My long term residence in the organization building, however, gave me a detailed and profound insight of the Organization's work patterns. I was able to observe their ability to program and carry out activities, their ability to delegate work, their techniques for conflict resolution, their ability for internal coordination and for coordination with other organizations. I was also able to observe patterns of dependency towards foreign solidarity workers, constraints put on the WCM by other town boards and organizations, the WCM's response to these constraints and its accessibility to its own social base.

I employed the ethnographic method because I could not have collected the type of information I needed through the sole use of a pre-written survey instrument. Many of the nuances, subtleties and ambiguities of the women's experiences would have been lost. There would not have been dialogue, only a sterile and very culturally-biased schedule of questions and answers. I believe the survey instrument is of value to fine-tune and quantify the results of a previous ethnographic encounter. This could be done once the researcher has attempted to understand the history and particular cultural context of the people who are participants in the problems being studied. This can only be accomplished through a careful investigation based on very detailed observation, note taking, and by checking, as much as possible, the information attained through interviews with different informants.

#### **B. Data Analysis**

My analysis of the data will proceed inductively and will be based on a content analysis of the interviews done during my field work and the observations of the women's interactions in their day-to-day lives. In order to answer the questions posed in the introduction, I will focus on the



informants' accounts of the situation of women in the zone and the relationship between the different women's organizations to that of PADECOSMS with emphasis on the WCM. I will use the accounts of six different sectors of the population to gain a general and hopefully more accurate picture of the situation of women in Morazán. These are:

1. unorganized women
- 2 female combatants
3. organized women
4. women in leadership positions in PADECOSMS
5. male combatants
6. religious representatives

The real names or personal information of those informants who did not wish to be identified will be omitted for their own protection.

For contextual purposes, I will take into account a historical framework descriptive of the situation of women and of their participation during the war, as well as the achievements and problems faced by women's organizations that preceded the WCM. I will base my assessment of the WCM's level of "success" on a comparison of their stated goals and their, as well as other informants', descriptions of the organization's accomplishments and progress in fulfilling these goals. My observations of the level of attendance and participation at their meetings, and their ability to accomplish short term goals will also be included.

Based on the information analyzed, I will construct a theory of the forces that constrain and guide the functioning of the WCM. This theory intends to explain why the women's organization seems to be approaching its demise. I will also include trends of women's empowerment that have developed in spite of the ideological and structural constraints affecting the WCM.

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### C. Problems In Data Analysis

In the process of analyzing my data I have already run into methodological problems. An interesting dynamic within the interviews became apparent when I listened to the recordings for the purpose of content analysis. The tapes revealed that, as the interviews progressed, there was a tendency for the informant to change the answers, or come up with exceptions that contradicted a generalization given at the beginning. This raises several possibilities. The inconsistencies within the interview could be a result of a growing sense of ease and trust towards me on the part of the informants as the interview went along, and they felt it was safe to be honest. However, it might also be that the informants were completely honest to begin with, but changed previous responses in order to give information that they thought would be pleasing to me. Another possibility is that the questions asked by me during the interview had the effect of making the informants re-evaluate or re-interpret the situation that was described at the beginning of the interview.

Although I have no way of ascertaining which or what combination of these possibilities is responsible for the internal inconsistencies of the interviews, I tend to believe that the first hypothesis is the strongest with some effect from the third. Most of the contradictions arose from a contrast between the party rhetoric about the value of women within the revolution, and the concrete examples of how women were actually treated. A good example of this is the "Responsable's" interview which will be quoted in this paper. An example of the third hypothesis is an interview that I did with a relatively new combatant who had only participated in the revolution since the General Offensive of 1989. She said that she believed women were treated equally to the men and with fairness. However, when I asked her if she

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thought that the women had been given as much credit, acknowledgment, and compensation as the men now that the Peace Accords were signed, she said "no" and she was unable to explain why. I asked her if she had asked herself those questions before and she answered negatively.

Although I did not take a representative sample of the population (statistically speaking), I believe I was able to check the consistency of the responses by interviewing different people from the six sectors mentioned earlier about the same issues. I have attempted to include lengthy quotes in the thesis so that, at least to some degree, I can let the informants speak for themselves. My personal comments usually precede or follow the quotes so that the readers can have the opportunity to come to their own conclusions.

In the cases where contradictions have been present in the interviews, I have made an effort to reveal them rather than to chose only those parts that could more clearly and directly prove "my point". Nevertheless, it should be understood that I have made the choice of including some interviews over others, and within the interviews I have also chosen specific excerpts. Bias is inherent to writing for as a text is chosen and created, so is a "reality" which only reflects the way a certain cultural being attempts to understand a world that is unfamiliar to her or him. This is a problem inherent to any analytical endeavor and the most we can hope for is to be honest about our limits and to believe that we can increasingly reach some sort of consensus and mutual understanding about the effects of our interactions in a global and gender specific social-economy.

My analysis will entail the incorporation of theories of subordination, power, social structure, and anthropological interpretive theories. For example, I will discuss Jelin's and Hartmann's descriptions of women's roles within socialist revolutionary movements and organizations that arise in

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times of socio-economic crisis. For an understanding of women's groups I will also incorporate Bourque and Warren's theory of the Social Ideology approach of female subordination because of its importance for the understanding of women's present role in society. In addition, I will include the political and economic theories of the ex-commander of the FMLN (Joaquín Villalobos). This will enable us to better understand the place of women within the Salvadoran Revolution and their place in society in the near future. My projections will be based on evaluations expressed in the FMLN political framework, the observations the women have made of their situation, the depictions of women's situation by men and my own observations.

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## CHAPTER THREE

### BRIEF HISTORICAL AND SOCIAL ANTECEDENTS: EL SALVADOR AND WOMEN'S ROLES BEFORE AND DURING THE WAR

#### A. El Salvador Before The War

El Salvador, the smallest country in Central America, just recently terminated a twelve year civil war that devastated the land and lives of its already impoverished people. The roots of the conflict derived from a history of peasant exploitation and repression which spans more than one hundred years. By 1881, the creation of an agro-exporting middle class began to take place (Navas Turcios 1987: 57-72). Peasants and indigenous populations were thrown off their lands so that it could be used for the cultivation of export products such as coffee and sugar cane. Communal property was destroyed and laws were created to favor private property. The result was a huge mass of landless salaried workers who lacked a constant income (Op. Cit.: 5).

In 1932, approximately 30,000 peasants were slaughtered by general Maximiliano Hernández during an uprising which protested the massive unemployment in the countryside and the extreme poverty of the population which was drastically worsened by the world economic crisis of the 1930s (Op. Cit.: 56).

In 1954, there was a renewed wave of peasant expulsion from their land as cotton, a new capital intensive export product, was cultivated. The

result was an increase in the exploitation of the rural labor force even though cotton and coffee sales decreased by 1959 (Navas Turcios: 56-57).

The 1960s were marked by the creation of the Central American Common Market whose goal was to spur industrialization. The result was the consolidation of the Salvadoran middle class. This decade was also marked by a number of industrial strikes, the rise of new political parties and the beginning of the influential pro-peasant role which part of the Catholic Church (based on Vatican II) would take. This sector of the Church played an important role in the creation of peasants' and laborers' awareness of their repression (Op. Cit.: 58-59).

By the 1970s, the economically dominant class of the country felt a need to tie the Salvadoran market to the world market through the "installation of 'maquiladoras' and agro-industries that would facilitate the introduction of foreign capital"(Op. Cit.: 60-61) The latter "demanded an agrarian reform which caused a schism in the dominant economic class" (Op. Cit.). The Law of Agrarian Reform was promoted by the industrial middle class and clashed with the agro-exporting oligarchy. The oligarchy blocked the law and prevented the reform from taking place. This caused the economic and social crisis to become even more severe.

In the 1970s, the percentage of families without land grew dramatically (Op. Cit.: 63). Whereas in 1961 they only made up 19.8% of the population, by 1975, 41% of the population was landless. This decade was characterized by the rise of popular and political military organizations which opposed the oligarchy. The situation resulted in increased military repression and in the increased activation of a government-sponsored paramilitary organization of the 1960s called ORDEN. Many disappearances, tortures and assassinations were attributed to the latter. In 1970 the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL),

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led by Cayetano Carpio, were created from a division in the Salvadoran Communist Party. The same year the Popular Revolutionary Army (ERP) came into existence and, in 1975, it too experienced internal problems which resulted in the death of Roque Dalton, one of its leaders. Consequently, the Armed Forces of National Resistance (RN) was formed by disenchanted members of the ERP. The FPL, ERP, RN, and PCS had various political and military confrontations with the Salvadoran Government during the 70s (Op. Cit.: 71).

By 1979, repression in El Salvador had increased dramatically as a result of the popular movements' stated efforts to institute a democratic government (Op. Cit.: 72-79). During that year the Central American workers Party (PRTC), which had close ties to a new mass organization called the Popular Liberation Movement, was formed (Shenk 1982: 155). The PRTC joined the other four political military organizations to form the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN) in October 12, 1980. During this year the FMLN joined with the Democratic Revolutionary Front (FDR) which was integrated by a "coalition of political parties, unions, and other democratic forces" (Op. Cit.: 81) making the ties between the popular and the political military organizations evident (Op. Cit.: 72).

According to the publication Vamos con El Frente (1992: 2), the FMLN decided to start the revolution in 1981 after realizing that all the forms of popular resistance against the repression had been exhausted. Beginning in 1982, the FMLN proposed various negotiations to end the armed conflict but the government would not agree to do so. In 1984, a dialogue was initiated but it was not until 1989, after the FMLN's General Offensive, that through the mediation of the United Nations, "the real negotiations" for a peace treaty

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were accepted by both sides. The negotiations ended on December 31, 1991, and the final Peace Treaty was signed on January 16, 1992 in Mexico.

### **B. The War: Events In Morazán**

Morazán, one of the poorest regions of El Salvador, became the "principal rearguard for the People's Revolutionary Army" (Binford 1992c: 2). The origins of the political transformation which took place in this zone, go back to 1973 when Father Miguel Ventura's excursions into the zone (with the purpose of setting up Christian Base Communities) helped the peasants to become conscious of the injustice of their social conditions (Op. Cit.: 3). In 1975, Rafael Arce Zablah (the ERP leader) helped to politicize and mobilize people from the communities to engage in armed opposition against the repressive government military forces.

In 1981, the US. trained Atlacatl Battalion of the Salvadoran Army applied the Vietnam-style scorched earth tactic and massacred over 1,000 inhabitants - - mostly women and children. The purpose of this attack was to weaken FMLN resistance by ridding it of its social base. In this way the combatants would be deprived of food, informants, and couriers on which they depended for survival. During my interviews, many peasants described the particular viciousness of this massacre as having been characterized by women being raped, and forced to watch in pain and terror as their wombs were slit open and their fetuses were dismembered. . There were also vivid descriptions of how children were flung into the air and bayoneted, or thrown into bread ovens to be burnt alive. The informants did not specify whether they witnessed these events personally, whether they saw the bodies after the massacres, or whether they heard about these events from witnesses. However the archeological findings of El Mozote by the international Forensic Anthropology team found ample evidence of this massacre.

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The intensification of the repression from 1980-82 resulted in a country-wide migration of people who were fleeing for their lives. However, a third of the population of Northern Morazán remained in the zone thanks to the FMLN's presence. (Binford 1993: 6). By 1983, the FMLN had gained control over the zone. Peasants were able to begin forming small cooperatives and became officially affiliated to the FMLN. At the same time, they strove to achieve a legalized standing before the government in order to hide their true allegiances (Op. Cit.: 10-11) and to get international support. The relative stability resulting from the FMLN's protective role in the zone resulted in larger participatory spaces for the "population to seek collective means of survival and fulfillment" (UNICEF 1991: 14)

The emerging community organizations were heralded as an innovative experiment in participatory democracy in the controlled zones. Binford described the creation of cooperatives and communally-based movements in the following way:

These experiments. . .consisted of agricultural and fishing cooperatives; a broad network of primary and secondary health care ranging from young, peasant health promoters with rudimentary training. . .and literacy circles and schools teaching both adults and children to read with methods pioneered by Paulo Freire. Popular Assemblies elected officials and disseminated information, local representatives of Production, Health, Education, and Organization Committees participated in sub-zonal and zonal organizations and collaborated in implementing ever more elaborate plans (Binford 1992c: 1-2).

This "Local Popular Power" was a grass roots movement, representative of the Salvadoran peasant communities, which attempted to change the class hierarchy and social structure from the base up. Its spokespeople in the popular combat forces and political fronts argued that it also advocated gender equality (Golden 1991: 10, 15). Researchers such as Cagan and Cagan (1991: 88) and Radford Ruether (in Golden 1991: 10) felt that



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in the bumpy road to community organizing, and of military, social, and political participation, women had, to a large extent, achieved an equal level with men. A close scrutiny of these positive views, however, shows that certain important aspects of gender equality have been overlooked:

Social equality between men and women in Colomoncagua was most evident in public life, and public life centered around work. Most jobs were done equally by men and women, although some tended to be assumed largely by one or the other gender (Cagan and Cagan 1991: 88).

Here, the last sentence is particularly intriguing since the author does not seem to take into account that the jobs which are gender-specific tend to vary in importance according to the value that is given to the gender as a whole or vice versa. For example, housewives are socially valued less than their husbands because the former's work is not remunerated. A vicious cycle is created when a specific gender and a job are understood to have an intrinsic relationship especially if that job is believed to be marginal in its social value. The following quote also espouses the idea that equality had been achieved, but this time among combatants:

In the Salvadoran people's army there are women fighters too, the *comandantes-muchachas*-alongside the *muchachos*.. Here the equality is less of a sham [than in other revolutionary movements]. The women really do shoulder the risks alongside the men (Radford Ruether in Golden: 10).

This quote assumes that because a woman carries a weapon and combats alongside a man she is given the same value as the man and treated with equal respect. I do not see how one thing follows logically from the other since other elements such as interpersonal and social power relationships have an important bearing on the question of gender equality. The quote mentions that women are also able to become "comandantes" but in it there is no consideration of tokenism and other patterns which may result from

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the use of women in socialist movements (see Lydia Sargent's article "New Left Women and Men: The Honeymoon Is Over" in Sargent 1981: xi-xxxi). Whether equality between men and women was actually achieved during the war will be discussed in relation to the data gathered in the field.

### C. The Problem: Women Before And During The War

Comments such as those of Cagan and Cagan, and Radford Ruether are also surprising in view of earlier published accounts on the subject. Only nine years earlier, a female combatant expressed her view that although women were becoming more conscious of their worth, there were still clear gender inequalities in the Salvadoran Revolutionary Movement:

Women really have to struggle a lot in the popular groups to be respected as equals. Like, your political opinion, is it worth as much as the political opinion of the *compañero* sitting next to you?? It really was a struggle. And it still is a struggle (Latin American Working Group 1983: 35). . . .Another thing that sometimes happens is that you'll find that women do not have "the right" to be pregnant in the fronts and outside of them as well. At one meeting, one *compañera* came who was pregnant and many people harassed her because of it- - women and men. She had become pregnant during the time of war, and she had been charged with very high responsibilities, which she never let down, despite her pregnancy (Op. Cit.: 36). . . .Why do we not have a chance? I mean all of the commanders, all of the great *compañeros*, have a family, but the women do not. Most of the outstanding women, mainly, are alone or have had to make this kind of sacrifice in order to cope with political work (Op. Cit.: 39).

This combatant's observations of the inequalities practiced towards women within the revolution became another link in a chain of female devaluation and repression long established before the war.

There are also various descriptions of the daily life of the peasant woman in Salvadoran society which date from before to the beginning of the revolution when female combatants and peasants were being interviewed by foreigners who supported the revolutionary cause. The following description

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comes from a 1980 talk given in England by a Salvadoran woman who represented the Democratic Revolutionary Front ("Women's International Exchange" 1980: 1-2). It depicts the hardships that women faced and continue to face at the present time, especially in the countryside:

For a woman in the countryside the day starts very, very early. Even before the sun has risen they get up from their rough bundle of a mattress and, trying not to wake their husbands or step on their children, go outside their little shack and start grinding up maize into flour tortillas. . . .Grinding the maize is really hard work because its' still done by hand, and it gives you muscles like rock. By the time she's finished, the children and her husband will be up. If the children are old enough she'll send them off to get some water, but if not she has to go herself. . . .Once she's got the water the family breakfast on tortillas and coffee, then if its harvest time, everybody goes off to work on the big plantations picking the crops.

Sometimes, women have to give birth on their own. I remember once when I saw a woman cutting her umbilical cord herself. She'd given birth then and there. . . .Well, I went home with her and, do you know, she cooked the dinner and sent the kids off to play before she lay down!

There was a census in 1971 which said that there were three doctors and 17 hospital beds for every 10,000 people. You can imagine how many women die in childbirth and how high the infant mortality rate is as a result. Women have an average of six to eight children but often have twice as many pregnancies.

Many women don't even have a *manifundio* [small piece of land] to live on so they. . . have to make their living as migrant laborers. . .when she has to travel caring for her children all the while. . . .Even more are migrating now because the repression is horrific. Some find work as *empleadas* and, unless they're very lucky, they end up exploited as workers and as women. Its just expected that an *empleada* will service her boss and the sons of the family sexually as well. . . .The social structure in El Salvador is inhuman. It's important to say this because, yes, *machismo*, is a real problem, but nothing's going to change until we have the basic necessities of life; economic security, health and education. . . .We must join with our men who suffer too, as well as fight for our specific rights.

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The problems expressed by this FDR woman are repeated over and over again by other Salvadoran women as revealed in the following quotes (Op. Cit.: 4-9, 19, 25-26):

Unemployment in the countryside hits women the hardest. The women work in the three migration periods of the coffee, cotton, and cane harvests. This creates a difficulty in permanent love relationships resulting in an increase in the numbers of single mothers who are solely responsible for raising their families. The migrant workers do not have any rights to medical insurance or social security and they lack schools.

For domestics there is no minimum wage, they have no right to unionize and no right to severance pay and they are allowed no more than one day off weekly or in some cases bi-weekly according to the whim of the employer, and all of their household duties must be completed before they may take any day off. . . .Pregnant women are denied jobs. . . .Those women who have the privilege of studying are employed as secretaries, nurses, sales women, at wages which do not cover a family's needs. Very few Salvadoran women reach professional level.

Carolina Castillo, another woman quoted in Women's International Exchange, vividly portrays the role of women in the Salvadoran agrarian economy as contrasted to that of men:

In 1980 women made up 53% of El Salvador's population yet because of their gender they were doubly exploited and doubly oppressed: their capacities are underestimated, while men's capacities are over exploited. . . .Women in the countryside earned wages which are a third less than men's and only men or heads of household are officially under contract so only they have a right to payment at the end of the week. The women and their children have no such rights, since they are not officially at work: in this way the landowners increase their profits. Illiteracy is twice as prevalent among women as it is among men. (Op. Cit.: 7).

As dire as the situation has been for women in El Salvador, it was not their specific oppression that led them to take a stand. Rather, women began participating in the popular struggle because of the repression and



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disappearances of their family members. In 1977, it was mostly women's organizations that emerged and:

struggled for the liberty of political prisoners: the Committee of Mothers of Political Prisoners, and the Committee for the Liberty of Political Prisoners and Disappeared. These groups called for hunger strikes, demonstrations, sit-ins, and they laid their case before international tribunals, in order to gain the freedom of their unjustly retained relatives (Op. Cit.: 8).

According to Cecilia Criollo, there were no women's organizations that existed in El Salvador during the 1980s which concentrated solely on women's issues or demands: "Women have decided (my underlining) that at this time it is most important to change the society and only after to demand new roles and places in the new society" (Op. Cit. ).

Carolina Castillo stated that this was a decision made by women even though she admits that:

As a woman, if you are suspected of political activity I think that torture and punishment take on a special vengeance. I believe there's a special sexual hatred that takes place. . . it seems they're even more vicious with women than they are with men. (Op. Cit.: 19).

A good example of this is Ana Guadalupe Martínez' (ERP chief in Eastern Zone) account of her capture by the military (Op. Cit.: 25-26). Tying up her arms and legs, they cover her head and face with a cloth and throw her to the floor of the car, beating and insulting her:

"Ya know why we picked you up you whore. . . You're Norma Guadalupe Martinez and we're going to fuck you. Look at 'er. Some ass she's got. Let's take her to the river bank. That's where we'll screw you, ya whore . . . It'll be better for you if ya tell us, if not you're going to end up with black and blue tits"

In the case of women, sexual abuse, the constant pawing, and the threat of rape are among the principal ways used by the repressive apparatus to demoralize. The mere fact of feeling an assassin's hands on your body causes revulsion and anguish.

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Even though I had known all this would happen, it was a brutal and horrible experience.

Obviously these psychopathic killers who take pleasure in human pain cannot possibly understand that dignity and honor reside in our respect for revolutionary struggle, that all physical pain caused by them can be transcended by our dignity and our determination to sustain principled struggle at all times.

Ana Guadalupe's account is doubly horrifying for it not only reveals the pathologic mental state of a few individuals, but of a government-sponsored military institution which, ideally, is supposed to safeguard the moral values of society and the dignity of its members. Her final comment also has a familiar ring. As we have seen previously and will see again, the objective of the struggle by women is the Revolution first and women second, even though as expressed by Carolina Criollo, and by Ana Guadalupe's own account, the repression towards women is especially vicious.

Their accounts, however, have the effect of leading the observer to the conclusion that because the forces which oppose the Revolution have been so sadistic and brutal towards women, and because these women seemed to have gained an awareness of their oppression within the society there would be a clear effort to combat these ills within a revolutionary movement that seeks social equality.

The following quote is an excerpt from an interview that I did with a "Responsable" of the ERP who had been a combatant during the 12 years of the war. I will reproduce it in order to allow the reader to follow his feelings and train of thought without analytical interference. This "Responsable" entered the revolutionary movement at the age of sixteen and later was given the recognition and responsibility of being in charge of a squadron of men during the cease fire agreement preceding the demobilization of the FMLN

combatants. His account is of special interest not only because he was in a leadership position, but because of the fact that he was a participant in the war throughout its entirety. Therefore, he was socialized to see and treat women in a certain way within the revolutionary forces. He was also exposed to the FMLN's modifications of its official rhetoric regarding women as the war progressed.

**How would you describe the relations between men and women combatants?**

the FMLN promoted camaraderie of men towards women. It strove to form a society which encompassed the rights of men as well as those of women.

**Did many women become pregnant during the war?**

The FMLN required women not to become pregnant. It was an error for her to think about having children if she wished to participate in the revolutionary process. This was more common in the beginning of the war. There were cases of women who never had children in order to continue with the struggle. You see, when the war started there was usually only one woman in the squadron and she tended to be a medic or a communications personnel so their responsibilities were of crucial importance.

**Was sexual education imparted to both men and women?**

Sexual education was more directed towards women. If she became pregnant, the responsibility was almost always attributed to her because she did not want to take precautions. But the education we received was mostly military in content. . . . Many women really wanted to be part of the struggle, but sex during the war was a way to get relief from the tensions of the war. It was really the only way of distancing yourself from the war. To have an affair was the "only way out". The type of contraceptive used by the women was optional. If none were used, there was the risk of losing our medic or communications personnel. Maybe the most loyal to the cause never had children, well, maybe the others did because they forgot to take the pill, I don't know

**Were the men aware of the different types of contraceptives?**

Maybe not. For example, I never received classes about how to avoid pregnancies. . . . There were a few tendencies within the organization of women- -around 1986, I think- -that began to struggle for women's issues, and would orient the women in the proper use of contraceptives. But I think that they were causing some problems of liberalism. We felt this was going to cause some problems. There was the case of a woman that would have sex with whichever man she liked. She was free in that sense. But she had a "compañero" who wasn't fond of the idea. She was clear with him and told him that if he wished to be with her, he would have to accept that she would sleep with whomever she liked and he had no reason to tell her anything. She told him that if he didn't agree with that, he should leave her alone. Well, maybe he was in love with her and he agreed. But there came a time when he found her with another combatant and he killed her, then he killed himself. It almost always ends that way. The man will kill her, and then he will kill himself.

**You told me that the women had been badly advised and that's why the group was dissolved. Who dissolved it?**

The directive of the ERP, because the organization wasn't advising the women correctly. The women were confusing liberation with liberalism. So the organization was suspended. . . . You see, we had a policy of agreement. All the relationships that I know of during the war were informal. It was rare to see a particular couple always together. Because of the war, couples almost always had to be separated. They tended to be casual relationships. . . . In fact, there were cases where women should not find a permanent partner because if they did, they wouldn't be able to satisfy the needs of many other combatants because there were so few women. For every 50 men there were 2 women. So, in that sense, there was a greater tendency for sexual relationships. Well, it was a necessity. Every one saw it that way. There were women who did not have a stable relationship and they would have sex with many combatants. These were not harmful relationships. In fact, they helped lift morale. There were men who criticized the women and called them prostitutes. But that was wrong of them because those men would take advantage of them and then would talk about them behind their backs. Once the FMLN incorporated more women, this situation diminished. But a squadron or platoon leader could have, for example, six women and he could get

more than a mere combatant could. If I wasn't in charge, the women would ignore me even if I had good intentions. But if a commander came along, the woman would go with him. It's always been felt that women are easily influenced and they don't perceive the true value of a man, his principles or his simplicity. . . his humbleness because as they say 'you're worth as much as you've got'. I feel machismo has changed little during the war

**How about women, have they changed much?**

The women who have been combatants might see those who didn't participate in the struggle as inferior. I know of cases where a female combatant would say 'Ya see, that bitch let herself get pregnant by an old fart so she wouldn't have to fight in the war'. The combatants are also different in that they can defend themselves from men. They feel they have learned a lot. Many don't want to return to their homes to grind corn and take care of children.

**Do you think women's organizations are important?**

I think they're important as long as their ideology doesn't go against men. In other words, to put all the responsibility on the men. For example, a director of a women's organization should not have had a frustrated life in her personal relationships because this will cause her to make mistakes. She won't act in a just way towards the problems of men. She would probably attack the individual and not the problem. But it's a good thing for women's organizations to exist so they will help women develop in their way of thinking. For, example, they should teach them how to do things, how they should help men, you see. They should learn to deal with problems through a dialogue. They should acquire a capacity to discuss with men. And the organizations should also find a way to take the message to the men as well, and not only to women. Men should be taught to recognize the rights of women and the rights that men have.

**According to your own view, which do you think are the rights and value of women?**

Women's rights are many, you see. They aren't all defined because I still don't understand that stuff. But for me, the rights of women concern the political question above all. So that they may govern, so they may be mayors, and military personnel.

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Everything that a man can be. It's to have the opportunity to be what she wants to be.

This interview reveals a man who has had to deal with the contradictions of a rhetoric which espouses the value of women, for whatever the purpose, versus the reality of the treatment, view, and place of women within a social system that sees them as fulfilling a necessary, but merely utilitarian role. Their value is appreciated only in so far as they fulfill the roles that the men in the revolution and the women influenced by them find necessary. For the woman to act as the men have historically acted, which is to engage in sexual activity with many members of the opposite sex, is considered libertine and problematic. But it is only problematic if there are enough women to go around for the men. If there were few women, then, for them to engage in sex with many men was seen as a harmless and necessary behavior because it would lift morale and relieve the tensions caused by the war. However, "Free Love" is not considered libertinism when applied to the men, rather, it is a condoned and even promoted conduct for it reinforces the stereotype of the overly fertile and virile "macho".

The result is the responsabilization of women for their pregnancies and for the rearing of their children. As the Responsable stated, it was mostly women who received some sort of sex education and it was women who "were not serious about the Revolution" if they did not take precautions. To make matters worse, the women also had to feel inferior for becoming pregnant and were punished through pressure to abort and reprimands for having gotten pregnant in the first place. Their pregnancy was viewed as an irresponsible attitude and lack of concern for the priorities of the revolutionary struggle, even by other women combatants.

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It seems clear that women were getting their self worth according to the values and conditions prescribed by the men. As in times of peace, their self worth depended on how well they submitted to the ideal stereotype of a good housewife, mother, and Christian. But even those women who fit the "ideal" were devalued because they "must be taught how to have a dialogue with men". This implies that in general, it is emotional outbursts that women use for communication rather than rational discourse. Once they are taught to have a dialogue the purpose is so they can "learn how to do things, how they should help men, you see".

The answers to the first and last questions of the excerpt quoted appear to contradict the other responses and to express a genuine aspiration for women to reach equality with men. This is ironic in so far as taken in their totality, the responses reveal an ignorance of the true meaning of equality. At this point I cannot help but remember an insightful comment made by Binford after observing the work patterns of peasants who were supposed to take turns working on communal land. In the attempt to explain why some peasants were fulfilling their "quota" while others never showed up, he realized that although the time allotment might have been distributed equally, it was not equally fair. A woman with eight young children should not be expected to work the same amount of time on the land as a woman with two children because the former would obviously have less time. People who do not have equal structural-economic conditions are being treated unfairly if these inequalities are not considered when allotting work responsibilities.

The same logic applies to the thoughts of the "Responsible". He answers the last question by stating that he really does not understand "that stuff" about equal rights for women and he ends by stating that he believes

equality would be that they can be whatever a man can be. Rather than taking into consideration that women are not men, and therefore have certain needs that differ from men's which must be met for them to achieve "equality", he ignores (or is ignorant of) this problem and sees them as filling the public role which men have traditionally filled. For him, this is sufficient to fulfill the "equality" requirement. The danger with this kind of logic is that tokenism may (and in many circumstances has) become a reality. Women have been placed in traditionally male roles only for them to resume with an agenda that continues to follow the priorities set by the male majority. This majority persists in its efforts to exclude women and ignore their particular needs. That a woman, and not a man, fills a traditional male position, is used as "evidence" that women have achieved equality. Therefore, following this logic, in order for a woman to be equal to a man, she must stop being a woman.

Unfortunately, a country-wide perspective of the situation of women only provides stronger evidence of the severe oppression and disregard for them and their needs. According to a UNICEF report (1991: 14) on women and children of El Salvador, by 1991:

more than 40% of Salvadoran families [were] exclusively headed by women, this figure increasing to 57% for displaced families. [These] adverse conditions . . . forced hundreds of thousands of Salvadoran women in all levels of the society to assume economic and social responsibilities to a larger extent than in the 1970s.

The report adds that the cost of living quadrupled during the decade of the 1980s and increasingly "large sectors of the population [were] trapped in non-formal or self developed activities, high unemployment rates, under employment and increase of an urban non-formal sector mainly integrated by

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women”(Op. Cit.: 10). In the rural areas the situation is even more devastating since they are unable to take care of their basic needs.

During the period of 1985-1989, the differences between the family income and the basic food cost were negative, disclosing extreme poverty conditions prevalent among families in the rural sectors (Op. Cit.: 64). . . . The most directly affected individuals are women in extreme poverty, suffering from lack of water and appropriate technology within an adverse cultural context which discounts and diminishes their social role, as well as their work, placing upon them the burden of obtaining water (collection, transportation, storage and distribution). This heavy task places a toll on their health, is not remunerated, but is certainly basic to fulfill their own and their families' needs (Loc. Cit.: 64).

As depressed as the situation of women is in El Salvador, an even more impressive problem is the lack of information about them, indicating even further their undervalued status in the country. The same UNICEF report claims that there is insufficient information on the nutritional state of women and that

abortion indicators are practically non-existent in the country, primarily due to the deficient information resulting from the scarce coverage of maternal health care [only one maternal hospital in the country located in the Capital] and to the illegal status of induced abortions (Op. Cit.: 42).

However, the report adds a positive note mentioning the collective means by which part of the population was able to insure its survival:

Armed conflict gave rise to the constitution of new organizations integrated by displaced families, repatriated relocated groups, relatives of confined or missing persons, refugees living in other countries, parents of affected children, persons disabled through violence, and other groups. . . . The majority of these groups is assisted by private non-governmental organizations, which channel external funding to philanthropic assistance and community development projects (Op. Cit.: 14).

These are the organizations which so impressed researchers such as Binford, Cagan and Cagan, and Golden, and that led to the comments quoted

earlier heralding gender equality within the organizations and the revolutionary movement. The positive descriptions of women's participation, however dubious, might lead one to expect that the characteristics of "Local Popular Power" (LPP), as described previously by Binford, would also apply to the new Women's Communal Movement (WCM) which the LPP spawned. One might anticipate that if the process of democratization had been unusually innovative and effective in instituting democratic values and participation, the WCM would differ from the patterns of disintegration and temporary existence that had been observed in other Latin American women's groups described by Jelin (1990: 6). In other words, one might expect the Women's Communal Movement to be an integral part of the mechanisms of "Local Popular Power", to be more involved in participatory democracy, and to be more committed to women's issues than the women's organizations of other Latin American countries as represented in Jelin's anthology. There was the matter of "machista" ideology, however.

Once the interviews were over, it became evident that the WCM was turning out to be another example of short term organizing. It was unable to put into practice participatory democracy, to work in a decentralized structure, and tend to the needs of the women who composed its social base. The male headed organizations were also having difficulty implementing the model (Binford, fieldwork notes; Villalobos: 29), but the women's organizations seemed even further from carrying it out. They were much less focused and were disintegrating much more rapidly.

In light of the evidence contradicting my expectations, it became necessary to analyze not only the reasons for the disintegration of the women's movement, but the accelerated rate that they exhibit when compared to the men's. Therefore, it is important to determine the extent to

which the WCM's trends towards disintegration can be aptly explained by merely looking at the problems that the larger male dominated organizations have faced. Second, if this approach is unsuccessful, other gender-specific forces that can account more adequately for the disintegration rate of the Women's Movement need to be explored.



## CHAPTER FOUR

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

In order to understand the forces that are taking place in the Women's Communal Movement of Morazán, it is necessary, first, to review some of the literature that has been written on mechanisms and problems of community organizations as a whole. It was the community organizing experience during the war that provided the model for most of the people who are participating in the present communal organizations. According to Richard Adams:

Peasant communities have been defined as those which are not self-sufficient and in which there is a semi dependence upon employment and commercial facilities within a larger society (Adams 1962: 418).

The peasant communities, which arose during and after the Salvadoran Revolution, differ from the concept of "traditional communities" in that they are relatively recent and are a result of chaotic social circumstances which have brought individuals together from previously destroyed communities. A better term for them, then, might be "repopulated communities". For example, the long lasting bonds of kinship and "compadrazgo" relations typical of traditional communities were very difficult during the war.

In essence, the communities of the controlled zones of the FMLN have been highly permeable and open. In spite of this, the characteristics which Adams

ascribes to the concept of community do apply, to a certain extent, in this case. Even though the "semi dependence upon employment . . . within the larger society" became almost impossible during the war, this dependence was merely transferred onto international aid organizations that were supporting the revolutionary movement. In addition, the people depended on each other for services

which would benefit the community such as distribution of resources and the organization of work groups.

Because research on community organizing has traditionally focused on male participation, the review of literature based on female movements and organization trends is indispensable. This will allow for the examination of forces that specifically affect the female gender and its ability to organize. The literature review will begin with a summary of Richard Adams' article on community development, followed by Golden's characterization of the "sense of community" she found in the controlled zones of El Salvador.

### Community Development Theories

It is a peculiarity of modern social anthropology that an ethnographer may describe a society or community with some degree of accuracy and then arrive at a theoretical formulation which need have little relationship to his own empirical data. This seems to apply to the qualities ascribed by Redfield to the community (Adams 1962: 446).

In this quote, Adams was referring to the mythical aura that has been ascribed to the social structure called "community". For more than three decades now, community development research has been of utmost interest to social scientists. According to Adams (Loc. Cit.), at least up until the 1960s the community was looked upon by anthropologists and sociologists as "a battery of stored energy for action and development, a dynamo of potentialities" (Op. Cit.: 409-410).

Communities were perceived to be stable and long lasting structures of cooperative and communal relationships. Nonetheless, after reviewing the literature, Adams concluded that rather than holding true to these idyllic values, they showed evidence of being mostly characterized by a strong individualistic ideology. He argued that "community work for community benefit [should be] sharply distinguished from . . . reciprocal or collective work for individual benefit" (Op. Cit.: 420). As an example he used the classic case of communally- owned land that is worked as if it were individually owned (Loc. Cit.).

Adams used this example to demonstrate that development would not occur within "a community simply because it [was] a community." First, it was "necessary to create the appropriate social relations and kinds of behavior which [would] permit development to take place" (Op. Cit.: 426). In order for individuals to form social relationships, there had to be a problem that needed to be resolved. Once the crisis was over, the relationships would also terminate (Op. Cit.: 423). The internal dynamics that prevented long term associations were characterized by factionalism based on differences in political or religious beliefs, differences between ethnic groups and/or territorial divisions. It was the reactive rather than the proactive nature of community organizing that prevented Adams from accepting the metaphor of the community as a "battery of stored energy".

Following Adams' lines of thought, more research was devoted to analyzing the nature of communities and communal organizations so that the power struggles which were causing a disruption of cooperative relations and of communal development could be understood. Social scientists such as Foster advocated the theory that community size, and the type of dyadic relationships (formal-legal, or informal) among its members affected the

cohesiveness of the community (Spielberg 1968: 241). Wolf argued that peasant communities would arise when faced with restrictions from a dominant group which minimized or prevented access of the minority group to economic or social resources (in Adams 1962: 428). In the literature of the peasant organizations of El Salvador, various references have also been made to the individualistic nature of the peasants before the war. In fact, one of Binford's main concerns was how this individualistic ideology had been overcome (Binford 1992a: 5). In dealing with this concern he described the many accomplishments of PADECOSMS during the war. In his proposal, Binford stated that it developed programs:

based on a self management model that emphasizes collectivization, regionalization, and sustainability (Binford 1993: 17). . . . PADECOSMS, in collaboration with other organizations, provided an unprecedented level of popular representation to thousands of historically marginalized peasants and workers in Northern Morazán, raised their combativeness before government and military repression, and disseminated a message of collective as opposed to individual solutions to shared problems (Op. Cit.: 21).

However, Binford concluded that lately

attendance at meetings was decreasing, and the leadership was being accused in some quarters of being out of touch with the base . . . the culture and values of Northern Morazanian peasants, . . . did not change as much as regional activists claim . . . Now, after years of war, many peasants in northern Morazán desire little more than a return to peace so they can pick up the threads of their lives. They are not particularly interested in participating actively in grandiose, long term social experiments unless they can see good possibilities for an immediate pay off. And while they are no friends of the Salvadoran State and the oligarchy it serves, they are suspicious of collective endeavors. Here PADECOSMS butts up against entrenched peasant attitudes that may require generations to alter (Op. Cit.: 22-23).

Could it be, as suggested by Wolf, that the cohesiveness of the community was merely a result of the repression and restrictions that the

peasants were submitted to by the military forces? Binford seems to believe that the "entrenched individualism" which he mentioned in his proposal is still a destructive force within the organizations especially now that the repression is less visible.

Perhaps, Adams and Wolf would have predicted these results. But Golden described a cohesive force in her analysis of Salvadoran peasant communities which encouraged us to believe that communitarian ideals were not so easily swayed by the diminution of external violence. The creation of appropriate relations and behaviors which Adams mentioned were accomplished in the ERP Controlled Zone thanks, to a large extent, to an unusual mechanism: Liberation Theology. Unlike many other socialist movements which have been atheistic, this one made "a pact with God", and thanks to this Christian ideology, the traditionally Catholic peasantry was mobilized. In describing her own experience Golden stated:

Those of us who traveled to El Salvador and encountered community (comunidad), sustained primarily by women, have discovered a new possibility for social life . . . Salvadoran community is created by the base, those who in US. culture are the most marginalized and ignored . . . Comunidad is neither anarchic nor mystical but highly organized, disciplined and democratic (Golden 1991: 15) . . . To understand the Salvadoran "comunidad" as both embodiment of spiritual liberation and an effective counterinsurgency tactic requires the language and inspiration of "mística" (Op. Cit.: 26) . . . Democracy, as a political formation, grew out of the "campesino" construction of "comunidad" the social practice of becoming people spiritually and nationally (Op. Cit.: 70) . . . for women resistance has meant a refusal to let community die (Op. Cit.: 191).

Is it sufficient, then, to look solely at the forces mentioned by Adams, Foster, and Wolf in order to understand not only the creation and disintegration of communal organizations but their rate of demise as well? How can the faster rate of disintegration experienced by the women's

organizations, their smaller constituency, and lesser amount of power be explained by these theories when the women have been a numerical majority during and after the Revolution, have been advocates of the revolutionary socialist ideology, have participated as combatants, and most importantly, have been the main uplifters and organizers of the community through a Christian ideology to which Golden seems to attribute permanence?

Communal organizations have been analyzed as if they were homogeneous in terms of their gender, implying that the forces that affect all of these organizations will be the same in nature. For this reason many social scientists have remained at a very general level of analysis and have not been able to discern important differences in the relations, not only within organizations, but between organizations, that inevitably affect their nature and continuity.

It is just as erroneous to think that internal factionalism and individualistic attitudes are the only major forces affecting the organizations as it is to believe that the attitudes that generate these two forces are equally characterized across gender lines. For example, when dealing with factionalism we should not presuppose that the characteristics of each faction are in fact what caused the division. There may be outside forces playing on, and manipulating those internal differences with the purpose of causing strife and disintegration. Genders have historically played very different social roles in Western society and have had, in conjunction with these roles, different stresses and value systems applied to them which should be taken into account in the analysis of an organization.

For this reason, before beginning a general review of the history of women's organizations in El Salvador, and a description of the WCM, it is

important to turn to literature that has focused on the analysis of women's organizations which have sprung in times of crisis.

The following summary of women's organizations in El Salvador will help us discern some of the outstanding problems and contradictions which they have faced, and the achievements which they have made in spite of many obstacles. This review should give us a historical context of the WCM by allowing us to examine the patterns of development in women's organizations prior to the formation of the WCM.

## CHAPTER FIVE

### BRIEF SUMMARY OF WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS IN THE POPULAR MOVEMENT OF EL SALVADOR

#### A. General Historical Background

The Fraternity of Salvadoran Women (FMS) was, according to Thomson (1986: 93-94), the first Salvadoran Women's organization to be concerned with women's rights. It was formed in 1957 "under the influence of the Salvadoran Communist Party" and had an active role in the protest against the Lemus regime from 1956-60. The FMS sought nursery care for the children of market women as well as improvements in the buildings in which they were working. In spite of its sponsorship by the Communist Party, the FMS was forced to deal with resentment from fellow male party members. Liliam Jiménez, the founder of the organization observed that there were "men who were renowned working-class leaders but would beat up their wives if they got in late from one of [the] meetings (Thomson 1986: 94). The FMS seems to have disbanded around 1968 due to government repression against the women and also because of political schisms within the Communist Party.

Meanwhile, in 1965 the National Association of Salvadoran Educators (called ANDES 21 De Junio) protested a law which forced them to extend their retirement date by a third before being eligible for pension. Thanks to its 1972 strike, ANDES was able to achieve three months maternity leave as well as



equal pay for female and male teachers. ANDES membership has been 90% female, and the organization's first general secretary was Mélida Anaya Montes, who later became Commander Ana María for the FPL branch of the FMLN (Op. Cit.: 72-77). According to several testimonies, she was assassinated in 1983 due to the orders of Cayetano Carpio, founder of the FPL.

Even though ANDES is mostly made up of women, its objectives have focused mainly on improved working conditions for teachers in general, and better educational and nutritional programs for children. In an interview with a combatant published in 1983, the combatant expressed Mélida Anaya Montes' views on the incorporation of women's issues into the popular struggle:

Ana María of course, is also a very loved person in El Salvador. And she often told the teachers, the women teachers in ANDES, that this was not the time for women's issues - - she was very clear about that. There were other things to fight for. She said we would just have to face it. Like many other women in El Salvador face the issue—it just is not the right time (Central American Women, 1983: 39).

The "things" that Mélida was referring to were the protection of the family members from government-sponsored assassins and the prevention of the destruction of their land. The issues which had to wait were such things as the struggle for the social realization that women were being kept in a subordinate, devalued, and unequal position when compared to men. Women would organize but only to continue with their traditional nurturing roles based on motherhood and Christianity. As the repression intensified in 1977 (Golden 1991: 108), the Committee of Mothers of the Disappeared was formed as a result of Monsignor Romero's encouragement. The Mothers gained international support when they began protesting the

disappearance of their relatives and demanding information from the government.

In 1978, four members of the defunct FMS decided to create another women's organization (the Association of Women of El Salvador--AMES) which would focus more on women's issues. Due to the increased repression, however, the organization was not able to get started until a year later. They began speaking to women who were "active in their local Christian communities" and were able to organize them around specific "immediate basic needs" (Thomson: 94-97). Thomson states that AMES became the "largest of the women's organizations [to] support the FDR-FMLN" (Op. Cit.: 95). Its leadership was primarily concerned with the struggle against the exploitation of subordinate classes even though they were also asking the FMLN to "adopt a Minimum Women's Program as part of its published manifesto" (Op. Cit.: 96).

AMES advocated shared responsibility in domestic work, and sex education programs. It also sponsored non-traditional technical training for women such as shoe making and munitions workshops (Thomson: 125). But rather than prioritizing women's issues, AMES believed that the priorities during the war were to end the civilian massacres and to fight for national liberation (Op. Cit.: 96). Surprisingly, however, in 1981 at the First Latin American Research Conference on Women AMES gave a paper stating that the left, by focusing on class struggle, had ignored the problems of women altogether. The left saw the struggle of women as something separate from the class struggle to be dealt with after the Revolution (Golden: 110-111).

Later AMES experienced internal problems especially in areas outside of the controlled zones. According to Corina, a founder of the National Coordinator of Women of El Salvador (CONAMUS), AMES ceased to exist

around 1983 due to the intense repression (Op. Cit.: 113). On the other hand, a spokesperson of the Institute of Feminist Studies argues that AMES

arose from the FPL's need to organize women for the Revolutionary Struggle. Once the party felt they were no longer necessary, it [AMES] ceased to exist. In the First Offensive of '81, political fronts like AMES passed on to military fronts and their structure weakened. In 1981 it ceased to exist in San Salvador. It remained in Chalatenango up until 1985. Then it remained in the US. and Mexico (CEF, interview notes 1992).

By 1984, women who were still in the country, and who had not joined the guerrilla forces, began to participate in popular organizations. Many women joined the Christian base communities which "preceded the formation of national women's organizations" (Golden: 71) such as CONAMUS (National Coordinator of Women of EL Salvador), AMS (Association of Salvadoran Women), MSM (Salvadoran Women's Movement), and ADEMUSA (Association of Salvadoran Women). According to the same CEF spokesperson, these are the oldest women's groups that have attempted to incorporate both a class and a women's issues agenda. They each represent an organism of the FMLN and find themselves in a difficult and contradictory situation. They all deny that they are an instrument of their political party, even though in practice they obey the party's commands and they always end up giving priority to the class struggle (CEF interview notes, 1992). "They all have problems with the party but they don't discontinue their relationship and they respect their authority, up to a point" (CEF interview notes: 1992).

Rosa, a current representative from the directive of CONAMUS, stated that her organization was created in 1986, and it took them two years to define their objectives. They decided that their goal was to promote women in an integral manner and to create projects according to the needs of the different

groups with which they worked. However, the war was a time of crisis which demanded that women tend to the priorities of the moment, mainly survival:

Originally, we didn't have a clear concept about women's issues, so more than anything we were tied to the ideas of our political parties...They organized us because we are a majority in the population and if we are organized we can help in the process.

**But why did they organize you as women rather than organize you with the men?**

Because there is a lot of resistance, well, now it's not that much, but in those days, in the unions the participation was minimal because the men didn't want their women to socialize with other men. So it was a lot easier if only women would organize. Also, the enemy wasn't prepared for a women's organization.

**So, in those days, none of the women's organizations were created as a result of the women's own initiative?**

No. . . but now its different. Even though there may be an affinity between an organization and a certain party, we were not created as a result of the initiative of our compañeros. At least not all of us. . . In our specific case we have never been dependent on the party. . . we have always been totally independent.

In Rosa's quote, the contradictions between what is expected of them as revolutionaries versus the ideal goal of a women's organization (which is to serve women), are clearly revealed. Women were organized because they were a majority of the population. They were organized separately from men so their husbands wouldn't become jealous and to surprise the enemy. They were not organized so that the women would develop a consciousness of what it meant to be a woman in their society in that particular historical moment. This is ironic considering that AMES had criticized the left for its lack of interest in the situation of women five years before the resurgence of CONAMUS. However, Rosa does admit to an affinity with the party but

denies that the organization's second resurgence was a result of the party's initiative and she also denies a dependency relationship to the party. In order to strengthen her argument, she stresses that during 1985 CONAMUS was thought of as the most feminist leftist organization, and she lists its accomplishments.

CONAMUS went so far as to print T-shirts which said "CONAMUS Adelante: Soy Feminista", because they wished to rebel against the campaign that was defaming the concept of feminism. Currently, CONAMUS has created health and literacy committees. It has a health center which serves 52 communities and consists of 162 organized groups of 9-25 women. CONAMUS also offers credit for production, it has a shelter for abused women, and offers them legal advice. CONAMUS is a member of The Women's Organizations Coordinator (COM) which encompasses the four FMLN related women's organisms mentioned earlier.

Unfortunately, however, Rosa does not explain how CONAMUS was finally able to prioritize women's issues. Because of the firm control the FMLN had over its organizations as revealed in Rosa's own account, this leads me to believe one of two possibilities. The first is that the women became so determined to defend their rights that the party was forced to come to a realization that they had to let the women continue on the road to feminism. The second is that, through five or six years of war, the party was able to become more aware of the social inequalities pertaining to women and decided that women's issues had to be considered as one of the priorities of the Revolution. However, when we contrast the CONAMUS with its rival organization (DIGNAS--The Women's Association for Dignity and Life), Rosa's argument loses strength as a result of the objections which are posed towards the latter.

The Women's Coordinator (WC) is another "women's umbrella organization" which encompasses organizations and individuals who claim, openly, to have broken the structural ties with their political parties. The WC is the main rival of the COM. According to the spokesperson from the Center of Feminist Studies (CEF), and to representatives of the DIGNAS, the main member organization of the WC, the COM deals with gender issues but gives priority to political and party issues. The DIGNAS, however, are thought to be radical feminists and are looked upon negatively by the COM, which has a stronger affiliation to the FMLN political parties.

The DIGNAS was created by women who had belonged originally to the Women's Association Lil Milagros Ramirez (AMLMR), formed in 1980-81 by the National Resistance Party (RN). Ironically, the AMLMR was described by Rosa of CONAMUS as the most "pro-party/anti-feminist" women's organization of its time. But once it disintegrated, some of the women were strongly encouraged by the RN, to form another women's organization. The organization was created and, again, met up with the RN's manipulation and control. The following excerpt is part of an interview where a representative of the DIGNAS describes the problems FMLN women's organizations have had to face. She also recounts the hurdles which the DIGNAS had to overcome in their own development:

I don't know if Violeta spoke to you about some differences between the women's organizations. For example, each organization arose at a different time. And most of them were created because of a need to support the struggle for survival and political demands during the war. And so, each women's organization existed only in terms of or because of, as a subsidiary of its political organization, and not as a way to solve [women's] own problematic issues. In most organizations, for example: CONAMUS, ORMUSA, the WCM which is part of the AMS, [the women] have petitioned for funds to carry out projects, but at the end it's the political structures which in some

clandestine way have benefitted from them . . . . There are women who are trying to change their situation and that has caused them conflict. Many of them have been thrown out of their organizations. The organizations that are in the COM are ones that still resist working for themselves . . . . Historically, the members are women who have been participating in popular organizations and who have assumed very difficult tasks. They have never been recognized, yet they continue to assume those responsibilities . . . . In no way, have they seen themselves as the conductors of their own work, it has always been others. . . . There have been conflicts and polemics because the political organizations of the FMLN are afraid that the women will become autonomous and they are seeing this happen in many organisms.

Violeta re-enforces Rosa's statement that the women's organizations were formed to support the revolutionary effort. They were not created because of the party's understanding that the cause of women needed to be advanced. In fact, Violeta argues that the women's organizations were an important source of funding for the revolutionary institutions. In spite of this, the work that women had struggled to accomplish as representatives of a women's organization was not recognized. Rather, women were punished when they began to demand that their accomplishments be given their due and that they be allowed to work for their particular issues. Organized women were not even allowed to make their own decisions about their priorities as is demonstrated in the DIGNAS quote: "In no way have they seen themselves as the conductors of their own work".

In an effort to verify Rosa's comment that the DIGNAS had separated too suddenly from their party instead of making a stronger effort to negotiate and come to an agreement with it, I asked a DIGNAS representative how and why this supposed rupture had taken place. The following excerpt of my interview with her reveals an attitude of rebelliousness towards the FMLN based on how some of its female representatives were treated.

**I was told in the CONAMUS that you are the organization which broke off most abruptly from its party, and that they believe that women's transformation should proceed more slowly under the present political conditions of social repression. Do you agree?**

Well, not in such a vertical fashion, and it wasn't easy. Each one of us had to go through a process and a time of political participation that does not disappear. Each one of us had her own individual political militancy. But what we said from the beginning is that we didn't just want another women's organization in the popular movement. If we had found the need to form a women's organization, it was to struggle, in the first place for women's needs, which in turn would become a struggle for the needs of a particular zone and then of society. We are an organization of women with pluralistic ideas. We have women of many political inclinations. The women's movement has a lot of perspective and all the other sectors are trying to capitalize on us. We do not want to see ourselves as something that is just in vogue. We want to work with the popular movements but we are no longer willing to share everything or to be dependent on them. We will integrate with them only as they incorporate our particular issues. We cannot incorporate into them while they continue to ignore our efforts . . . Many of [the women of the COM] have participated in activities where we have spoken about these issues, but when it comes down to actually doing something about it they are afraid they will be thrown out.

**How did your organization deal with that fear?**

Well, look, our first year was pretty exhausting. This was in 1990. We arose from a meeting of women where more than 600 women from eight or nine different departments participated. Before this meeting we would engage in retreats and reflections because we were given the idea that we had to form a women's organization. [We were supposed to] put women at the head of the organization who would . . . be public figures and would offer a discourse that would strengthen the political organizations which had weakened economically after the offensive [of 1989]. At first, we said 'yes'. . . Then they told us how much money they were going to give us since they were going to solicit some funding for projects. Then we got together with women from different zones and we began asking ourselves 'Why do we want this women's organization? What are we going to do with it? How are we going to work? They tell



us to work this way. Is this good or not?' Ideas began to surface and we talked about the problems that we face in our families and in the popular movement. This made us become more conscious of our situation . . . There were many women who said that while being in the popular movement they were sexually harassed. [The men] would laugh at their work and would tell them that they were not good enough to do things well. And the same things would happen in their homes. The women would be beaten and told they were lazy even though they were doing a great number of tasks. We told the men that this is work that exhausts us and doesn't help us develop. This allowed us to see that we needed to make an effort [to organize for different reasons]. When they saw that our ideas were changing, [the commanders] told us 'you will no longer get funding from us for your work because you are getting out of line'

In this excerpt the DIGNAS representative repeats her argument that women were organized for tokenistic and fundraising purposes. The fact that women were sometimes sexually harassed, that their work was ridiculed and that they suffered physical abuse when they returned to their homes is evidence of a real lack of concern for the problems and needs of women. Women were made to understand that they had their "place" and their purpose, which were not to be defined by themselves. As a result, the DIGNAS have tried to do what they feel other FMLN related women's organizations have feared to do. They have told the FMLN that they would integrate with the FMLN only in so far as they incorporated women's particular needs.

These comments led to some inconsistencies with a majority of the literature which characterized the work and value of Salvadoran women within the Revolution as seen by the FMLN. I found statistics claiming that 40% of the "comandantes" (see Golden: 191) were made up of women, especially intriguing after listening to the previous interview. In order to better analyze what I felt were strong

contradictions, I asked the DIGNAS representative to explain the role that the female comandantes had played in the organizations of women and in the defense of their issues.

**Were there also female commanders who were telling you this [that you were getting out of line]?**

No, but we would try to speak to the female commanders so that they would take a stand for us. But they were afraid because there were only one or two and they were outnumbered. So the men wouldn't even invite them when they met with us

**How did these women become commanders?**

Assuming the same roles as the men. It was difficult because they had to withstand the bribes, the harassment, even sexual harassment. But the women who have been able to achieve these positions have done so because they have become, in their way of acting, just like the men. Women who dominate other women. Women that don't take into account the decisions of other women-- they only impose their own. And whoever is the most "machista" is the one who will stand on firmer ground. It's the same as our Legislative Assembly, there are women who are representatives but every one of them is assuming the role of their party and not of women. That is the situation we don't agree with. Some of us say 'If we have lived through such difficult times, we don't want to return to the same thing'.

These quotes reveal a bleak picture. The female commanders felt outnumbered and afraid that they would be ridiculed or disregarded. In other words, their elevated position within the revolutionary hierarchy did not protect them from the devaluation which organized women had also felt and were asking them to correct. Instead, the women who aspired to become "comandantes" had to take bribes and to endure sexual harassment. They had to "assume the same roles as the men". This reminds us somewhat of the Responsable's assessment of women quoted and analyzed earlier in this thesis. The reason for the female "comandantes" hesitance in standing up for women is revealed in their real lack of power.

According to Violeta (another DIGNAS representative), the problems confronted by organized women as revealed in these interviews, are the reason why the DIGNAS had to take such a radical stance. She claims that their principal objective is the organization of women. At the time of the interview they had not created a platform for their organization as yet . They were receiving funding from many international organizations and they had begun projects of self management for the women of the repopulated and marginal zones of Cuscatlán, Chalatenango, Cabañas, La Libertad and Usulután. They had set up popular stores, child care centers, mills, and they had a program for teaching gender theory to the representatives of women's directives who, once trained, would in turn train the women of their community. The main problems the DIGNAS has faced, as the following quote demonstrates, have involved the communal directors:

Often directors only one or two are women and some [directives] don't have any. The women have strong feelings of respect and submission towards the men. Even with these obstacles we have been able to form some women's committees. The men believe we are trying to steal their social base. We tried to explain how the community was going to benefit by valuing their women and through the sources of work for women that were going to be introduced. But the men wanted to have control over everything that was done in the community. It's important that women gain the power of decision over what they do (Violeta, my notes: 1992).

This quote reveals how the communal directors, who were known to be well-versed in the revolutionary issues, were not very well instructed in the need for social equality between genders even though the FMLN propaganda has stated otherwise. Instead, the communal directors saw women as a threat to their established order and made every effort to protect the power of decision and economic control they had always had. The dynamics of fear and jealousy evident in the men's strong efforts to control

are similar to those expressed by the other DIGNAS representative in the quote about the FMLN:

There are conflicts and polemics because the political organizations of the FMLN are afraid that the women will become autonomous and they are seeing this happen in many organisms (Lil M. Ramirez, my notes: 1992).

As we have seen, the women's organizations which have been involved in the popular movements and who were created by the FMLN as supports for the war efforts, have undergone great difficulties in dealing with the specific needs of women (see Figure A). Both, the Women's Organism Coordinator (COM) and the Women's Coordinator (WC), represent powerful opposing forces within the leftist women's movements. The differences between them lies not in one's lack of interest towards women as compared to the other's, for they both have created very useful projects that have benefited women who have been historically the most marginalized: abused women, prostitutes, market women, and peasant women. They differ mainly in the issues they seem to prioritize when their party's agenda and the women's agenda come into conflict.

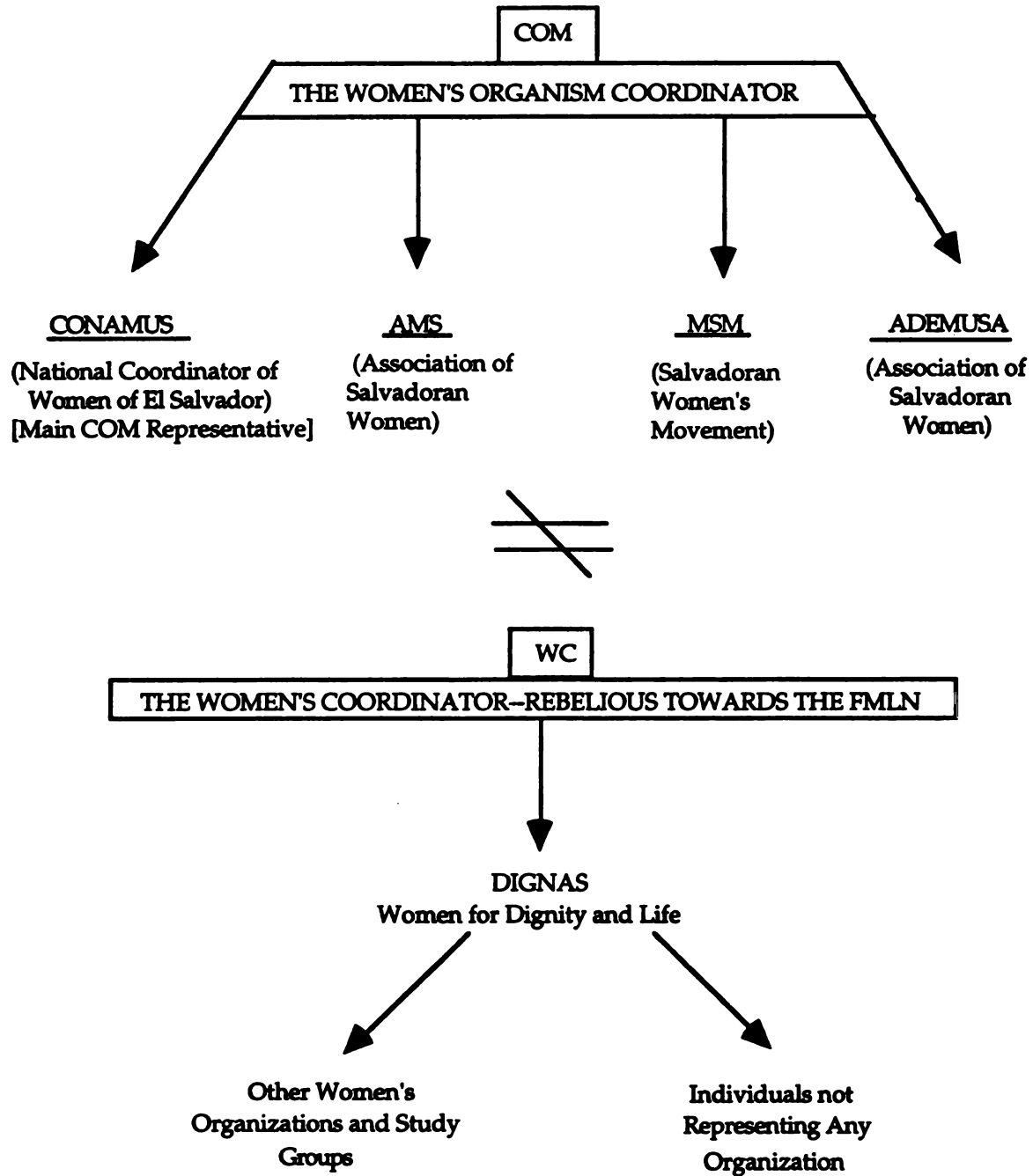


Figure 1: Opposing Leftist Women's Organizations Coordinators

Of the COM, the CONAMUS has been described to me as the most powerful organization of the four members. It is wealthier, has more resources and has claimed openly to be feminist when some of the other COM organizations (i.e. AMS) would prefer to disassociate altogether from the term. Of the WC, the DIGNAS would be the major representative organization. They are also quite wealthy and have begun many important and well coordinated projects. But these are organizations that have the advantage of being located in the Capital, and are better able to tap into the resources available to them there. For example, the membership of their councils is largely made up of either college or high school educated women. The DIGNAS have many international investigators and feminist supporters who work from their offices doing research which benefits them. These supporters also council them on organization and current feminist theory.

The opposing ideological views represented by the WC and the COM, as well as the problems they have had to face in their development begin to clarify the power hierarchy based on gender differentiation. The cooptation of women as individuals and as groups by the male-dominated revolutionary structure has created factions in what could have been a very strong women's movement for and by women. The strength of the manipulative ability of the male structure is more and more evident as the women's sophisticated ideological rhetoric begins to clash ever more starkly with their lived experiences and with the actions that they are expected to take. A good example is the DIGNAS representative's statement that they were forced to separate from their party when they realized that they had been organized for propagandistic purposes only. Their funding was cut because "they were getting out of line" . Ironically, both the women of the COM and those of the WC are women who are undergoing the same struggle and have the same

needs of recognition and support. The pattern of conflict and acquiescence revealed by the history of women's organizations in the capital leads us to wonder how the peasant women of Morazán fared in their organizational endeavors.

#### B. The organized Women of Morazán and the WCM Before July 1992

These women are famous for performing some incredible feats. In 1985, the Congregation of Christian Mothers—the first women's organization to be formed north of the Torola River—managed to break a military cordon that had prevented food from entering the zone. The women consider their achievement as a major accomplishment and transformation of their reactions before they were organized.

Miriam, the current leader of the Congregation of Christian Mothers, described the devastating and dehumanizing effect that the repression had on interpersonal relations before the Christian base communities were formed. For example, she mentioned the case of two young girls who walked by their mother's corpse on the road without looking at it and acted as if they did not know her. Miriam added that:

Up until 80-81, the women were not organized and had no way of protecting themselves or their loved ones. Once they organized they were able to demand that the authorities let their family members and friends go. But before that, people would be killed and often, if family members went to claim their bodies they would also be taken prisoners and killed. They would often find out about the death of their relatives because neighbors would find their naked tortured bodies in the middle of town.

Margarita, a current WCM member and ex-Christian Mother acknowledged that before the existence of the CCM people only tended to their individual needs and would not even look out the window if they heard a neighbor in trouble because they feared for their own lives. Being part of an organization helped them to change this.

Pasita, one of the original founders of the CCM explains that the origin of the organization lay in the Christian base communities composed of men and women. But, since the majority of the members were women, they were encouraged by Father Rogelio Ponceele and several catechists to form a CCM. This new organization was mostly Catholic but included a few Adventists such as Pasita and Margarita.

Pasita stated that it was difficult to unite people of both religions because most of the Evangelicals refused to participate in political struggles. Farah, a representative of the WCM directive of San Fernando, who was once also a coordinator of the CCM, noted that the issues that were dealt with in the organization were mostly political rather than religious. She was never pressured to become a Catholic in the CCM. The coordinators of the CCM in each town were not elected democratically. They were chosen by the General or Zonal Coordinator of the CCM. Farah's job entailed working with five women organizers to teach the people about the CCM's struggle: "It was necessary to recognize the struggle of the FMLN . . . they would direct us" (Farah, my notes 1992).

Unfortunately, when the CCM was able to implement projects for the benefit of children such as the project of bread and milk, internal problems affected the organization. The coordinators began accusing each other of stealing milk containers. Later that project became a tailor shop even though, according to Farah, they would spend more than they could earn. The shop then passed to CEBES Christian Base Communities of El Salvador) but she heard that they were also having problems with the coordinators, and that the cloth and garments were being "lost". This last project was about six months old at the time of the interview and most of the women involved were new. Although the bread and milk project was terminated because its



funding was discontinued, the problems mentioned have had a strong repercussion on the current size and strength of the CCM. It has weakened because of lack of membership and power. Recently, CEBES has taken over all CCM productive projects and has instructed the women to devote themselves to religious activities and discussion groups.

The CCM is of primary importance in the history of the women's movements of this zone, however. According to many of the women who belong to different organizations and to Golden (1991: 96), it was thanks to the courage of the CCM that men were mobilized into forming the community councils which later coalesced to become PADECOSMS. The women are not shy about stating that they were the first to organize for the benefit of their communities.

The first attempts by the ERP to deal with women's issues occurred in the early part of 1987 and involved a group made up of female combatants. One of the organizers of this women's group (Mariana-pseudonym), has recently been appointed General Coordinator of PADECOSMS. She left Mexico while working towards a BS in Biology in order to become a combatant in the Salvadoran Revolution. She had been exposed to communist theories from her early youth and joined discussion groups on the same topic as an adolescent. Before acquiring her position in PADECOSMS, she was honored with the rank of Sub-Commander of the ERP for her outstanding work as a radio operator with Radio Venceremos and as an organizer of various committees within the Revolution. Before discussing the women's group of the ERP, however, an excerpt of the first interview I had with Mariana will provide a synopsis of her views of the place of women in the ERP and it will also give us some context to understand her description of the ERP women's discussion group:

The Party's political position regarding women has always been one of total equality. In the ERP's directive there are now four women. Ana Guadalupe Martinez, Mercedes del Carmen Letona, Ana Sonia Medina, and Marisol Galindo. There are also many women in other levels of direction. There was never an attitude of "machismo" at the political level and women had the same opportunities to achieve a leadership position. It was a question of ability.

At the concrete level, in the urban guerrilla, there were many women who became "Responsables"—Clelia, Mariana, Tita and others. In the countryside there was a different situation. The fact of being a woman permits you to camouflage better. It's easier for women in the city, but in the countryside the conditions demand more of you. In practice the women are less efficient than the men in battle because of their physical conditions such as menstrual periods, and pregnancy.

A traditional division was made. In practice, women had more ability than the men to make tortillas. Men more commonly occupied the position of combatants and military leaders. Most women were not combatants. I don't know what the ratio was of women to men in the radio and health divisions, but men were the ones fitted for combat. Women's physical resistance was more limited than the men's even though some were as good as the men. Machismo made it difficult for women to lead a troop. The all-women's troop [Silvia Battalion] lasted little because it was better to mix them with the men so the battalion would have a better fighting capacity.

The party wanted to break with the trend that only women made the tortillas and it demanded that the men make tortillas for a day. This didn't work out because they didn't have the ability. The Party had wanted to break with the attitudes of machismo so that it would be realized that everyone could perform the different tasks. But it didn't last long, it was only a test. In practice to try to get people to take on tasks that they hadn't been raised to do was a double effort for the guerrilla. Realistically it was necessary to take advantage of the capacities of each one. We wanted to break the [the "machista"] mentality without forcing things.

In this interview, Mariana begins to reveal the idea that women are basically physically inferior to men because of their reproductive "burden". This causes some suspicion as to the Party's alleged policy, at least at the

political level, of encouraging "total equality" among men and women. Another point in her argument that makes me question the desire for real gender equality is the speedy one day experiment of having the men make tortillas. It seems more like the Party was trying to convince the women that they should stick to cooking because after all that is what they were good at.

The following interview with Mariana is of interest because it serves as a contrast to the interview done with the "Responsable" quoted earlier, and who referred to the same ERP women's group. But, more importantly, it gives us an honest portrayal of the forces and pressures a woman in the ERP hierarchy has had to contend with as she organized a women's discussion group and attempted to integrate two ideologies that were conflictive:

You also asked me about the experience of organized women within the FMLN, before what became the women's organization in the civilian population. I'm not sure if the organization was promoted in 86 or 87. But it was really a group rather than an organization. It was a group made up of militants and combatants of the interior of the FMLN. Its purpose was to have a series of discussions, exchanges and trainings about women's rights.

**Who promoted this group?**

The party promoted it precisely in order to develop some aspects about women that were considered important. For example, the difficulties and concerns of women became more evident when they had to deal with problems that are specific to women like sexuality and the conception of a child. Planning, you see. We wanted to give women gynecological help but our resources were very limited. . . The work of the medical brigade was not sufficient to counsel the women. Rather, there were many concerns that were important for the women to share among themselves. In 1987 there was the initiative to organize the female squadron leaders or "Responsables" such as Libertad from the medical brigade, Altagracia who worked in the school and Yanira who worked in explosives workshop. I also worked with them but I was located in Jocoaitique at the time.

Well, we began trying to discuss topics concerning women and we collected some biographies about women leaders of the

FMLN. We hoped to motivate the women and to give those leaders who had been killed the recognition they deserved. For example we were able to write the biography of our comrade ("Compañera") Virginia Peña Mendoza, of another comrade Arlen, of comrade Lil Milagros Ramirez, of comrade Ana María and of a few others. The idea was to make a pamphlet and to distribute it so that others could learn about these women.

We tried to begin a kind of training session that was very participatory. A teacher would deal with the topic of sexuality, would show them pictures and the women would ask questions. We hoped women would become more aware, feel more at ease and gain a better understanding of these topics. The problem is that women were very shy and there was a lot of taboo about the subject. Well, it wasn't easy because the women felt very uncomfortable and they would barely speak.

The problem began when the groups were no longer made up of 5-10 women but of 30-40. This began calling the men's attention and they asked themselves 'What are those women planning? What might they be thinking?' The men thought it was a conspiracy against them. They always felt uncomfortable with the group and some even spoke negatively about it because they thought they were not going to be favored by these discussions. The reason is that men sometimes feel that the purpose of women's organizations is to struggle against men, to affect them in some way. But we wanted to teach women about sex education, how to prevent venereal diseases and unwanted pregnancies, women's issues. We also strove to strengthen women's self-esteem, but in those days we didn't have a command of this kind of vocabulary. But we understood that there was a real need for women to value themselves, because as we know, in our countries women suffer a lot of subordination, especially in the rural areas. The role of women is really devalued and women themselves have a low self esteem.

Our goal was not to struggle against men, but against machismo. But we didn't want to get into a confrontation with them. We wanted to find a method that the men themselves would understand. However, we were not able to accomplish this because the military attacks prevented women from getting together. This made it difficult for us to continue our work and the groups began to disintegrate. There were always other priorities and so we lasted very little, only a few months.

**Can you give me some concrete examples of the problems you had to face when you were organizing the women?**

One thing that impressed me was that women knew so little about their own bodies. For example, it didn't matter how well the medics taught the women about the use of contraceptives, they would keep using them incorrectly. Sometimes they would only take the pill the same day they had sex and only then . . . That's how many women get pregnant and this causes many social conflicts. Not only does the woman suffer but the man and the children do also. The man sees himself tied to a family which he did not wish to have. This situation of couples or of women who have children with one and then with another is very common here. This causes great instability in the family.

Another thing is that even though everyone knew that there was a method the problem was that during the conflict we didn't have the best resources for it. Many times we had to rely on donations of contraceptives that were easier to get a hold of. Some so called 'pearls'. They were stronger and made the women sick and more uncomfortable. This obviously caused some of the women to refuse to use them. Sometimes it was the men who would tell them not to use the pill and they would also refuse to use condoms because of taboos. There were cases where the men did not use condoms, the woman would cure her venereal disease and he would re-infect her. It was not easy, but our goal was to teach people to ask questions, to become less fearful, and to get to know their bodies. We wanted to tell them that it was not a sin.

We tried to tell women that they were not there to serve men which is a common belief. But we tried not to cause conflicts and clashes that would create a crisis and rejection. The idea was not to change everything suddenly. We didn't want to cause disruption.

**Did you ever try to explain to the men what the talks were about?**

We tried to, because a clash was being generated and there was a lot of unease. We tried to explain [to the women] that it was unfair that men could have many relationships yet if a women was caught doing the same thing she could be exposed to beatings by her lover. We were not trying to promote these kinds of ['free-love'] relationships . We were just trying to make a point. However, of course, this caused conflicts and clashes when women began becoming aware of their situation and of the machismo they were exposed to, so they began to try and change things. But the way the change is created can be

problematic. Or it can be assimilated. That's why if the women had decided to stop cooking all of a sudden it would have been a serious mistake and a great problem. . . . But as I said before, no one discontinued the groups, it was the military attacks that prevented us from continuing.

In this excerpt, a relatively clear picture of the situation of female combatants in the ERP is revealed. The majority were generally ignorant about their bodies and had a low self-esteem that prevented them from participating actively in discussions. Ironically, the women organizers also appear to have been ignorant, or blind to the situation of the female combatants because after five years of war the organizers were still impressed by the women's ignorance of themselves.

Mariana's response to my first question ('Who sponsored the group?'), is particularly revealing of the ultimate purpose of the discussion groups: to increase the labor and fighting capacity of the women by decreasing the pregnancy and sick leave rates. According to the interview, the party promoted the groups because women had to be taught about problems which were "specific" to them like pregnancy, sexuality and venereal diseases. These issues were somehow not seen as relevant to men.

Mariana could sense the women's suffering as they were instructed to use oral contraceptives which in the end were harmful to them. She was also aware that they kept getting re-infected with venereal diseases because the men refused to wear condoms. The women's fear of being confrontational prevented them from taking the men to task for their own responsibility in these problems. The men were only spoken to when they began to feel threatened by the group. They were never the focus of the discussions. Women were blamed for having had "children with one and then with another" and for causing "family instability" because of it. Mariana acknowledges that women, men and children suffered as a result of the

individuals' various sexual encounters. However, her sentence seems to give equal or more importance to the suffering of the men: "The man sees himself tied to a family he did not wish to have". This is ironic since the men have had a reputation of "wandering off" as soon as the women got pregnant, and of leaving them with the sole responsibility of rearing the children.

In Mariana's and the Responsable's interviews, it is evident that the party was trying to reach a goal whose purpose was disguised under the rubric of "women's rights", but was in reality, an ideology based on women's subordination. The ultimate goal was not to elevate the intellectual, personal, and hygienic level of the women because they were thought to deserve it. Rather, the goal was to make a more efficient, potent, and cohesive military force by eliminating obstacles such as unwanted births and diseases. The strength and lack of foresight of the party's ideology regarding women is seen in its exclusion of men, and in the attempt to resolve problems of which they have equal or more responsibility than the women. For example, women can only get pregnant once every nine months whereas men can impregnate numerous women in the same amount of time. Nevertheless, women were the ones blamed, if not in the theory they were taught, at least in the practice of teaching them. In this way, the unconsciously held, but pervading ideology about the nature and functions of women aborted the efforts that were initiated, at least by the women organizers, to improve the situation of female combatants.

The result of these ambiguities in goals and ideology was an incipient self-awareness of the women as capable individuals, and a feeling of impending threat and resistance on the part of the men who had been excluded from the group activities. For example, when the organizers tried to

explain that they were not promoting promiscuous behavior in the women, the men remained unconvinced. The problem was not only that the behavior in itself was proper of men and not of women. The real problem was that allowing women the same rights would cause jealousies and conflicts among the men. Again, in the end the place of women as such in the whole debate was not a priority or even considered.

As we recall, the Responsable said in his interview that the group was terminated by the party because the women were being instructed inappropriately and they were engaging in sexual "liberalism". Mariana denies that the party terminated the group but acknowledges that "there were always other priorities, that's why the group only lasted a few months". She adds that it was the military attacks that prevented [them] from continuing.

I cannot say for sure whether the group ceased to exist because of a direct order from the party or if it was just allowed to dwindle. It seems clear, however, that it did not continue because of the problems it caused among the male combatants. Notwithstanding the good intentions and the insights that the female organizers had about their "compañeras", their guiding ideology and the structure of the ERP command always demanded that the Revolution be prioritized over the lack of equality of women. As I understand it, "the other priorities" mentioned by Marianita refer to maintaining the status quo, as unjust as it may have been, so there would be "peace" within the lines and a united front against the enemy. The little awareness of women combatant's state of knowledge about female physiology, the lack of inclusion of the male combatants in issues concerning romantic relationships, and the speed of disintegration of the female combatant discussion group demonstrate the low priority women's issues had for the ERP during the first half of the revolution.



Since the early 1980s a trend which intensified in 1987 was initiated by the different parties of the FMLN to form national women's organizations such as CONAMUS which were made up of civilians. The ties between the FMLN and the organizations, however, were kept a secret and vehemently denied. In the latter part of the same year the ERP followed the example of other FMLN parties and encouraged the formation of the Association of Salvadoran Women. In the following excerpt Mariana reveals why such an effort was made by the ERP especially after its previous experience with the female combatant discussion group.

**Were you one of the first to promote the AMS?**

Well, yes but those who promoted it most directly and concretely were the 'compañeros' of CEBES with the Congregation of Christian Mothers. When they promoted the AMS organization, a 'compañera' named Patti was one of the most active in promoting it concretely, you see.

**And the idea?**

More than the idea it was the actual participation.

**But where did the idea come from?**

The idea came from the fact that at the national level it was thought, well, we used to say, you see, that we had an ample social base but we lacked a clear projection for the future. So the work existed but it was a little dispersed. An attempt was made to give it more structure and projection. Then the formation of the AMS at a national level was proposed. It was supposed to have a more or less federated character and to bring together other women's organizations that already existed. It was supposed to promote even more the organization of women.

So, it was, lets say, an idea of the party [ERP], of a 'compañera' Luisa and of Marisol. That's how the discussion of the topic began, you see.

**Was it difficult for the party to accept the idea of organizing the women for things other than the defense of human rights and for religious activities?**

I don't think it was difficult to accept. The thing is the concrete practice of it, you see. The problems are the setbacks that have occurred, the difficulties and maybe the slightly traditional mentality of some of the 'compañeros'. It's possible that there wasn't a lot of enthusiasm about the idea, you see. Because at certain times there were some who rather than actually opposing the effort, they just didn't see any future in it. Because the argument they make is that women already participate in the revolutionary process. That women were never. . . well, marginalized from participating. They had a pretty intense and ample participation. But an organization, like you say, primarily devoted to the struggle of women and to promoting their rights, well that's something else.

I at least, and many others, do believe that [the organization] has been important, necessary and correct. But perhaps, because it [the party] was immersed in the need for structural changes, national changes concerning social justice and the search for democracy, all of that, its like the priorities were those changes and not specifically those of women or anything having to do with the rights of women. It's that it has to be an effort that has to go side by side with the struggle. It has to be a joint effort. But there were 'compañeros' who thought that, well, it [the struggle] had priority and to a certain extent they were right in that everything can't be done at once, and that a stronger effort was needed to get ahead in [the revolutionary] process during the conflict. It was necessary to join efforts.

Perhaps [the trouble] is that there hasn't been a tradition of feminist struggle and also because the social problems in El Salvador are so acute. The economic and political problems caused [the struggle] to be seen as something [men and women] had in common: the joint effort of the genders, rather than a separate effort so that, for example, the respect for women's rights could be achieved. In order to achieve the development of women the attempt was to transform the society as one. To create [appropriate] conditions. So the opinion was a little divided between those who said that the struggle for structural and national changes had to come first and all that. And then, you see, it would be possible to advance towards the other issues. I'll tell you that for me it has to go hand in hand. It's true that [the appropriate] conditions must be created but if the struggle doesn't include [women's] specific rights, against, let's say, the marginalization or of the backwardness, those limitations in development are never going to be overcome, you see.

**So, from the beginning, the idea was to struggle for the rights of women?**

It was like that at the beginning but it had to go along with their participation in the [revolutionary] process. Because the conditions forced the women to work for the structural changes. [The women] were already doing that but primarily from a religious perspective. The AMS was more like an effort to form a broader organization. One that would integrate not only peasant women but urban ones as well. That was the idea, but in practice it hasn't been easy, you see. Also, to be honest and realistic, the motivation to promote the organizations was principally, to give the work we already had [with the social base] some direction. Because, sometimes, let's say, solidarity members from international organizations would arrive with the concern of whether or not we had any women's organization. They were interested in channeling their support to women's organizations. So the idea was to create a referent [organization] so we could channel through them the support of people who were interested in directly promoting the rights of women, you see.

The interview begins with her statement that the AMS was promoted by the "compañeros" of CEBES with the help of the Congregation of Christian Mothers. As the interview progresses she states that the idea was actually the result of the international solidarity's expectations that women's organizations would be created so that financial support could be channeled through them. However, even though the funds were needed for this struggle, the idea of creating an organization whose focus was the advancement of women was less than heartening to the men: "They didn't see any future in the effort . . . because women already participated in the revolutionary process".

At this point in her argument, Mariana asserts that the two things should go hand in hand, but then she backtracks and says she understands why the party had to give priority to things such as "structural changes, national changes concerning social justice and the search for democracy". She

adds that "to a certain extent the "compañeros" were right in that everything [couldn't] be done at once". She does not seem to realize that by justifying the party's priorities she is accepting the false premise that women's participation in the struggle was sufficient to qualify their treatment by men as that of equals. She also implies that the subordination of women and their devalued position, especially among rural women, is not an issue which concerns or falls within the Revolution's struggle for structural changes, or for social justice and democracy.

Later, however, Mariana tries to understand the lack of effort by the party to prioritize the problem of women and to see it as intrinsic to the struggle for social justice. She concludes that the reason was the lack of a feminist tradition. Again, however, she falls into inconsistencies when she asserts that by making a joint effort, as they had done thus far for the Revolutionary priorities, women's rights would somehow be achieved even though earlier she had stated that the priorities had "nothing to do with the rights of women". Nevertheless she subsequently stated that "In order to achieve the development of women the attempt was to transform the society as one which contradicts the earlier statement that women were not even an issue".

Her final statement, reveals that she had been exposed to some feminist rhetoric, possibly from the international organizations, or that she had pondered about the so called priorities when she adds that ". . . . If the struggle doesn't include women's rights. . . those limitations in the development are never going to be overcome". But even here she tags on the idea that in order to include the women "conditions must be created" first. This "tag" reinforces the traditional revolutionary position that the cause of women cannot be advanced until the other priorities have been achieved.

The systematic use of the passive and reflexive voices, of pauses and hesitations, of the lack of specific agents performing the actions in Mariana's answers, of the subordination of women's actions to external forces, and of logical inconsistencies, betray the conflict she faced in answering my questions. Mariana represents two conflicting identities; one as a leader of the ERP and of PADECOSMS who must prioritize the goals of the Revolution, and the other as a woman who realizes the subordinate position of women in general.

It is through the interview, while trying to explain her position as a woman and as an organizational leader to a stranger, having to examine her thoughts and feelings from the outside, as it were, that Mariana becomes aware of the inconsistencies in her argument and feels the need to justify them. On the one hand, these are caused by the power of an unconsciously held but pervading masculine ideology which dictates that women's issues are of lesser importance or even irrelevant to the social struggle, and therefore can be postponed indefinitely. On the other hand, Mariana is pressured by her individual observations about the reality and immediacy of women's issues and the unlikelyhood of their solution in the future if not promptly addressed.

In 1987, the Association of Salvadoran Women (AMS)--the association that preceded the Women's Communal Movement of Morazán (WCM)--opened its main office in San Salvador. The brochure of the AMS describes the organization's origins as arising as an initiative of the CCM, and of the women's committees of San Miguel and Morazán in October and November of 1986. The effort was directed at unifying the different independent committees to form a national women's organization. The directive of the AMS was finally constituted in January of 1987. The brochure refers to the

AMS as a response to the urgent need of dealing with the problems which affect women specifically. The subordinate role of women and the lack of recognition of their rights which have resulted in their marginalization, exploitation, underemployment, and domination are given as examples.

The goals of the AMS are to:

Organize women so they will actively participate in the change and development of their society. To collaborate in the formation and training of women so they are better able to deal with daily problems. To struggle for women's and children's rights and for women's participation and expression in the national arena. To collaborate in solidarity with the most affected communities of the country as a result of the military conflict.

The brochure ends by stating that the AMS has promoted productive projects, has given technical assistance training, and has begun literacy and health programs for women. Currently, the AMS has a program which gives prostitutes legal advice and protection.

These have been the ideal goals of this organization, and perhaps, they have begun a process of achieving them to some degree. However, during my stay in San Salvador, I attended a workshop on gender theory given at the main office of the AMS. Contrary to the brochure's statement of the origin of the AMS, many women argued that it was formed by the FMLN in order to deal with the political and economic repression of the time, and not because there was an interest in the plight of women. Once in the organization, the women have been able to look forward to their own advancement and have come into conflict with the ERP to which they are affiliated.

However, the women still give priority to the socio-economic issues of the country and to the demands of their political party. In fact, one of the members stated that when she incorporated into the AMS she realized that

the women there knew nothing about women's development and that they were very "machista". She felt that up to that point they had not achieved anything as and for women. They had only dealt with the political situation. The speaker of the workshop argued that in the late 70s women's issues were in "style" and El Salvador was in a serious economic crisis. Therefore, all of the leftist political movements decided that women needed to be organized to bring in funds and to help organize women for the war effort. Even though the AMS is a member of the COM, and appears to be much less oriented towards feminism than CONAMUS, it is interesting that their comments resemble the DIGNAS assessment of why women were organized by the FMLN.

The AMS of Morazán was formed on March 8, 1987, four months after the AMS in San Salvador. According to Pasita, there was a need to create a women's organization without religious overtones so that they could be more active in the war. The public image of the Christian Mothers as martyrs and pacifists prevented them from getting involved in more bellicose activities. In order to create the AMS, leaders of the CCM were recruited for the new directive because of their extensive experience in organizational work. In 1989, the main office of the AMS in San Salvador was burned by the military and the members who did not join the guerrilla as combatants were continuously persecuted by military sponsored death squads. During this time the AMS lost contact for six months with its satellite organizations such as the one in Perquín, Morazán. The women of Perquín became isolated and lost their work agenda since they had always depended on the main office for instructions and projects. Many of the women of Perquín's AMS became combatants and others feared for their lives and ceased to work: the military had discovered that the AMS worked with the FMLN (based on interviews

with Pasita—ex-member of the AMS, and Gloribel current vice president of the AMS).

In December of 1990, the Women's Communal Movement was formed by PADECOSMS— the largely male dominated umbrella organization of Morazán. According to Pasita and Blanca (current president of the WCM), up to that point, PADECOSMS only dealt with men's organizations. The effort to form the WCM was intended to re-organize the women who had belonged to the AMS and to recruit many more. According to a member of the Congregation of Christian Mothers, this created some conflict between the CCM and the WCM because the CCM feared that the WCM was going to take over the role that had been played by the Christian Mothers in organizing women, and it was also going to have the effect of dividing the women, and of weakening the organization (CCM representative, my notes).

PADECOSMS and CEBES organized an assembly of approximately 200 women and a vote was taken to decide who the executive council members of the WCM were going to be. Three presidents were elected. Once the council was formed, the women, with the help of a North American solidarity worker, wrote up their platform and began to create directives throughout the zone.

The WCM's platform begins by describing the situation of the women of Morazán which "constitute more than 55% of the population" (Platform: 1). It asserts that women, thanks to their participation in the war have begun to "break down the barriers to their own development" and "have begun to assume a more active role in society". Nevertheless, their reality continues to be one of illiteracy, of single mother-headed households, lack of economic assistance, and of lack of health care. According to the platform, it was the women themselves who came up with the idea to form a women's



communal movement as a result of their previous experience in other organizations.

The objectives that they strive for are quite ambitious considering the high rate of illiteracy and lack of consciousness of gender issues among the population. The following are the objectives which to me seem to be the most difficult to achieve and somewhat culturally alien to the women:

Open an office of Human Rights of Women and Children, which will also have a program of solidarity and aid for mistreated women.

Organize courses about forms of communication in the family.

Seek agreements with PADECOSMS in which single mothers will be given priority for job posts in the different projects.

Promote a law dictating that household items will be jointly owned, regardless of whether [couples are] married or living together.

Motivate young women to continue studying in the schools and set up a scholarship program for high school studies.

Promote a housing program for widows and single mothers.

Promote a reforestation program which will also provide jobs for women.

Investigate and promote the use of alternative means of cooking which burn less wood, such as the Lorena stove.

Investigate and promote the use of appropriate technology such as windmills, compost latrines, bicycle driven corn grinders, etc.

These goals seem to have come directly from a solidarity worker's mind. It is hard to believe that with the experiences women have lived, and the priorities which all other women's organizations have had to make, that the WCM would have given thought to these issues. Rather it is more likely that they would have focused on those things that are more apparent and have a more immediate and palpable effect on them.

The most common response I got from the women when I asked how men could be taught to treat them differently was:

We should tell them that they should get up and get their own cup of coffee because we are also tired from working all day...but we should do this over a long period of time and in such a way as to avoid confrontation because these things take time.

This statement, like Mariana's interview, clearly shows a continued feeling of submission and fear of confronting the men in an assertive and determined way. Also, the thought of women coming up with a scholarship program for high school when most girls do not even finish elementary school, is a bit hard to believe. Another example, was the goal of creating courses of forms of communication in the family. This goal seems slightly ironic when we observe the council members' interaction with their children and their husbands. Husbands commonly communicated with their wives and mothers with their children, by means of orders and screams. The wives and children, on their part, responded with quick obedience. Reforestation programs were never mentioned to me as a concern by the women. Neither were programs dealing with the construction of special housing for widowed or single mothers. This is not surprising because most of the female population in the zone was described to me as fitting this category. The only appropriate technology they seemed interested in was anything having to do with agriculture and organic fertilizers. Regardless of the inconsistencies of the platform and the goals and needs the women actually voiced, the platform gained substantial international support and funding of projects, because of its impressive and sophisticated goals.

Some of the more plausible objectives that could have very well been defined by the women themselves are the following. All of the objectives on page 3 of the platform, especially

The development of greater levels of consciousness in the women about their problems as women.

The improvement for women and their families . . . through their participation in self management.

The promotion of education and technical training for women.

On pages four and five, some of the goals which were actually or indirectly voiced by the women I interviewed were:

Study, contribute to, and participate in the economic development plan of PADECOSMS.

Propose and carry out economic projects, and train women in these.

Promote laws against violence and aggression against women and children.

Promote a law in which the mother and father each must recognize and economically sustain their children.

Create child care centers so that children can have adequate care while their mothers are working.

Motivate women to participate in the literacy campaign for adults of PADECOSMS.

Promote training courses for women of the zone in different areas: guitar, typing etc.

Promote a law guaranteeing women the right to pregnancy leave with salary before and after birth.

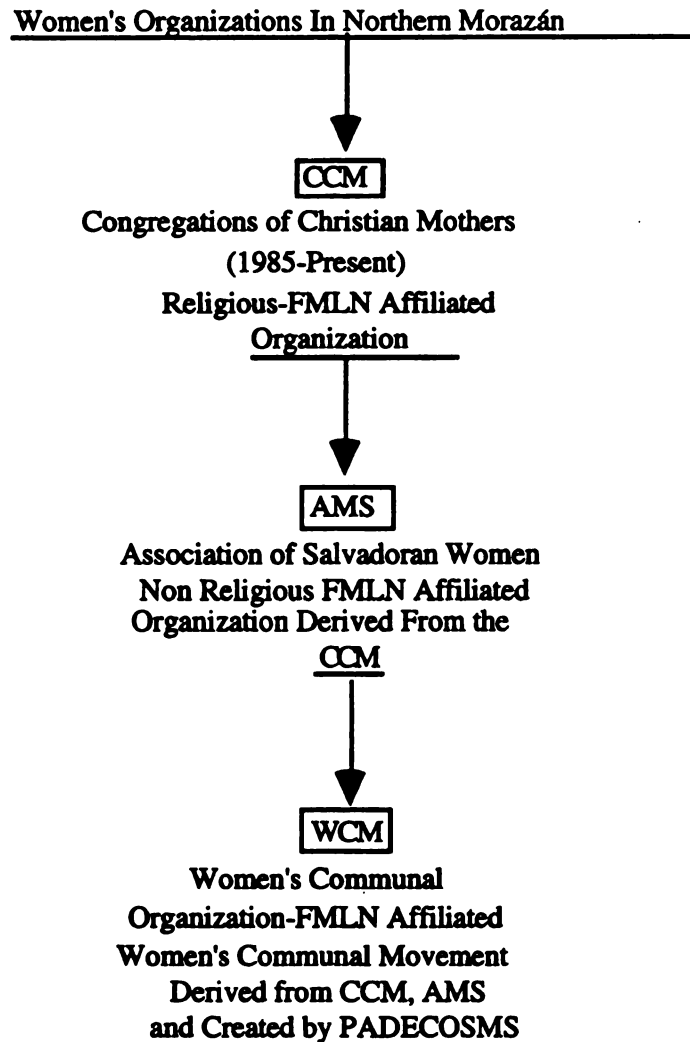
Organize talks about sex education for men and women, and talks about family planning, and provide access to methods of family planning.

Unfortunately, I am unable to say whether the women voiced some of these concerns as a result of a project which they carried out, or because of the solidarity workers' own ideas. However, I noticed that the four council members were the only ones to voice most of the previous concerns. The

women who belong to the WCM's social base (its town directives) only mentioned one reason for organizing as women: "To get jobs". When I asked them why they could not accomplish this by organizing together with the men (in other words, why organize as women), they answered "A saber" (Who knows?).

The structure of the WCM created to accomplish the goals of the platform was a direct imitation of the structure of secretariats used by PADECOSMS, with the exception of the election of three presidents (see Figure 2). The platform states that at the time of its creation there was an active participation of 300 women out of a total of 6,000 who inhabited the zone. Fifteen of 30 communities had a WCM directive with eleven being the largest communities in the zone. The leaders of the directives were said to have been elected democratically and could be removed by the same means if they did not work appropriately. There were supposed to be regular meetings of the directives and a meeting once or twice a month of the council with delegated representatives of each directive. The "areas of responsibility", similar to those of PADECOSMS, were defined by eight secretariats:

Secretary of Relations	Secretary of Finances
Secretary of Communications	Secretary of Production
Secretary of Education	Secretary of Health
Secretary of Culture	General Secretary



\* 1987 Female Combatant Discussion Group was not included in this figure because it was not an actual organization nor did it descend directly from other women's organizations

Figure 2: Women's Organizations in Northern Morazán

At the time of the platform, the WCM council as well as the boards of directors were made up of volunteers and its work was supposed to be coordinated with PADECOSMS--"the organization which coordinates the global plans for the social-economic development of the zone" and for the A.M.S.

The [WCM] enjoys the full support and back-up of PADECOSMS . . . and in the [WCM's] work [of national character] it is affiliated with the Association of Salvadoran Women (WCM Platform: 5)

## CHAPTER SIX

### THE SITUATION OF THE WOMEN'S COMMUNAL MOVEMENT FROM JULY 30, 1992 TO FEBRUARY 28, 1993

#### A. The WCM's First Assembly Meeting During My Fieldwork

On July 30, the first WCM assembly meeting since my arrival took place. A Spanish solidarity member (Josefa) was invited to attend so that she could include the organization in her plans to write up projects for child care centers. Up to this point the few meetings that had been held in the organization building involved the five Council members who made up the entire Council. These meetings were always held behind closed doors and any one who was not of the Council, the boards of directors, or of a solidarity group, was asked to leave the room and was excluded. This had happened to me several times so I felt that it was better not to force my presence on them. The Spanish woman, however, informed me that a large assembly meeting was going to take place and that the representative of the AMS (Association of Salvadoran Women) was going to be there to advise the women of the WCM on their organizational tactics and to evaluate their progress thus far. She explained that an assembly meeting differed from the more frequent meetings in that it was supposed to take place about once a month. It was also supposed to include a representative or two of each one of the organization's boards of directors (usually the presidents) in order to discuss their progress and to decide on new goals. After I explained the purpose of my study to

Josefa, she invited me to join her at the meeting. This was my first opportunity to observe the women at work.

The meeting was delayed two hours which was not unusual since many walked or took buses from relatively distant places. By 10 a.m. all the women began arriving at the WCM's organization building which consisted of three floors. The first contained a garage used to store wood and gas tanks for cooking. The second floor had a hallway which separated the Council's meeting room from the room used for typing and crafts lessons. At the end of the hallway to the left there was a wood stove kitchen and to the right there was a large concrete sink used to wash clothes and dishes and as a wash room for the women who stayed overnight. The latrine was located further to the right hidden from plain view. The third floor consisted of two rooms which the women had added after receiving funding from a solidarity organization. The smaller of the two was used as a sewing room and meeting room and the larger one was used as a bedroom for guests and for one of the Council members and her child who, at the time, was living in the organization premises.

By 11 a.m. the women were guided up to the third floor to begin the meeting. The chairs had been positioned in circular fashion and whoever was left without one sat on the stairs leading to the other room. At this point Josefa and I sat down on the stairs and the room became very quiet. Because of my seating location I was viewing the women from the bottom up. I could not help but notice that many of them had patches of lighter skin and blisters on their legs. Most of the women were staring at us and some were whispering into each other's ears. One of the women, the only one with short hair besides Josefa and myself, was carrying a one year old baby whom she began to breast feed as the meeting progressed. With the exception of



Josefa and I, everyone was wearing a skirt and a blouse. Some of them began smiling and paying attention to the child who had been put on the floor by her mother. She was playing with some old batteries and putting them into her mouth as the President of the WCM welcomed everybody and began to read the organization's objectives:

Our objectives as a women's organization are to contribute to the transformation of Salvadoran society so that it will be more just and will allow for the full development of women's abilities. To contribute to the new political, economic, and social process of alternative development. To help women achieve a greater level of consciousness about their situation as women. To improve the living conditions of women and their families through self-help projects. To promote technical training for women.

Following the enumeration of the objectives, the woman with short hair, who turned out to be the representative of the AMS, began to speak with great charisma and strength in her voice as she fed her baby, switching her from side to side and bouncing her on her knee.

We must always keep our objectives in mind because they are the base of our organization. Our struggle is only half started and we still have a long way to go. Our struggle is for us and by us. But our principal struggle is for our children. As long as we know our objectives no one will be able to stop us. We must make our objectives a reality. It's not sufficient to have them on paper. If we don't put them into practice we won't accomplish them and then we will ask 'Why are we organizing?' We must make concrete plans.

All the women began nodding in agreement and saying "Así es" (That's right). Then Brenda, the WCM secretary, began to read the minutes from the last Assembly meeting as rain began crashing down on the room's tin roof making everything anybody said barely audible. The organization proposed a training program on accounting.

We've had problems with our stores. Only a few of us have any experience in business administration and most of us cannot

even do simple math. The training took place from July 6-9 and representatives from Carrizal, Nahuaterique, Cueva del Monte, San Fernando and Jocoaitique were invited. Most women did not show up.

Then Blanca, the president of the WCM began to speak about other problems they had encountered:

We asked the PADECOSMS technician to collaborate with us for the accounting workshop but the women were disorganized. We arrived at different times and many communities were unable to send representatives. We are going to reschedule the workshop to see if we can train the women. The typing course was not followed up. The women do not seem to be very interested in the course. We only have one student from San Fernando and our own secretary Brenda, even though the course lasts three months and is permanent.

Gloribel, the representative of the AMS asked the WCM directive representatives that had participated in the accounting workshop for their impressions. After some silent smiles, and exchange of glances two women began to speak:

Those of us who participated are very satisfied. All of us women have a low cultural level and that is why we need more workshops. I feel that my mind has awakened a little. As women we need to discover more things. We have been able to get training through our own efforts.

Gloribel followed up their answer by emphasizing the importance of the workshops: We want to achieve a better standard of living through these workshops. Our fundamental objective is that the women who make up the base will be clear about the objectives so that they can give workshops in their own towns. Accounting is very important since the stores in our communities are hard to handle because most of us can barely count to ten.

Following Gloribel's words, Blanca stated that plans and dates had been set so that CEBES MCM and PADECOSMS would choose land for the child care centers. However, the plans were not carried out during the six months I was in El Salvador. The next topic discussed was the trip that two of

the WCM representatives had taken to Mexico for an international meeting of organized women:

About 125 women attended the ten day meeting . . . There were many feminists and we told them that we didn't want to be feminists. They took us to see what the ancient Indians did. We felt at home. It was beautiful to see how the women valued themselves. We were the only two peasant women there. The others had a much higher level than us. But the presentation of El Salvador was the best one. We spoke about our 500 year history to the present. El Salvador's history was the most moving. We mentioned all the insurrections in the 500 years and we spoke about the 70s and the popular organizations, and of the 80s and the FMLN. We had to tell them what women's life is like in El Salvador. We spoke about the women who have been in the most conflictive zones. We didn't have a place to live, [there was an] economic crisis, everything was destroyed. All the women in the audience began to cry.

I think all the women in the world are struggling. The war for political change is going to be of the women. We think we accomplished something in Mexico because there are many rich North American women who have made our problems theirs. Brazil sent 23 women, each Central American Country sent two women. We were the only ones that didn't take visual aids such as posters and videos.

Here we are not going to implement feminism as in other countries. They are more radical than us. Our struggle is against a system that affects men and women. Our struggle is to create schools, clinics, education, better homes, and food. It's necessary that we as women be taken into consideration and that they learn how we feel. How do I know what our next struggle is going to be about? Their struggle is that of gender because the situation in their country is different from ours.

Again, the other women responded with smiles, nods, and "Así es". When the problems of the organization were discussed they remained straight faced, looked down, and did not engage in eye contact with each other. They responded positively to any comments which defined what they were supposed to be doing as an organization, or that gave them some semblance of order. They all agreed with the WCM representative who stated very clearly that they did not wish to be feminists and that their problems

were different from those of more industrialized countries. However, the women never questioned the significance of the same representative's comment that they be taken into consideration "as women", nor was feminism ever defined. It was only implied that it was negative, culturally alien, and that it caused conflict between men and women.

The women's struggle in the WCM was described as one for socioeconomic equality between classes. From the AMS representative's point of view, the ultimate purpose was to struggle for the children. Gender was not mentioned as an issue, rather, it was considered to be too radical and mostly irrelevant. The clearest evidence of the women's lack of understanding about the concepts that they used so often—that they be taken into consideration "as women"—is revealed in the WCM representative's comment that she had no idea what their struggle was going to be about once their need for a better education, health clinic, homes, and food was achieved. Her perception that men and women shared equally in their social marginalization and deprivation is evident. Also, the women's continued low self-esteem, even at the institutional level (WCM), emerged as they stated repeatedly that they had a very low cultural level. They seemed to attribute their problems in organizing and their low level of participation to their own lack of education, to their lack of interest, and to their lack of responsibility.

The final topic of the meeting was organizational tactics. Gloribel told the women that they had to write down the names of the women who attended each activity and the number of women that took part in them. They had to make note of the dates and what was discussed. She said that the questions the different boards of directors should ask themselves were "What are we going to do?" and "How are we going to accomplish it?" But the

problems of the organization should be discussed at the level of the board and not the base since the base could become demoralized because of internal problems. She explained that it was important to be aware of the profits and losses of each project: "After the base is informed what is expected of them, they should be asked for their opinions and comments. But the boards of directors must be structured before imparting tasks." Gloribel added that what made the women's organization communal was that the board would tell the Council what had to be done and not the other way around. This was ironic in so far as she was telling the WCM how to run things. She ended by stating that from now on the WCM should have meetings every eight days and that the treasurer should give her report to the boards of directors.

Even in Gloribel's suggestions to improve the organization, inconsistencies were revealed in her view of the importance of the full participation of the WCM social base. Ideally the base is supposed to inform the Council what is needed. That is, after all, what participatory democracy is supposed to be about. However, she advised the Council not to discuss its internal problems with the base for fear that it might become demoralized. This paternalistic attitude reaffirmed the stereotypic notion that, because of their "low cultural level", peasant women were unable to analyze critically and to help resolve the problems that were affecting those they had chosen to represent them before international agencies. How was the base supposed to decide whether to eliminate a Council member from her position or to reelect her if they had no notion of what was going on in the Council? Yet, not a single woman questioned or took exception to any of the comments or instructions imparted by the Council members or by the AMS representative.

When the meeting ended, all the women went to the first floor and were given refreshments by the WCM cook, who had not been present in any

of the meetings. There seemed to be an atmosphere of general satisfaction with the exception of the WCM Council members. I suspected that the Council members' discomfort derived from the fact that most of the meeting had been led by the AMS representative and not the WCM President. Later, during my stay, I was to hear many WCM Council members' complaints and suspicions that PADECOSMS had sent the AMS representative to spy and to direct the WCM so that PADECOSMS could control their activities instead of helping them improve the women's organization. This was not stated during or immediately after the WCM assembly meeting because the AMS representative was staying overnight. However, conflicts with PADECOSMS were revealed.

When the visiting women left, I took the opportunity to interview one of the Council members. Marcela was 32 years old and she told me she had been one of the first to join the popular combat forces. In 1991 she decided to join the meetings of the WCM and after going five times she was elected to be the Secretary of Finance of the Executive Council.

Marcela began telling me about her involvement in the revolutionary struggle and about the creation of the WCM. Then the AMS representative joined in the conversation. They both explained that even though the WCM was an offshoot of the AMS, their mutual coordination had diminished as the WCM became more autonomous. The problem, as they expressed it, was that the AMS and the WCM did not have knowledge of their "mutual realities". When the AMS was unable to take care of its satellite organizations it decided that the branch of Northern Morazán was stronger than in other zones and should not be eliminated or merged with other communal organizations or cooperatives. This is how the WCM was formed. In subsequent interviews with other WCM members, the following

descriptions were made of the relationship between PADECOSMS and the WCM:

Here in Perquín the WCM was very well organized and they didn't want to be represented by PADECOSMS. The zone of Morazán is unique in that [we women] defend ourselves. PADECOSMS is marginalizing us and using us but we are not getting anything out of it. The only organization that we have with PADECOSMS is to organize workshops. But women need to acquire this ability so that they can request and design their own projects. The problem is that many times we don't know who we are or what we are looking for.

The strong relationship between PADECOSMS the AMS, and the WCM is established in the latter's Platform. However, contrary to the opinions expressed in my interviews, it was described in a very positive and supportive way. The structure of the WCM Secretariats which imitated those of PADECOSMS is even stronger evidence of the ties between them. In order to understand how the WCM actually worked I asked the Council members to describe the functions of the Secretariats which were not mentioned in the Platform.

Marcela was not sure what the General Secretariat was for, but she stated that originally three women had been elected to fill the positions. Juana, another Council member, said that its main purpose was to organize and advise the women, and that four members had been elected. The purpose of the Relations Secretariat was to speak to the different agencies, to mail out letters, to receive members from international agencies and to take them to the communities. According to Marcela, one person was elected for this task whereas Juana mentioned two. The job of the two women elected to be part of the Finance Secretariat was to elaborate projects, to keep control of the funds, and to keep track of the WCM stores because they did not have an administrator at the moment. Two women were elected to be part of the

Propaganda Secretariat. Their task was to design posters, banners, and to distribute bulletins and to act as activists.

The Health Secretariat was made up of one woman and her job was to get medication for women even if they were not members of the WCM. Marcela explained that sometimes the Council would not buy paper for the office so they could buy medication. But the members of the WCM were guaranteed free health care if they would go with a stamped letterhead to the town clinic created by PADECOSMS. According to Juana, talks on preventive care were given to the women by the WCM. However, the women have never had a health project because they were never given the opportunity. There was little work that could be done by this Secretariat. The Education Secretariat was also supposed to be made up of one woman, but at the time there was not a specific function for her. She was supposed to coordinate with PADECOSMS. Juana stated that at the beginning many plans were made but none were accomplished.

The Secretariat of Recreation and Culture originally had six women and it worked with children and teenagers. At first they had "Happy Afternoons" where talks about the role of women were given to teenagers. They had sports activities and they began to teach them dancing lessons but they were never completed. The ultimate purpose was to motivate people. Thus far this Secretariat had made efforts to organize workshops for the women through PADECOSMS. The last Secretariat was the one in charge of production. These women were supposed to control the productive projects such as the Mora Jelly project located in the zone called La Montaña, the bean project located in San Fernando, the vegetable garden project initiated in Arambala, and the Stores project made up of three stores in the zone of La Montaña—Cueva del Monte, Nahuaterique, and Carrizal. According to



Marcela, the board of WCM directors of each community was in charge of its particular projects.

Each communal board of directors was also divided into the same Secretariats as the Council and had their own president and vice-president who were in charge of organizing the women. They also had a treasurer and a secretary. Marcela added that the organization worked by having the board of directors consult their social base and then the Executive Council would receive information from the different boards of directors through an Assembly Meeting, and would attempt to generate self help projects that would meet the women's needs.

However, I was told that the WCM was experiencing serious problems in Council-Base coordination: " When the organization was formed the Council devoted most of its energies to struggle against the military and the communities were rarely visited. The WCM's active participation with the FMLN and in the Peace Accords resulted in community [social base] neglect" ( my notes, 1992). Also, as I mentioned in the earlier part of this section, the Executive Council only had five members instead of the original twenty two stated by Juana. The fifteen communities indicated in the Platform were not all represented at the assembly meeting.

According to Juana, Perquín and San Fernando used to have two WCM Boards of Directors of 40-50 women each. Now San Fernando is left with one and Perquín has none. Only the Council remains in Perquín. The Secretariats were not functioning and the five Council members were taking on the task of project write ups, of visiting a few of the communities, of directing workshops at the organization building, and of attending specialized workshops and PADECOSMS meetings if and when they were invited. The Council members often expressed that they were overburdened. By the end

of my stay there were only four Council members left. Most of the WCM organizations had disintegrated.

Juana stated that the Secretariats only remained fifteen days after the Peace Accords were signed. She attributed their disappearance to the decrease in enthusiasm and to the fact that the WCM had gained a bad image. She felt that the strongest cause, however, was the return of individualistic attitudes: once the accords were signed the communitarian ideals were forgotten.

Considering that Marcela was a Council member, her doubts as to the actual function of some of the Secretariats, and the inconsistencies as to the number of women elected for each one, their rapid disappearance, the decrease in number of the WCM Council and social base membership, brought into question the real reason for the creation of the WCM and for its structural imitations of PADECOSMS. Was Juana's evaluation of the reasons for organization disintegration complete or were there other factors besides the return to individualism that accounted for it? If her analysis was correct, how did the WCM expect to combat the entrenchment of an ideology that the Revolution had tried to eliminate during 12 years of war? In order to answer this, it is necessary to analyze the function and relationship of both internal and external forces as well as the women's awareness of them.

Before setting off to visit the different communities, I asked the President of the WCM and Angelita (another Council member) to give me an overview of the Organization's concrete goals, its projects and its difficulties. Blanca agreed and invited me to their Council's Revision of Goals Meeting. Their short term goals involved the creation of communally owned garden plots for the women of five different communities. Torola, San Fernando, El Mozote, Jocoaitique, and Arambala. The Council also hoped to evaluate the WCM communal stores which already existed and wished to create a new one

in San Fernando. The following section describes the WCM's Revision of Goals Meeting and my excursions with a WCM Council member in charge of organization into the communities where the WCM had existed.

## **B. The WCM's Revision of Goals Meeting**

### **Topic 1: The Reorganizations of the WCM's Board of Directors**

For the purpose of clarity, I will divide the information of the meeting into two sections or topics so that I can give an account of the communities and projects which were referred to in the meeting. The WCM's purpose in the visits to the communities was to reorganize and stimulate the women who had belonged to the different Boards of Directors. Recently, the WCM was offered organic fertilizer workshops, technical assistance and free seeds by The Salvadoran Foundation for Workers Self Management and Solidarity (FASTRAS), in order to start communal vegetable plots in the different towns. One of the Council members (Angelita) attended the workshops and began visiting the communities to train other women. In fact, these workshops became the Council's new "trigger" for attempting to re-organize the women. The WCM Council also hoped to evaluate the women's projects that had been created in each community. My purpose was to find out why they had organized in the first place, why they had disbanded, and what techniques the Council members were using to get them started again.

### **Topic 2: The WCM Evaluation of Their Communal Garden Plots**

In 1991 the Archbishop of San Salvador gave the women 15,000 colones to be distributed equally in the communities of San Fernando, Jocoaitique, and Arambala for the creation of bean plots. In San Fernando the project ceased to exist because, according to the Council members, the women did not know how to defend their land and the previous owner took it away from them. In Jocoaitique, a change in the President of its Board of Directors

caused some setbacks. The first President became a Council member and an apparently unmotivated new President was elected. This resulted in the structural demise of the bean project. Subsequently a dining hall was created in Jocoaitique with the earnings of the previous bean project, and 1,500 colones of credit given by the Council. However, the dining hall also fell because rather than remaining communal, it "became a family project which was administered badly". At the time the loan given by the Council had not been reimbursed. Later, the cooking utensils, and the furniture of the dining hall were appropriated by the Council in order to start a cafe in San Fernando (see Figure 3).

Now with the help of FASTRAS the WCM hoped to make another attempt at creating garden plots that would increase the nutritional content of the food being consumed. Another objective was to create a surplus so the women could sell it and earn additional money for their day-to-day expenses. The vegetables to be planted were tomatoes, carrots, chile peppers, cabbage, cucumbers, beans, pipián, and onions.

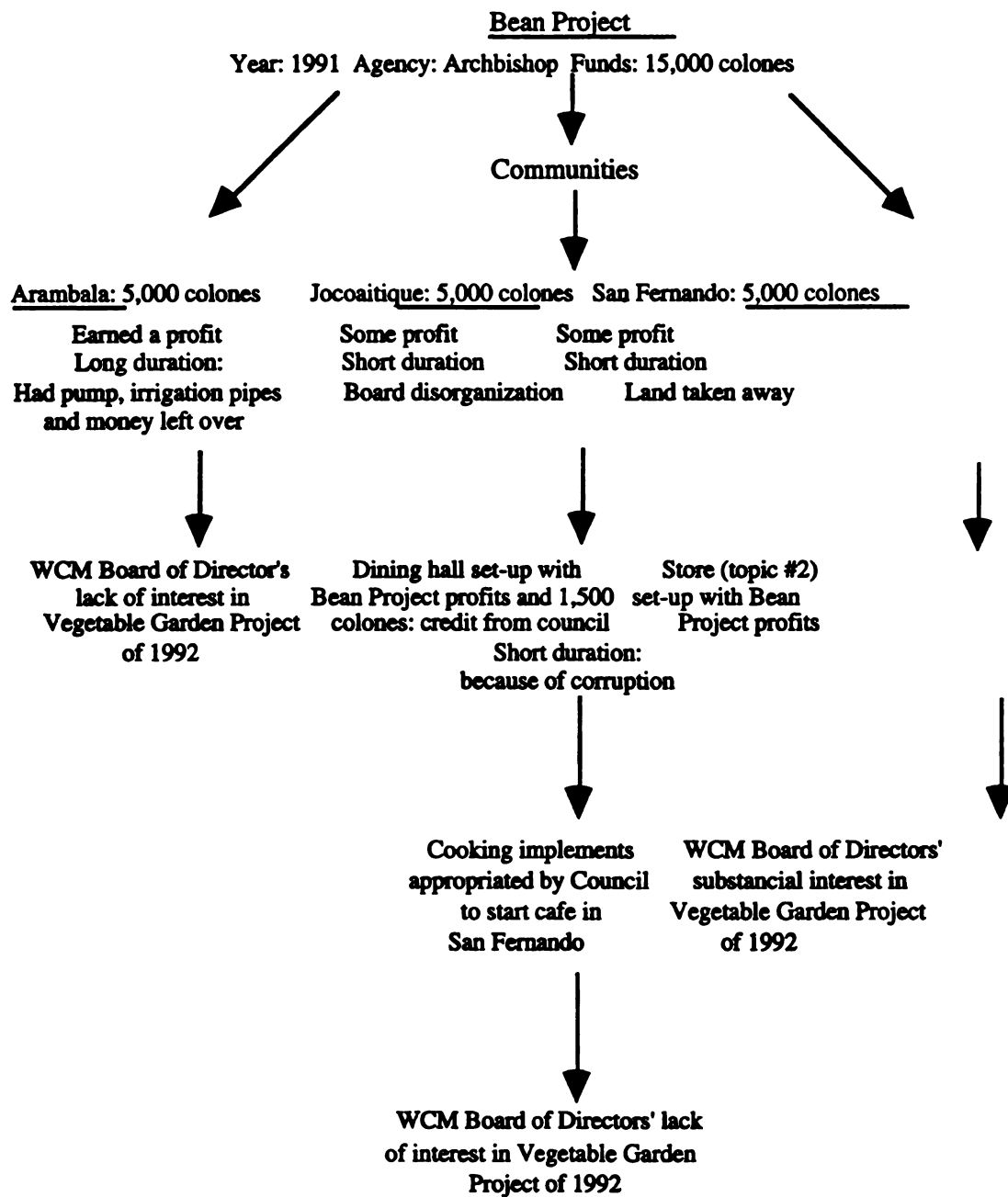


Figure 3: Garden Project According to WCM Revision of Goals Meeting

However, Angelita's report of her attempts to get the women mobilized was not very promising (see Figure 4). In Torola the women were not able to reach an agreement with the cooperative directors who coordinated the land distribution. These cooperatives were headed by men who were not enthusiastic about giving the women a share. Therefore, the women of Torola were unable to organize and meet with Angelita.

The WCM Board of Directors of El Mozote agreed to create the garden plot. They set a date for November 1 in order to begin the training on organic fertilizer. The irrigation of the plot would be done through plastic pipes which the Council had to purchase. According to Angelita, the WCM of Mozote had plenty of water available and the land was ready to go. The seeds were going to be donated by the Appropriated Technology Office of FASTRAS. The women would have to begin collecting chicken droppings, cow manure, ashes and weeds. A nylon cover also had to be bought.

In San Fernando, the plot was also ready for planting. The women had already made the fertilizer and they had the plastic irrigation pipes. They still needed a wire fence to keep the animals out and they had to be taught what to plant and how to do it. In Jocoaitique, the women had not searched for the land. Angelita felt that there was little interest in that community because she had already visited them three times with no results. The women had met as an organization but they had not made any efforts to coordinate with the town cooperative. Angelita believed that the problem was that Jocoaitique's WCM President was very timid. Blanca - the Council President - promised to visit them in order to motivate them and to set a date for the training on organic fertilizer. This meeting was continuously postponed.

In Arambala, the women said that they were not willing to work any more because it was a waste of time. Blanca stated that two women of the Arambala

directive discouraged the others. She added that the two women had only become WCM members to stay out of the war and to take advantage of the bean projects which had existed. Ironically, the earlier bean plot created in Arambala was the only one to earn enough to reinvest in another garden plot.

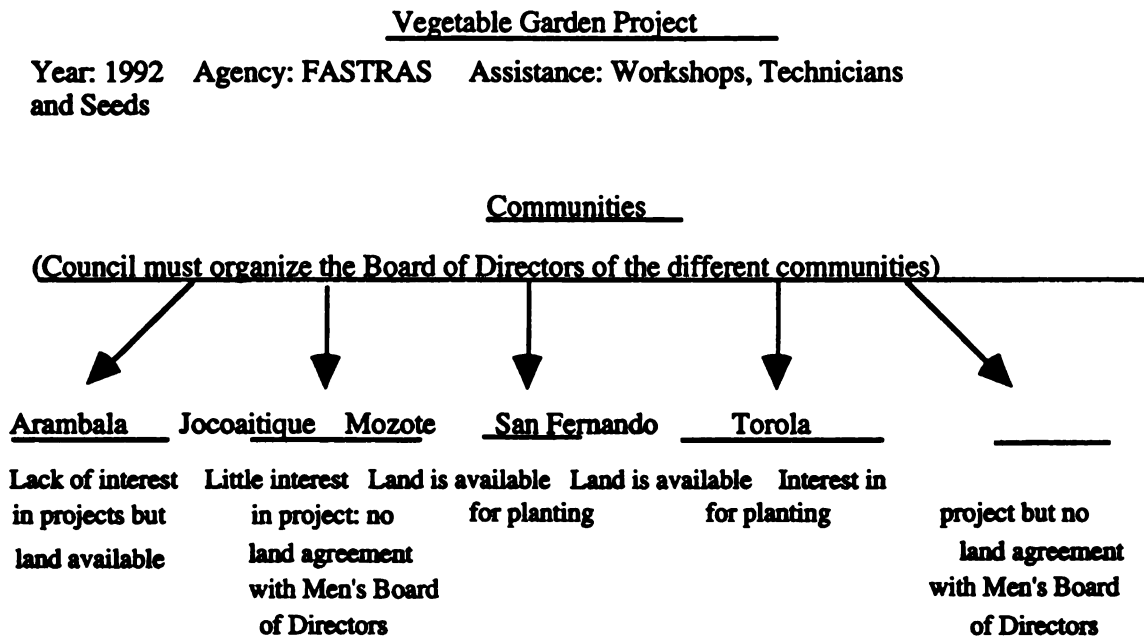


Figure 4: Garden Project According to WCM Revisions of Goals Meeting

Therefore they still had land, irrigation pipes, an insecticide pump, and money left over from the old project. Arambala never experienced a loss of revenues. They still had 12 quintales of beans that had not been sold. However, the women said they were not interested in the project. Nevertheless, Blanca and Angelita stated that the new garden plot project would begin in November in all the communities mentioned. The Council members also hoped to create a WCM Board of Directors in Ocotillo because there was fertile land and plenty of water in that area. They scheduled a meeting for the third of November which did not take place (see Figure 4).

### Our Visits to the Various Garden Projects

#### a. Arambala

On October, 1992, I accompanied two WCM Council members to the town of Arambala. The President of Arambala's Board of Directors (Carlota) also occupied the position of WCM Council member but was on maternity leave for three months. The purpose of our visit was to regroup the WCM Board of Directors, to invite them to take advantage of the organic fertilizer program offered by WCM and FASTER, and to convince them to start a communal vegetable garden. As we recall from the Council's Revision of Goals Meeting, Arambala was the only town to have a head start in gardening equipment and funding because of its previous profitable bean project. However, it was also the town that Angelita had described as showing no interest in communal work.

After an hour-long walk down a winding road full of pot holes and a galloping ride from Doctors Without Borders (accurately labeled "Doctors Without Brakes" by the population, we arrived at Carlota's place. She was living in a house that had been abandoned by its owners during the war and she had started her own little store. Carlota had just given birth to her ninth



child a month before our arrival. After offering her some guayabas we had picked on our way over, we asked her where the rest of the WCM women were. She answered that she was not able to call them so she told another Board member to alert them about the meeting. In our search for this Board member we were forced to walk down some mud trails. After getting mud up to my ankles I noticed that my companions had somehow managed to keep their new shoes sparkling clean.

We finally found Venecia as she was washing a huge pile of clothing. She said the women had not shown up and that it was not surprising because every one was still dealing with lunch at one p.m. on a week day. We decided to go back to Carlota's to say goodbye and set up a date for the following week. Carlota said it was very hard to get women to come to meetings. They were tired of organizing for the sake of organizing. They needed to see results and projects. Angelita suggested another communal project and Carlota replied that she did not think it would work because the last communal bean project did not work. The women stopped working even though they were getting paid. The last women to work were the WCM board members and of those, the last was Carlota.

When we got back to Perquín, I helped Angelita type the notices for the next meeting in Arambala. Carlota said people were more likely to show up if they had written notices. I had a hard time understanding this because I was told most women could not read or write, but the results were positive. I was informed by Angelita that over twenty women came to the next meeting and that they seemed more enthusiastic about the project. However, Arambala's Vegetable garden was not begun before my departure from the country. The visit to this community verified the Council members' comments about Arambala women's lack of interest in organizing, but more

importantly it revealed some problems in the Council's organizational tactics. After a year of organizing women, the Council members were still setting up meetings at times and dates when women were the busiest. There was also an ambiguous and weak organizational structure that resulted in an inefficient chain of communication and made it difficult for the Council and the community Board of Directors to carry out their goals.

b. Villa El Rosario

On October 14, Angelita, the AMS representative (Gloribel) and I had made arrangements to meet up with another WCM woman (Carmen) at a bus stop in order to visit the women at a town called Villa El Rosario which lacked a Board of Directors. After waiting for a half an hour we decided to depart without Carmen and we set out on a one-way two-hour walk under the scorching sun. This walk was particularly difficult because the pine trees had been felled and there was no shade on the seemingly endless winding road. Gloribel tried to keep our spirits up by telling us some of her and other women's war experiences. Later she began to tell me how expensive it was to raise children. For example she stated that she could never get all of her children clothing at the same time because she never had enough.

As we were approaching the last third of the trip and having visions of cold water spewing from the mountain side, Carmen met up with us and ended our delirium. She said she had missed us some how but that she had already made it to Villa El Rosario. Unfortunately there was no one there. The women had not organized. Rather than continuing we headed back on another two-hour walk and caught a ride at a crossroad. When we arrived at the WCM building in Perquín, we told the President what had happened and she promised to revisit the community. However, she never made it because the walk was too long and she had not been able to find a ride.

c. San Fernando: Azacualpa

On October 27, Angelita and I took a bus to San Fernando and walked about forty five minutes through trails until we reached Azacualpa, located within the boundaries of San Fernando. There we met up with a little boy who ran to alert the women that we had arrived. We continued walking into a large soccer field and found a log to sit on. The women began arriving in twos and threes and sitting down on adjacent logs. The meeting began with a total of eight women plus Angelita and myself. However, I was told that the Board was actually composed of about twenty women and that its social base was made up of four women. When I asked Angelita how it was possible that the Board was larger than the Base, she explained that all the women that were members of the WCM were also members of the Board. The other four women just gave support in some activities but did not wish to have any constant responsibilities. Following this conversation, Angelita introduced me to the women and proceeded to give me some background on the San Fernando Board of Directors:

The San Fernando WCM worked well when they had the bean project but once I [Angelita] joined the Council, there was no one left to motivate the women and the Board of Directors fell. In May, Carmen [S.F. WCM President] and I were able to reorganize the Board. Carmen was able to motivate them. But the women don't see the need to organize if there aren't any projects.

During the meeting, two topics were discussed: the vegetable project and a chicken farm project. Some women had already received the organic fertilizer workshop from Angelita and they were able to mix the fertilizer and spread it on the land. However, the women were forced to find another piece of land because the owner was returning to claim it. They decided to ask Carmen's father to let them use some of his. One of the women suggested that it would be better if one WCM member would speak to his wife first

because "It's easier if one woman speaks to another". The women had already made arrangements for a man to build the seeding boxes and they agreed to pay another man to clean out the land.

The second topic discussed was the chicken farm project. The women felt this kind of project would be profitable and easy to manage because it was "only a matter of feeding the chickens". They said that many times it was difficult to get chickens because sometimes there was no one to sell them. Angelita instructed them to write a proposal so that the Council could send it to an agency for monetary support. The women became nervous at this suggestion since none of them had any experience writing proposals. Angelita told them to ask the head of the school of agriculture to give them a workshop on proposal writing. She added that the Council could not do it for them because then it would be accused of forcing unnecessary projects on the women. It had to be an initiative of their own. The women were enthusiastic because they thought that once the project got started and gave results, other women would automatically become interested in becoming WCM members and would be willing to lend a hand in the projects. The fact that the Agricultural School already had a chicken farm and that the women might benefit more from starting a project that did not already exist was not mentioned.

A few weeks later, Angelita and I revisited San Fernando with two agronomists (Xenia and Pedro) from FASTRAS who had made an appointment to give the women a workshop on planting. Only two San Fernando women showed up for the workshop. After revealing her dismay at the lack of participation, Xenia explained that the purpose of the project was to cover the needs of the Zone with the vegetables and to sell whatever was left in other areas. The vegetable project would cover five zones (San

Fernando, Villa El Rosario, Laguna, Mozote, and Torola). This workshop was supposed to have representatives from each one of these communities but the women did not arrive. It was also supposed to cover three topics: training in organic fertilizer, farming techniques based on the peasant women's own experiences, the acquisition of loans or credits, and the commercialization of the products. Following the overview of the project, Xenia proceeded to give the two women notebooks, pencils, and a summary of the workshop. Then she decided to take a look at the seed beds and the land that had already been prepared by the women thanks to a visit she gave them a week earlier.

When we arrived at the vegetable plot we found another six women (including the President of the Board of Directors), two men and some children working on the preparation of the land. In their enthusiasm to get the project started, those women who were working had forgotten to go to the workshop. It turned out that most of the people working on the land were immediate family members of the San Fernando WCM President. The agronomists, the Council member, the two workshop women and myself picked up some tools and began to help the women plant until night fall. Since we were too exhausted and terribly hungry, the agronomists and I stayed over night at the Agricultural School. The next morning Xenia spoke to the Head of the school and asked him to check on the women's project periodically and to give them advice until she could return. I was told by one of the women that the Head of the Agricultural School had waited too long to check on them, and by the time he arrived the crops had already perished.

Even in Gloribel's suggestions to improve the organization, inconsistencies were revealed in her view of the importance of the full participation of the WCM social base. Ideally the base is supposed to inform

the Council what is needed. That is, after all, what participatory democracy is supposed to be about. However, she advised the Council not to discuss its internal problems with the base for fear that it might become demoralized. This paternalistic attitude reaffirmed the stereotypic notion that peasant women because of their "low cultural level" were unable to analyze critically and to help resolve the problems that were affecting those they had chosen to represent them before international agencies. How was the base supposed to decide whether to eliminate a Council member from her position or to reelect her if they had no notion of what was going on in the Council? Yet, not a single woman questioned or took exception to any of the comments or instructions imparted by the Council members or by the AMS representative.

d. Mozote

Following the first San Fernando visit, we took a bus to the outskirts of the town of Mozote known for the massacre of its population by the Salvadoran Military Forces (Atlacatl Battalion). Their purpose was to create a WCM Board of Directors from scratch since there had not been one in this area. Our first visit to the town was fruitless. There had been a misunderstanding about the rendezvous point and we never found the women.

On November 1, we returned to the town with an agriculture technician. Apparently, Angelita had told the women to bring their children so they could break a "piñata" donated by the Council. This activity was supposed to help attract the women. However, children were not brought because it was too far to walk. Angelita had also invited the Men's Board of Directors so that "they could learn about the WCM's objectives". Before arriving at the meeting place we stopped by Oneda's house (Mozote's provisional WCM President) so that she would accompany us. Oneda was

one of those people who had survived the Mozote massacre by disobeying the military's orders to congregate in the middle of town. She told us how she was able to hear the gun shots and screams as the people were murdered and to see the smoke filled sky as the bodies were burnt. She recalled that it was very difficult to breath as the air filled up with smoke and ashes.

When we arrived Oneda was very frustrated. She was complaining that the Men's Board had not organized for the organic fertilizer workshop because they had been drinking all night. A woman that was run out of another town had just moved to Arambala and was selling home brewed liquor there. It seems that the women of the other town had dismissed her because the men spent their days getting drunk. Now this was also happening in Mozote. Only six women and two men from Mozote and its surrounding areas showed up at the meeting, which took place in the patio of an adobe house belonging to one of the women. The excuse for not having more men was that they were watching a soccer game. Oneda added that the lack of women was probably due to the fact that they were discouraged because of the aborted meeting with Angelita the previous week.

At the beginning of the meeting, each woman stood up and introduced herself. The men remained seated when they spoke and one of them fell asleep during the discussion. After introducing herself, the agriculture technician and me, Angelita asked the women whether or not they were going to form a Board of Directors. The women started fidgeting in their chairs some saying that they wanted to be part of the WCM but they did not want the responsibility of being a Board member. They were asked if they wanted the workshop on organic fertilizers but no one spoke. Angelita proceeded to explain the goals of the organization and read a shortened version of the WCM's Platform and objectives. There were empty gazes and a

heavy silence from the audience. She asked if there were any questions and the women just answered "Everything seems all right" and continued to sit and stare aimlessly.

In an attempt to break the vicious cycle of silence and boredom, Angelita suddenly turned everybody's attention to me and told the women I was there to ask them a few questions. Feeling a little startled by this sudden turn of events, I came up with a question which was apparently inappropriate at the time. I asked the women why they wished to organize as women. They answered "We want to work". I replied "Is that all?" They said "Yes". I followed up my awkward first attempt by asking them how they would try to convince me to join them if I told them I had no time. They said they would tell me I should join because it was "interesting". Then Angelita, noticing the perplexed expression on my face, took the opportunity to speak about the situation of women in an attempt to liven up the discussion. The following is a verbatim transcription of what went on in the rest of the meeting:

**Angelita:** We have the same abilities as the men. The problem is that sometimes we are repressed in our homes. Women have more work in the household. Women are the heads of households.

**Hector:** "Así es" ["That's right" was the low response of an elderly man who was sitting slouched on a chair as he stared at the floor].

**Angelita:** A man says "only I can do this", but no, women also have participation. That's why I want you to tell me how you see things.

**Women:** We understand [two answered].

**Oneda:** [Provisional Mozote Board President--tall slender woman with a firm voice] Since we have never received any explanations, sometimes we don't understand. Not everyone who lives here has the necessary conditions to subsist. It's important to struggle to get something.



**Osorio:** "Así es" [Soft answer from a man in his thirties who was leaning against a post].

**Oneda:** It's the men who have all the rights. A man will go out into the street but he will not permit the women to leave the house. But we must understand that women also have the same rights.

**Angelita:** It's good to say what one feels so one will not be led by someone else's ideas. That is why we wish to give you participation and not just have you listen to me ramble on blah, blah, blah.

**Crista:** The struggle that I have is to find work to improve myself. To work anyway I can. My sister and I know how to do many things. She works on the 'milpa' and in agriculture. We just arrived in this area from the Department of La Libertad. But before coming here we made hammocks. But since we moved we haven't been able to get the materials. My sister knows how to do many things. She can make bread and she can sell.

**María:** Let's see if we can progress a little. There have been women coming to my land for two years now trying to form a women's organization so that we can get work, but the other women don't want to come.

**Oneda:** I have been invited to meetings in Arambala many times now. But the women of Mozote would not go because it's too far away. We have to organize here. That way if we all unite we will trust each other more and we will gain more strength. Everything is voluntary. The invitation was also for the men so that they would understand our struggle.

**Crista:** It's a good thing to have a women's board of directors because we can plant between all of us. The board of directors is the one that decides why people are going to be brought together.

**Osorio:** Women have more work than men. It's good to have a women's board of directors but you see the scarce participation here.

**Oneda:** In Arambala no one wanted to form the board. The women thought that they were going to be given more work than what they had during the war. Other women have small children and that's why they can't come.

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**Crista:** I would say it's important to organize so that we can prosper. When you are left out of the organization you are alone. If people are interested they will agree, if not they won't. When the women are told that there is a meeting to form a Board of Directors it is worse. They say "I'm not going".

**Angelita:** They say "What? Me, President? Go see who else you can find".

**Crista:** There are people whom you have to beg to get them to participate. "Come on, It's interesting". At first I didn't want to go but people kept inviting me and sometimes they would scold me. But when I went, I liked it.

**Oneda:** I've almost always visited all the houses. I ask the women if they took their children to get vaccinated. It's important to motivate the people. In this area many children have not been vaccinated. That is why the organization is good, because you earn their trust. My understanding is that the need is dire in this place. If we are organized we can find out what the families' needs are. There is a great need for education. That worries us. The first thing the internationals ask is "Where do the children go to school?" We have invited the Men's Board to come to our meeting but they already had an engagement to play soccer.

**Osorio:** That is why today was not a good day for this meeting.

**Angelita:** First we should have met with the men and women to see if the men are preventing the women from meeting or what? Are you willing to work in the vegetable project?

**Sarah:** We are but where would we do it? This is too far for us.

**Angelita:** If many women work it will be easier because one woman won't have to come every day and she could even plant a home garden if she liked.

**Oneda:** Yes, because we had already collected all the ingredients for the fertilizer. The chicken droppings, the ashes. I know that its for the good of all of us, but only we [three women] did the work.

**Ana:** [Owner of the large house where the meeting was taking place]. I think this meeting is good. But, me, it's that I can barely

help out because I have too much to do. I've got my kids in school. To say "yes" is not hard, but to come through is another thing. One has to take care of her home and then leave. It's a commitment and it must be kept. Because if you don't do your part our 'compañeras' will get upset. I've been invited to Arambala but I haven't been able to go because my children are in school.

**Angelita:** But if there is interest one can make time. But as we said earlier we do not force anyone. It has to be voluntary. I don't know how you see it. People must decide whether or not they want the vegetable garden.

**Oneda:** We think that it is necessary so that whoever wishes to do so can plant a home garden. If people don't want to do it communally then let them plant for their own families.

**Angelita:** If we come to teach you the other women can also come and learn.

**Crista:** I agree.

**Juan:** [Peasant trained in appropriated technology]. I think that the presentation that the 'compañeras' have given has been very good. I work in organic fertilizer and appropriated technology. People think that this is going to be hard work but in the end it is going to be very beneficial. It is important for us peasants to identify our raw materials and to know how our communities will benefit from them. If this works out here and you are able to collect the materials between all of you, it will benefit you all. This plant you have here is called "mariposita", it is used for fevers. All these plants are good for the organic fertilizer. And that is very important. This helps us begin to solve the economic problems of our own society. You don't need a large number of people. All you need is the will to begin. It's better to start with a few and to make concrete steps. This will be concrete proof for your neighbors and for the rest of the community. You can analyze for yourselves if it is going to be beneficial. You won't have to buy floral fertilizer which costs twelve colones.

**Crista:** Let's agree on what each one is going to collect so we won't all get the same things.

**Angelita:** Our next meeting will be next Sunday.

**Sarah:** If one woman does it she can teach others.

The interaction at Mozote was especially revealing in that, unlike the other communities visited, it had never had a WCM organization. It gave me a comparative perspective which I had been lacking thus far. It provided clues as to what the original women's organization attempts were probably like when women, who were victims of the dislocation of the war, lacked an understanding of their subordinate position within a gender stratified society. In this meeting there were women who had participated in other organizations during the war and became discouraged with the work overload and lack of results in terms of their own needs. The women expressed one main concern: to get a job. They were generally ignorant about any other purpose for an organization of women, even after listening to the WCM Platform and to Angelita's and Oneda's inspiring words.

The women's facial expressions, body language, and silence revealed an immunity to baseless rhetoric or "hype" without results which they had apparently been exposed to for many years. The women's form of presentation as opposed to the men's intimated the former's position of subordination in an authoritarian structure. The women would stand up before they spoke and sit down immediately after they finished, as if they had been programmed the way children are in very authoritarian schools. The men, however, maintained their relaxed sitting positions without paying very serious attention to what was going on. The men's lack of support and interest in the problems and goals of women were stark. Their manipulation of the women was also revealed in Osorio's insinuation that even though the organization was a "good idea", it wasn't going to work because the poor attendance of the women demonstrated that only a few were interested. He also blamed the women for the poorly attended meeting since they planned it on a day when a soccer game was going on. In this way, he insinuated that

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the women's priorities were all wrong.

Attitudes resulting from economic differences in the women also emerged. The homeless and penniless women were desperate to organize so they could find a support network to subsist. Yet, the more economically stable women were less enthusiastic. For example, the owner of the house where the meeting took place argued that she had no time to participate because she had her children in school and too many chores to do. Ironically, a direct correlation seemed to emerge between increased economic stability and a stated decrease in available time to organize.

The conflict between communal and individualistic ideologies was also present during most of the discussion of the vegetable garden, as the women debated whether to make a private garden or to work together for the benefit of all. Oneda's interpretation of the reason for the conflict was that there was a lack of trust, implying that after all the years of communal development projects in the Zone the women still felt they would be taken advantage of if they shared their work with others.

The confrontation mentioned in previous interviews between a pervasive ideology that instructs women to put their own cause aside and the ideology that espouses the injustice of a system that does not take both genders into account simultaneously is exemplified in the different styles used by Angelita and the Technician. Angelita's stricter and more confrontational style in convincing the women to work communally for their own benefit as women was met with resistance. Most did not respond or comment on her assessment of women's subordinate status nor did they seem convinced that the project was truly voluntary. It was not until the technician brought up concrete examples which were devoid of gender related themes that the women became inspired to work together. The

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women's attitudes revealed the prevailing ideology that has been expressed in most of the interviews: that women must struggle for the good and cohesion of the community as a whole rather than fighting for a truly just social system which admits that women have been relegated to an inferior status and will try to change their situation. The idea that women experience a double subordination because of their gender was not assimilated as a reality by most of those present at the meeting. Of all the patterns already discussed during the meeting in Mozote, this is the most important one.

e. Torola

On November 8, another Council member (Sonia) and I took a forty five minute bus ride to Torola, one of the most destroyed towns of the Zone, to meet with the WCM Board of Directors and make arrangements for the vegetable garden workshop. Unfortunately PADECOSMS arrived in their pick up truck shortly afterwards and began reconstituting the town board so the women were unable to meet. Sonia was annoyed because PADECOSMS had not coordinated with the WCM Council, causing this "clash of activities" as she put it. A female PADECOSMS representative told Sonia that they had tried to coordinate with the WCM but that PADECOSMS had already made up its calendar of activities. Sonia angrily replied that if WCM had been told in time they could have arranged to work together.

The coordination of the Town Directive election was performed by the main leader of PADECOSMS. There was also a female representative of PADECOSMS standing beside him but she never spoke. When I asked Sonia why she commented that this was always the case. The elections began with most of the men standing in the middle of the room and the women circling them from behind. When the PADECOSMS leader asked for nominations for President all the nominees were men including those proposed by

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women. The women did, however, gather the courage to nominate a woman for the Secretary position. She had an overwhelming mixed gender support. They tried to elect another woman [who had been in the PADECOSMS Board of Torola for four years] but she refused to run. She told Sonia and myself that she felt a lot of resentment because she had worked on the Board for a long time and they never took her seriously or into account. She added that she did not have any more "time to waste". Sonia arranged another meeting for the fertilizer training but she never showed up.

On December 18, I revisited Torola because I needed to interview the women and the WCM Council member had not made anymore efforts to organize them there. I was received by three Board of Directors' members who began the conversation by asking me why the Council had not revisited them. Following this question, Marta, one of the Board members began describing women's situation in Torola:

We have worked very hard here, but after the work is done they don't even turn around to look at us. In Torola, the women of the WCM are also members of the CCM (Congregation of Christian Mothers). Today neither of the organizations has meetings. Before the 1989 Offensive, the CCM met but it was difficult because there was a lot of jealousy coming from the outside. The project of Bread and Milk lasted four years. Here everyone worked very well. Later there was a tailor shop project which lasted eight days. Two sewing machines were brought and we got the shop itself from the Men's Board of Directors. Three women began to work but no one else was invited. No one knows what happened to the machines. Later the CCM women were invited to join the WCM. About twenty women joined. They told us women would be able to work. An AMS representative and a solidarity worker came to organize women. There was an election and then the President of the new Torola WCM Board of Directors went from house to house and gathered about eleven women.

Ten months ago PADECOSMS made a bakery in Torola, but the WCM hasn't had any projects. Our Board of Directors President was the only woman from Torola that would visit Perquín [town of WCM Council]. She would have to use her



own money for transportation or she would have to walk four hours to get to the meetings. We never received any training or workshops.

Last month about eight women met in a Council Assembly Meeting and they only spoke of work. The Council told us that they were going to start a vegetable garden project. But the Men's Board of Directors hasn't told us a thing about the land. The President of the CCM also told us she was going to meet with us but she never arrived. We feel that the vegetable garden project would be a good thing because otherwise a pound of tomatoes costs us four colones. But we have a problem with irrigation.

The situation in Torola is very bad. There are many undernourished children here. All of the women are going to PADECOSMS' Maternal Infant Care Program but we haven't received any counseling on family planning nor on women's health problems. Here it costs us two colones to see a doctor. But most people here are very poor and don't even have money to buy food. In Torola, there are about one hundred women—many of them alone and with children. Many of them have to cut and carry wood in order to sell a third of a cord for two colones. Our biggest problem here is malnutrition and lack of jobs.

The Vice President of the Torola WCM Board of Directors has gone to live in another community with a very jealous man so she hasn't come to any of our meetings. I think that the WCM women do not really want to work. They aren't willing to wait until there are earnings. We already know where the garden is going to be but the men have not handed it [the land] over yet and the actual owners are going to return soon.

A WCM Council member called a meeting with our WCM Board of Directors to plan the work on the garden but only three Torola women came and the Council member never showed up. The other Torola women didn't come not because they don't want to work but because they want to be paid for what they do. The WCM Council told us that we would have to wait until we harvested and sold the vegetables in order to get a profit. The Council could not give us any money. About fifteen women would be willing to work if they got paid. But only three are willing to wait.

Torola, unlike Mozote for example, had a history of women's organizations. The same women of the WCM had originally belonged to the CCM and continued to do so with an apparently stronger allegiance to the

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latter. They were older women with a strong organizational experience, and yet they faced some of the same problems revealed in Mozote. The WCM Torola women were more relaxed and confident in their manner of presenting themselves. They were aware that they had struggled and achieved a great deal in their participation during the war. However, they felt frustrated because they were faced with social problems such as a town full of malnourished and impoverished women and children, and they were not only lacking support from the Men's Board of Directors but from the different women's organizations as well.

The WCM women expressed a feeling of powerlessness before the Men's Board of Directors which had control over the land needed for the vegetable garden, and a feeling of confusion and abandonment as a result of the WCM Council's and the CCM's lack of initiative in visiting and advising the Torola Board of Directors. Regardless of the Torola women's participation during the armed conflict, the PADECOSMS election activity revealed that women were viewed as secondary in importance and that there was still a prevailing ideology among most men and women that stressed that only men were fit for leadership positions.

After finishing my interview with Marta, I returned to Perquín and spoke to a woman (Iris) who, in the past, had been involved in recruiting women for the WCM. I asked her why the WCM of Torola was also the CCM when in other towns the two were completely separated and even had some conflicts with each other. She answered that Torola was one of the most destroyed towns in the Zone and that the women with the most organizational experience had been CCM members. The FMLN and PADECOSMS believed that they would be the most useful in recruiting women for the WCM.

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Iris acknowledged that it was possible that because of the Torola President's religious inclinations, the organization which was supposed to be non-religious, took a different turn. She added that the two women who had organized the WCM Boards in the various communities stopped going to Torola because "women were not given importance in that town. In fact, Torola's WCM President would go to the Council Assembly meetings but she wouldn't inform the other Torola women what had occurred there" (my notes, Torola). She recalled that in the first meeting with PADECOSMS and the WCM in Torola, only the WCM Board of Directors would speak while most of the other women just sat and listened. Iris added that PADECOSMS wanted to organize the women to have them accessible for activities where they needed cooks or people to clean up. That is when the two women organizers (Salvadoran, and North American Solidarity Worker) encouraged the WCM Council to come up with a platform that would stress the struggle for women's specific needs. However, Iris felt that the women of Torola had forgotten the platform because they devoted most of their time to the CCM and confused the issues.

Topic 3: The WCM Evaluation of the Community Stores and Jelly Projects in The Zone of La Montaña

After discussing the vegetable garden project in the Revision of Goals Meeting, the WCM Council President (Blanca) and Angelita began to evaluate the WCM store projects (see Figure 5). According to Blanca, San Fernando had previously had a WCM store that belonged to the community and the earnings were distributed among the women. This store was created with the profits that were left over from the bean project that had existed previously. But the store also lasted very little because of faulty administration. Now the WCM directive of San Fernando is supposed to reimburse the Council with

the money that was lost (2,700 colones).

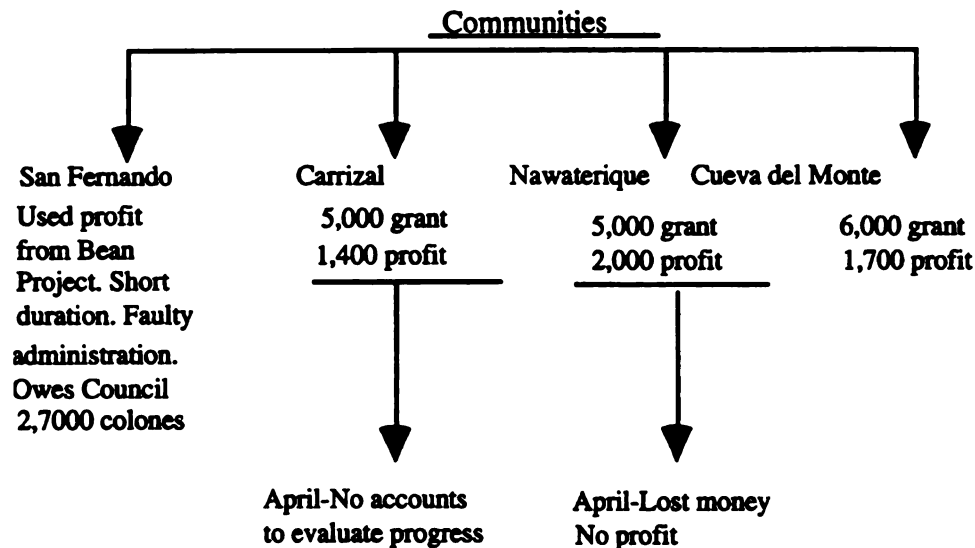


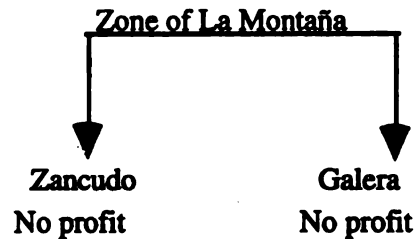
Figure 5: Store Project According to WCM Revision of Goals Meeting

According to the previous WCM Council President (Wanda) who started the stores and jelly projects (see Figure 6) in the zone of La Montaña with the help of an international solidarity worker who put her in contact with different agencies, the original funding for these two projects (16,000 colones) came from the Parish of Roses in May of 1991. The purpose was to use the revenues to lower prices in order to help the community and to help the elderly and orphaned children. By the third month the store in Carrizal had made 1,500 colones in profits after paying the attendant 160 colones a month and the woman who bought the merchandise 200 colones a month. The store earnings were reinvested in the store.

The store of Nawaterique was the first to be established and the men's Board of Directors was employed to build it. PADECOSMS constructed the shelves without charge. 5,000 colones were invested and 2,000 were earned in

profits after paying two women 200 colones a month. Six thousand colones were invested in the store of Cueva del Monte because they had to pay the men's Board of Directors to construct the shelves and a table. This community also had a greater need. The Seventh Day Adventist church, located in the center of town, agreed to move the congregation to a private home and donated its premises so that the store could be built there.

Year: 1991 Agency: Help to El Salvador  
 Funds: 16,000 colones  
 Women paid 15 colones a day for 12 months



\* 1992: Council borrows 16,000 colones from a reforestation project and invests in the Jelly Project. No records of accounts or knowledge of profits or losses exists. Problems in administration

Figure 6: Jelly Project According to WCM Revision of Goals Meeting

After two and a half months the store attendant became pregnant and the solidarity worker that was counseling them assigned the President of the Board of Directors to take on the task of saleswoman. According to Wanda, Blanca (the current WCM President) later became the President of the WCM Council and created a new Board of Directors in Cueva del Monte because there were rumors that the President of the Board of Directors was stealing money. Blanca appointed a woman from CEBES to be the new Cueva del Monte WCM President and eight days later the store was moved to her

house. According to Wanda there is no longer a communal store there because it has become a personal business of the President of the WCM Board of Directors. Before the Board of Directors was changed, there were 1,700 colones in profits and 200 of these were used to buy a needy child some milk. But now the women owe 2,000 colones in loans.

During the WCM Council's Revision of Goals Meeting, Blanca explained that the money that had been given to the women who were going to manage the stores was not accompanied with any sort of workshop in business administration. This created problems in keeping track of the revenues. At first they worked well; Cueva del Monte had earned 6,000 colones in six months, Nahuaterique had earned 2,700 colones in six months and Carrizal had made 1,700 colones in the same amount of time. But, Blanca argued that when she revisited the communities the earnings of Cueva del Monte had disappeared. Nahuaterique kept a constant rate of earning for a while but by April it was losing money. In Carrizal The Council has not kept track of the revenues but they were aware that there were problems. The Council had not asked for money from any of these three community stores.

The Jelly projects received 16,000 colones in 1991 from agencies of help to El Salvador. At this time Blanca was not the President. The Council decided to start the project in the Zone of La Montaña and a government institution (MAC) interested in ecological protection helped in the training of the women. Thirty women from Perquín, Jocoaitique and La Montaña were trained. Later the Communities of Zancudo and Galera were chosen for the jelly project. The idea was that each woman working in the project would be paid fifteen colones a day for the duration of the Mora berry season (two months). The President of the Board of Directors was given money to buy the necessary materials such as pans and sugar. In 1991 the project did not

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make a profit but neither did it lose money. The problem was that there was very little funding to begin with.

In 1992, the Council borrowed 16,000 colones from a reforestation project so that the Mora jelly project could continue. Blanca expressed that they were unable to get involved in reforestation because trees could not be planted in the summer. The agency of help To El Salvador that had originally funded the jelly project threatened to demand the return of the funds if the project ceased to exist. So the jelly project was continued with the idea that the Agency could be paid back in the future. The Council members were unaware of the revenues of the jelly project but they knew there had been many problems and many expenses. One of the coordinators who was being paid 200 colones a month was dismissed because of irresponsibility. The other coordinator left and now the project did not have any one overseeing it or keeping records of the accounts. Blanca informed me that at the time jelly was being sold in San Salvador (CIAZO, FASTRAS, DIGNAS, The Clementina Guest House, The Archbishop), in San Miguel (PADECOES), in Perquín (WCM) and in Segundo Montes. They hoped to sell some in the dining hall of PADECOSMS and in the WCM store of SAN Fernando that was being built.

In 1991, the WCM received financing of 45,000 colones from an Australian Agency to create a store in San Fernando. The earnings from this store were supposed to go to pay for the Council members' salaries, administration costs and the salary of the store clerk. Unlike the other WCM stores, the revenues were not going to stay in the community. However, the prices were supposed to be lower so that the community would derive some benefit. The Council members began to sell cooking gas and invested 14,000 colones. So far they had invested another 12,800 in the other merchandise to

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be sold such as vegetables, bread, sanitary articles toys and candy.

The Revisions of Goals Meeting revealed a pattern of extreme difficulty in coordinating and continuing self-management projects. Accounts were neither kept by the Council nor by the boards of directors. The causes of the problems were mostly attributed to some coordinator's irresponsibility, to the lack of education of the women, to internal power struggles, and to the resistance of the men in sharing their control over land. Nevertheless, there was a clear impression that the different boards, although full of internal strife, were still numerous. The Council also seemed to have a genuine interest in developing projects for the women in the different communities. The Council's numerous attempts to create projects for the women and the patterns of lack of interest and scarce participation raised important questions which could not be answered without speaking to the social base who had actually been involved in the development of the WCM organizations and its projects.

In the following descriptions I will comment at the end of each specific visit because the WCM Boards of Directors of La Montaña revealed an incredible commonalty in their origin and development which would make my previous style too repetitive. Rather, I will delay my comments and observations until the end of the whole section in order to summarize the patterns I observed in a more organized way.

### Our Visits To The Zone of La Montaña: Stores and Jelly Projects

During the month of December, Angelita Gloribel (AMS rep.) and I got on the back of an empty cattle truck to visit what had been described to me as the most beautiful region of North Eastern El Salvador. This Zone also happened to be where most of the store and all the jelly projects of the WCM were located. La Montaña along with other areas was recently ceded to



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Honduras by El Salvador's President Cristiani. It had been a point of territorial dispute between the two countries for over a century. Many Morazán inhabitants believed that Cristiani "got rid of the territory" because most of the people there were FMLN supporters. This event was a big blow to PADECOSMS which had formed many organizations in the area. At the time of my visit PADECOSMS had representatives in a Bi-National Committee which were struggling so that the La Montaña inhabitants would be given double nationality and would be allowed to keep their cooperatives and organizations.

Angelita's and Gloribel's purpose in visiting the WCM Boards of Directors in the Zone was to evaluate their projects to express their support at least in the way of counseling and they were also going to inform them that the structural ties between the WCM Council and the La Montaña Boards of Directors would have to discontinue because the La Montaña residents were no longer on Salvadoran territory. The towns visited were those which had the store projects (Carrizal, Nahuaterique, Cueva del Monte) and the communities which had the Mora Jelly Projects (Zancudo and Galera).

a. Carrizal

The small store in Carrizal was attended by an eighteen year old woman (Rosa) who had also been elected to be the WCM Board of Directors representative in the Council Assembly Meetings. Rosa attended a three day accounting workshop given by the WCM Council and taught by a PADECOSMS accountant. She was being paid 200 colones a month for her assistance at the store. She had only been to the Council twice and she knew little about the accounts and information of the WCM projects. She could not even say whether the store had any profits. However, she had noticed that the WCM Board of Directors had not met for many weeks and when they

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did meet, only a few women would attend.

Rosa argued that a possible reason for the lack of participation was that there were rumors that the Board of Directors President and Vice President were taking funds from the store revenues. It was their responsibility to buy the merchandise for the store and to pay her salary. She said, however, that she had always been paid on time. Originally the President and Vice president were earning 200 colones each for their work in getting the store articles, but they decided to give up their salary when they were accused of corruption. Rosa added that many people said that the WCM was supposed to help the community, but in reality they were just "opportunistic old hags who did not do anything".

Later, we spoke to another woman in Carrizal who was an inactive member of the WCM. She gave us a short history of the development of women's organizations in the town and reacted very positively towards the accomplishments of the AMS (the organization that preceded the WCM). She said the AMS began helping them with a "milpa" project (mixed vegetable garden, mostly corn and beans), and would keep them informed about the current political issues. "That's when I began to think that women should not be slaves and that we have rights" she added. When the 1989 Offensive came, The AMS recruited the women so they would participate in armed conflict. This informant felt that women were able to progress because they were given the opportunity to engage in combat. The husbands, however, were furious that the AMS had taken their wives away. Later the women dispersed as they returned to their individual homes ( my notes, Carrizal).

After the Offensive, the WCM Board of Directors of Carrizal was created by PADECOSMS with the help of a North American solidarity worker.

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Women were told that they would benefit from different productive projects and that organized women had a better capacity to work. In Carrizal the WCM set up a store and the organization was strong until March because the Council would meet with the women. But then the Council stopped sending representatives and the Carrizal women lost their faith in their own board of directors president and vice-president because they had sole control over the store.

Gloribel told the informant that if there were complaints about the Council they should be expressed because "the Base has the right to criticize its leaders". Angelita assumed that the resentment resulted from the Council's unkempt promises of visiting the communities. The informant's final concern was that Honduran women's organizations were trying to recruit Salvadoran women even though the Honduran Colonel promised to respect the existing organizations. Gloribel answered that he could only keep his promise if he was faced with a strong and structured women's organization that included all women.

b. Nahuaterique

Our next stop was the town of Nahuaterique. We had been walking for many hours up and down rock and dirt trails. The sun was just going down and the sky was filled with intense orange, red and blue swirls that emerged out of the black contours of the pine trees and mountain tops. We finally arrived at night time and woke the town WCM President (Remigia) so she would let us sleep over. She was startled by our presence because ever since Nahuaterique became Honduran territory there had been thefts and no one to guard and keep control of the town (my notes, Nahuaterique). Before lying on the hard mud floors with only a thin hay mat to keep us from getting dirty, Remigia made us some fried eggs and hot chocolate for supper. She was

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one of those rare Salvadorans that did not drink coffee.

The next morning I almost jumped out of my skin when I felt something large walking on my face. As I shook and shot my head up, I heard loud clucking and wing flapping sounds. There was this incredibly fat chicken that decided I should be removed. Fortunately, Remigia whacked and chased it out of the house with a broom as her children, Angelita and Gloribel were laughing to the point of tears.

Since Remigia had run out of eggs, and so had the WCM store she managed, we went to another store to get what we needed. After breakfast, she told us that it would be difficult to get all the women because it was coffee picking season and the women had expected us to have the meeting the day before. Seven of ten Board Members finally arrived while Gloribel and Angelita were elsewhere getting ready. A curious thing happened while I was waiting for them to return: when I sat next to the Board members in the front yard, they got up and entered the house. When I went into the house, they walked out the door and sat back outside. I decided it was better if I stayed inside the house until Angelita returned.

The meeting began with Remigia and the Vice-President's description of the WCM of Nahuaterique. Ever since the town had been ceded to Honduras, the women had stopped meeting. Before that they only met seldom. The few women that were present were unmarried and with the exception of the President and the Vice-President, they were young and had only recently become WCM members. The WCM had been a victim of vandalism: their banners were ripped and their store was robbed. As a result the husbands of its members prohibited them from meeting (my notes, Nahuaterique).



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Gloribel told Remigia that men felt they were important because they thought they supported women economically. She added that maybe a store was not the solution and that there were more productive things that women could do:

The men's organizations will not be as productive without the help of a women's organization even if they do not take women into account when they participate. But if you are organized, your presence will force them to recognize you. You should form your own organization but you need representation in other organizations as well. When you confront the Honduran authorities you must pressure them to give you support with productive projects. You have to show them that you are really organized.

Gloribel reminded the women that she and Angelita were there to learn about their situation and help in any way they could but the women had to tell them what the problems were. When Gloribel asked the younger women or "Vocales" who were seated around her how they saw things, they turned their backs to her and covered their smiling faces. Remigia explained that these women had little organizational experience and were still very shy. Gloribel encouraged them to dare to speak and she told them how she had also struggled to overcome her fear because she was a peasant like them. Seeing that the women would not answer, Remigia continued the conversation and told us that the Nahuaterique WCM Board of Directors was set up by PADECOSMS with the help of a North American Solidarity Worker. A secretary, president and vice-president were elected out of twenty eight women and the Secretariats were set up. However, when I asked Remigia the functions of the Secretariats she answered:

The men didn't tell us what the function of each Secretariat was supposed to be. Now only the Board of Directors is left-- the President, Vice-President and the Vocals. We no longer have a Secretary or a Treasurer. No one gave us any counseling. We didn't know what the hell we were going to do. The women

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elected for the Secretariats no longer work. They only participated for one year. They were elected by the men. And when these women left, the men elected others. Since I was the one that went to most of the meetings, the WCM Council told me I was going to be the Nahuaterique President.

Of the workshops given by the Council only the President and Vice-President of Nahuaterique attended. They received a workshop on health, accounting, and gender theory but they never passed the information they had learned to the other WCM women of their town (my notes, Nahuaterique). The purpose of the accounting workshop was to help them manage the store which was set up with the help of the solidarity worker after PADECOSMS organized the WCM Board of Directors. At the time of our meeting, Remigia and the Vice-President were the only ones working in the store. The women argued that they did not know math so they would be useless in the store. The original quantity given to the WCM for the project was 5,000 colones which were supposed to be returned. However, PADECOSMS charged them 150 colones to transport the food, which the women found to be outrageous. As a result, they began carrying the articles on horseback.

This store was the first in town and it was built so the residents would not have to travel to Gotera to shop. But since then other stores had been built by private owners who had their own cars and were better able to supply themselves. The owner of the location of the WCM store was also causing the women problems. According to Remigia he was a drunkard and was pressuring them to leave. Consequently, the women visited Perquín to tell the Council President that they were going to move the store to an old church until they found another place. Two Council members visited the women and asked them for 3,000 colones to buy merchandise for the store. However, they alerted Remigia ten days after the purchase and by then the tomatoes and

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a quintal of potatoes rotted. Remigia stated that 500 colones were lost in rotten merchandise. The store had made little money because of this incident, because of the transportation costs which had amounted to 2,000 colones, and because of the 500 colones of recently stolen merchandise. The stores remaining cash amounted to 3,000 colones.

Following the description of the store, Remigia expressed her bewilderment and worry with the situation of Honduras. She told us that a Honduran women's organization called Organization of Housewives was trying to recruit them. Gloribel's eyes shot up as she said:

For God's sake you don't need to be taught how to be good housewives. You're experts at it! I've heard about that organization. They are going to teach you how to wipe the sweat off of your husbands brow when he comes home from work and how to be more efficient in serving him. You have to organize for yourselves and contact some leftist Honduran women's organizations. There are some real good ones.

Remigia said she felt the same way and that was why she had been thinking about going to Perquín to ask the WCM Council for advice so that they could defend themselves better from the thefts and the Honduran women's organizations.

#### c. Caiman

After leaving Nahuaterique and promising the women that the WCM Council would be alerted about the problems they were facing, we headed for a town called Caimán. This town did not have a WCM project, but since it was on our way to the other towns, Angelita decided that it would be a good idea to stop by and speak to the women about the problems their organization had faced. We met with a woman who had been the President of the now defunct WCM Board of Directors. Even though the women here had not participated in a project they had been active for a year in the WCM. The ex-

President presented the following bleak picture of the organization:

Our organization lasted one year. At first only eight women were participating but later twenty two women joined up. They told us no one should be left outside. The PADECOSMS Board of Directors organized us so we could do domestic tasks when they programmed activities in the towns. PADECOSMS chose me to be President. However, when the WCM women came from Perquín they told the men's Board of Directors that women had to organize to defend the rights of women and children. Before, a woman could not go anywhere without her husband's permission. They told us that the WCM would safeguard the rights of women, but our rights were never respected. We were still slaves.

I met with a WCM Council member three times in Perquín. The first was the one year anniversary of the WCM of Jocoaitique. The other two activities were coordinated with PADECOSMS. The WCM of Caimán solicited a project by writing a note to the solidarity worker. We asked her for a store project, a chicken farm project and a vegetable garden project. The solidarity worker told us to apply for many so we would get at least one. We never received any workshops. When I was President I only went to two WCM Council Assembly Meetings and I can't remember what they were about. But that year women became a little freer. Now they go to meetings. Thanks to the WCM Platform, the men had begun to understand a little more about respecting women. The Platform was done between the WCM women and the men's Board of Directors from PADECOSMS. The men had received some workshops on gender theory in Segundo Montes. But the men outside of the Board of Directors were never counseled on these issues. Nevertheless, the four WCM Board members would cater the activities of PADECOSMS.

Even though twenty two women said they wished to participate, only eighteen would show up. We were meeting every fifteen days until May. We would discuss the Platform and projects. But I became ill with rheumatism and I stopped going to the meetings. I've been sick for nine months now. The Caimán WCM disappeared in March. Now that we are Honduran we don't even think about the WCM anymore (laugh).

When we spoke to this woman she was sitting on a wooden stool as children played around the house. She was very clear about not wanting or being able to continue in a women's organization because of the lack of

results, the political situation, and her own illness. We thanked her for her time and continued our walk to the towns which had participated in the Mora Jelly Project: Zancudo and Galera.

d. Zancudo

The walk to Zancudo was a long one up and down steep winding roads. The women and I ate Mora berries that grew wild in the bushes as we approached the town. Zancudo was somehow different from the other places we had visited. It had many soft rolling hills with short grass and a wide open space. When we arrived, there were only men playing soccer, conversing with each other and staring at us silently as we walked by them. We asked one of the teenagers where the President of the WCM (María) lived and he gave us the wrong directions. However, as we walked down the main road we bumped into her and she greeted us in a very friendly manner. She was returning from caring for her brother who had been wounded in a machete fight during a drunken brawl. María told us that she and the women had been expecting us earlier. We explained that we had visited many towns and we were delayed because of lack of appropriate transportation. She asked us to follow her so she could take us where we could sleep.

The sun was going down and a very cold wind was blowing as we entered what used to be an old school. The building was converted into a large warehouse and chicken coop after the Honduran soldiers invaded the town. María started a fire in the hearth with a sliver of recently cut pine that lit the whole room up and sizzled aromatically as the sap began to burn. The women and I huddled near the hearth to protect ourselves from the bitter cold, while she explained that the inhabitants of Zancudo were very suspicious of new comers because many Hondurans had come to investigate



and the Salvadorans feared their repression. Before leaving, she gave us some eggs, cheese curd and black coffee for dinner and breakfast which we very gratefully, almost desperately accepted.

The next morning we let the chickens out and ate the rest of the food María had left us. I had not slept much because of a severe congestion. I was almost sure I had pneumonia. Then Angelita and Gloribel decided they wanted to bathe. We walked down a long and very steep hill to get to a water source with a concrete block that caused the water to puddle up. I put my finger in to test the temperature and I was sure it had frozen. As filthy as I was, I told the women that I would bathe when we reached Perquín. Angelita and Gloribel undressed down to their waists, poured bowl full of freezing water on their bodies and began to hop up and down like frantic rabbits as they shivered and teased me for being a coward and slightly piggish.

When we returned the WCM women were already waiting for us to begin the meeting. María introduced the other five women and told us that it was a difficult time to organize women because they feared Honduran reprisals. The Honduran soldiers were accusing the population of being FMLN guerrilla fighters. María was one of three women in the Bi-National Committee in charge of discussing the arrangements to be done between the Honduran Government and the Salvadoran population of Cueva del Monte, Galera, Carrizal, Sabanetas, Nahuaterique, Zancudo and Los Patios. She was the only WCM representative that was attending those meetings in San Salvador.

During our discussion, she was the only woman to speak. The others merely listened. She told us that the WCM of Zancudo had not been created directly by PADECOSMS. Rather, the CCM President, a Perquín WCM representative and a North American solidarity Worker visited the town,

and offered the women a workshop on how to make jelly out of Mora Berries. The WCM of Zancudo began with twenty five women who were also CCM members. But the women began to leave after one year of work and only ten remained. According to María, the problem resulted from a specific Council member's bad attitude with regards to the women who were working on the jelly project.

At the beginning of the project, the Zancudo, Carrizal and Cueva del Monte women had to take the Mora berries to Perquín for a five day workshop. The solidarity worker helped them buy the cooking implements and gave them 1,700 colones to make the jelly. Eight women were trained. The first year, there were no profits because the jelly was not thick enough and it did not sell well. Money was also lost because of transportation costs. María described the project in the following way:

The first time we were charged twenty colones for transportation. We filled 1,200 jars and we were supposed to earn 1,000 colones. But the project was for the Council and not for the community. The women were paid one colón per pound of berries picked. And the women who cooked the berries were paid fifteen colones a day. The women who were trained in Perquín, trained others. There were about seven cooks and twelve berry pickers. They paid us once a month but not at regular intervals. If the berries were going to rot we would work twelve hours straight. But most of the time we had eight hour shifts. We would alternate groups of women and since I knew the women personally I could remember who worked and who was absent. The Council has records of how much the women were being paid.

The project ended with the end of the of the berry season. but the women left the organization because Deborah [Council member in charge of paying women and of collecting the jelly], was accusing us of stealing the cooking implements. Then she took them all away from us when the project ended. The money from the implements had come from a reforestation project. The solidarity Worker transferred the money to our project. Ten thousand colones were invested in the jelly and only four thousand were recuperated.

María concluded by stating that she was generally satisfied with the WCM but she wished the cooking implements would be returned to them so the women could make a better living. She also hoped the organization would make stronger efforts in teaching the women how to read and write. Gloribel answered that she would suggest to the Council that the pots and pans be returned to Zancudo. Before heading for the next town, María gave us a bag of berries for the trip.

e. Galera

It took us about an hour and a half to get to Galera. We had to leave the roads and climb up mountain trails in order to reach the WCM President's (Lola's) house which was at the bottom of a steep hill filled with Mora berry bushes. I had met Lola earlier in a WCM Council meeting. I recognized her immediately because of her continuous giggling and enormous energy. She was a short dark woman with missing front teeth who would tell you exactly what she thought and would follow what she said with hysterical laughter. I remember being startled repeatedly by her sudden reactions.

When we arrived, Lola was shelling some beans and complained that we were late. She was accompanied by her niece and offered to cook us some bean soup. Angelita asked Lola to give me some background on how the WCM had started in Galera and Lola told me that it had begun with twenty two women. Lola was chosen by the WCM representative and the solidarity worker to become President because of her previous experience in the CCM. Lola was attracted by the offer of the Mora jelly project and she accepted.

According to Lola, the Solidarity Worker and the WCM representative formed a three woman board of directors. One of the women died. When the solidarity worker set a date to form the Secretariats with the other twenty

two women, she never showed up. No one from the Council ever revisited them to finish the Organization formation even though many women were willing to organize. The only workshop the women ever received concerned the jelly project. Nine of the twenty two women would cook while the others picked berries at Lola's house. At the end of the year, Deborah (Council member) took away the cooking implements. All of the women who had worked were from Cueva del Monte and were single. The women were only paid twice. The first time after fifteen days and the last time after five months (my notes, Galera).

Lola stated that the women were angry and five had decided to continue the project even if the Council did not support them. The women from La Joya, Zancudo, Cueva del Monte, and Galera had met a few times, but the ones from La Joya did not want to know about the WCM of Perquín because they argued that the women of La Montaña had organized by themselves. Lola added that the four Boards of Directors from these towns were talking about uniting and forming a new organization. When I asked Lola why they wished to organize as women rather than organizing with the men she said she did not have the faintest idea why they should be separated.

Our stay at Lola's was relatively short because we were hoping to get back to Perquín that day and we still had to visit Cueva del Monte to see how the store project had gone. Unfortunately, when we arrived at the store which was built into the house of the WCM President, there was no one there. Angelita reflected that the President probably left when she found out we were coming so she would not have to face accusations of how badly the store had been run and how she had turned it into her own personal business. Unable to meet with any of the board of directors we headed back down the road and managed to get a ride on a logging truck. We sat on the

top of the log pile and held on to the chains for dear life as the truck swayed from side to side on the gravel and pitted roads that had been carved into the mountain sides. Huge powdery dirt clouds were formed where pine trees used to be as we rode by under the chilly star lit sky. Gloribel, Angelita and I were in complete silence. I could not help but wonder if each one of us was wondering what the other was thinking. Then Angelita asked me "Roxanna, are you praying? You look as if you thought this was going to be your last ride ever". I was forced to hear their laughter most of the way back.

As revealed in the descriptions of the women of each community of La Montaña, not only did the women have the Honduran threat in common, but the origins , structure and duration of the WCM boards of directors were also very similar. Most of them began with approximately twenty two women but by the end of the first year of work the organizations had ceased meeting. The communities with WCM projects were specifically chosen by a solidarity worker and a WCM Council member with the approval of PADECOSMS. There was also a tendency for the boards of directors, especially the Presidents, to be chosen from outside the community and to be given primary supervisory power and control over the productive projects.

Once the Boards were chosen, little to no counseling was given to them about organizational techniques. There was also a lack of effort by the organizers to instill in the women a real and concrete understanding of their need to struggle for a truly just social system that would end their manipulation and subordination. The women's understanding of the purpose of the organization was that it would be a conduit for projects, jobs and funds from international aid agencies and that PADECOSMS wished to have organized women so they could be tapped into more efficiently when women were needed to cater and clean up during social activities.

In general, if the women were given a workshop (which was seldom the case) it had to do directly with the project they would be involved in. The best example was the jelly making workshop. This was the only case where the information learned by the town representatives sent to Perquín, was actually passed on to other Board Members and town women. However, this project was intended to make a profit for the Council and not the community. The laborers in the project were salaried women who were paid irregularly and who later had their implements confiscated when the project was of no more use to the Council.

The patterns just described reveal an organizational structure that was mostly nominal and non functional. There was a strong hierarchical structure with little participation from the Base. The Presidents who were chosen by PADECOSMS or the Council President were the only spokes people for the women. Most of the women would remain silent if they attended at all. The WCM Presidents ended up by assuming the projects and in some cases by appropriating them and turning them into private businesses rather than continuing a strong communal endeavor.

The most striking pattern of all, however, was that rather than being a corruption based on real profit it tended to be one based on power. Neither the Council nor the Boards of Directors, with the exception of Nahuaterique, had any substantial records of the accounts or an idea of the profits or losses of the projects. There was mostly an ambiguous assumption that there were only losses because of the problems they had faced.

When I compared the WCM Boards of La Montaña with those involved with the bean and vegetable gardens mentioned earlier, I found some interesting trends. In neither one of the areas were the Presidents generally elected by the town women. Rather, they tended to be women who

were known by PADECOSMS and AMS to have had a lengthy CCM experience. In both areas the Presidents tended to have most of the control and or responsibility over the productive projects. The Boards of both Zones tended to be relatively weak so that they would fall apart if the President became ill or was chosen to become a Council member. In both areas most women had lost interest in belonging to any kind of an organization especially if it meant being the President or a Board member.

The divergencies between the two Zones, however, were revealed more clearly when I paid closer attention to a common complaint: that the Council members were not visiting the communities and were being absent from meetings which they, themselves had set. It is here that I noticed how the communities with vegetable gardens, which also happened to be closer to Perquín, had stronger projects and boards. In fact, as mentioned earlier, the strongest board was in San Fernando. Not only was it easily accessible by foot or bus because of its relatively short distance from Perquín, but both the Council President and the Council member mostly involved in organizational work lived there. As a result, San Fernando has a vegetable garden, a store set up to make profits for the Council, and there were also plans to make a WCM cafe there. San Fernando had three times as many projects as most other communities with a WCM Board of Directors.

My visits to the communities corroborated and went beyond the Council's evaluation of the state of the WCM organization during the Revision of Goals Meeting. What the visits revealed, which were not as clear during the meetings with the Council, were three things: The strong influence of PADECOSMS in the type of women's organization created and in their duration, the obstacles faced by the Council in being more efficient and useful in helping the different Boards, and the extreme authoritarian

structure within the WCM organization which resulted in an almost immediate demise of the Boards as soon as a Board President was removed or as soon as the Council lost contact with the Community WCMs.

My visits to the communities had already revealed a structural and communication problem between the Boards of Directors and the Council. The Board's intense dependency on the Council for advice, for economic support and for encouragement, and the latter's difficulty in providing for the Boards, made it important to take a closer look at the Council's internal dynamics and the social and structural forces it had to face.



## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE WCM COUNCIL: ITS OBSTACLES AND SOCIAL CONTEXT

When I arrived at the WCM Council building for the first time, the small number of Council members, the large difference in their personal characteristics and the problem that could come as a result became immediately apparent. There were five members and a cook who during most of my field work were reduced to only three members because one was expelled and the other was on maternity leave. By the time I finished my fieldwork, the one on leave had returned creating a total of four and the cook had been expelled. The women's educational level was high school equivalency for the President, sixth grade for the Treasurer, and first grade for the Main Organizer. The three members belonged to three different religious denominations: Catholic (non practicing), Assembly of God (fervent participant), and Seventh Day Adventist (fervent participant). Although I never witnessed any conflicts between the women concerning religious beliefs, I noticed that work days were easily postponed because of religious commitments that would come up.

The Council members were earning six hundred colones a month which they financed with the money donated to them by an agency, and with money they recuperated from selling "mora" jelly and cooking gas. The women generally divided their tasks into board organizing, proposal writing, project

workshops and propaganda geared towards solidarity groups. The organizing of the boards tended to be done by a specific council member, but the President sometimes did it as well. The workshops on productive projects were taught by the Main Organizing member who had received training from FASTRAS. The tasks of writing proposals, looking for organizational affiliations, going to specialized trainings and keeping account of the Organization's savings and salary payments was done by the Treasurer. She was also the member to receive the most workshops in accounting, proposal writing and gender theory because of her own initiative and her interest in advancing as an individual. She encouraged her thirteen year old daughter to attend the gender theory workshops as well. The Treasurer did not pass on any of what she learned to the other Council members and she stated that she was not interested in going to the communities to organize or teach women.

The Council's first workshop on sex education was given by a solidarity worker from Canada in April of 1992. According to one of the women, at that time the WCM would only do whatever the FMLN told it to, and it had to wait for their approval in order to have that specific workshop. All of the original twenty two WCM Council members attended and it was viewed as an achievement. They were taught about their bodies and pregnancy, but methods for family planning were not discussed. According to the women, this prevented them from getting into conflict with their husbands (my notes, training). The following workshop was about the legal rights of women given by representatives of the National University. The rights of women when they are left by their husbands were discussed. There were representatives from PADECOSMS, CEBES, the FMLN and the WCM. Few WCM Council members attended because they were not coordinated well. The WCM President stated that at that time there was a lot of wife beating

going on and the WCM gave talks in all the communities which helped to ameliorate the situation.

The third workshop was given by a PADECOSMS accountant. Ten WCM Board women and only two Council members showed up. The President stated that up until that moment the lessons learned there had not been put into practice. Another Council member added that it was the first time that PADECOSMS helped them with something.

The fourth workshop was on typing and it began in August of 1992. The WCM typewriters (six) were donated by solidarity members from Sommersville, U.S.A. and the rest belonged to PADECOSMS and CEBES. PADECOSMS also contributed the instructor. Plans were made with PADECOSMS to coordinate so that members from the different cooperatives, CEBES, PADECOSMS, and WCM could participate. Five representatives of each organization were supposed to attend, including five from the FMLN. However, the WCM Council members expressed their annoyance at the fact that in the News letter from PADECOES ( Patronage For The Development of Communities of El Salvador ), the workshop was referred to as a project of PADECOSMS and the WCM was only mentioned as a recipient of the services, even though it was actually a coordinated effort between three organizations. The women added that the only ones to benefit from the workshop had been the FMLN combatants because CEBES and the WCM had lacked interest in it since the women felt that the three months of training were too long a period to be studying without earning any money .

The fifth workshop was about proposal writing and it was given by the United Nations. Each organization had to support its representative by paying for that person's food and transportation costs. The WCM Treasurer attended and as a result was able to apply for projects and funding from

international agencies.

The Main Community Organizer of the Council took advantage of the workshops offered by FASTRAS in appropriated technology which included the following topics: training on seed planning, training on growing soy beans, training on the creation of natural insecticides, and training on organic fertilizers. The Council members stated that PADECOSMS had not informed the women that FASTRAS was offering these workshops. Therefore, the WCM's main organizer spoke to the FASTRAS representatives and asked to be given a female technician that would work with the WCM as a separate organization instead of going through PADECOSMS.

Three more workshops were attended by the WCM. The first, which was never completed, was on serigraphy. The second was a workshop on human rights and the third on child care centers. The last two were attended by one Council representative who never passed on the information to the other members.

During the six months I was there, the Council offered workshops on the creation of wreaths and piñatas to the community women. The WCM also offered typing lessons in conjunction with PADECOSMS. However, most of the women who attended the workshops did not belong to any of the community WCMs and they only made contact with the organization when crafts workshops were offered. The workshops were never accompanied with any training in accounting or business administration. Therefore, they remained at a mostly recreational level rather than at a productive one.

According to the women, all of the WCM's contacts with international funding agencies were achieved through the North American solidarity worker who helped organize the WCM women in the different communities and who helped write the Platform. It was thanks to her that they were able

to visit Mexico for the Encounter of Women of the Americas sponsored by the Roman Catholic group (GRIAL), and to make contact with the DIGNAS. The most direct beneficiary of the new coordination between the WCM and the DIGNAS, however, appeared to be the WCM Treasurer who traveled often to San Salvador to meet with them and to participate in the workshops they offered.

The DIGNAS helped sponsor the WCM's trip to Nicaragua on April of 1992, where the Treasurer and another Council member attended the Central American Women's Encounter. The WCM paid the food and transportation costs to San Salvador and the DIGNAS paid their tickets to Nicaragua and their living expenses during the meeting. As stated in my review of the women's organizations, the DIGNAS had a reputation of being radical feminists and FMLN separatists who wished to engage in open conflict with men. They also represented the Women's Coordinator (WC) which was the main rival of the Women's Organization Coordinator (COM)—the umbrella organization representative of the FMLN affiliated women's groups.

The WCM - DIGNAS coordination inevitably caused tensions with PADECOSMS and the AMS who were strong supporters of the FMLN. As the WCM was offered more support and opportunities by the DIGNAS, its relationship to PADECOSMS weakened and became increasingly stressful. The WCM Council had complained to me that they felt neglected and looked down upon by the AMS. They claimed they had never been to its office and were rarely invited to their activities so when the Council had to visit San Salvador they would stay with the DIGNAS. They added that the DIGNAS gave them names of funding agencies so the WCM could submit projects, while the AMS "lost" a project which the WCM submitted through them. Some of the Council women expressed the opinion that the AMS was

completely dominated by the Party and as a result, had the least resources of all the FMLN affiliated women's organizations. They also argued that their current relationship with AMS was too limiting.

On November 27, 1992, a WCM Council Assembly Meeting took place with a PADECOSMS female representative and three AMS representatives present to discuss their mutual relationship, the legalization and restructuring of the organizations, and to elect the new members of the WCM Council. Before the meeting there had been an atmosphere of tension at the WCM. The WCM Council had already expressed resentment towards the AMS representative's visits every fifteen days to keep an eye on them, and towards PADECOSMS who according to them had treated them unfairly. They stated that PADECOSMS, FASTERAS and the FMLN had used money from some of their projects without informing them or asking them for permission. The WCM found out about this when the agencies wrote to them asking them for a report on the progress of projects that the women had no knowledge of. The women also accused PADECOSMS of neglecting them, while at the same time trying to control all their actions.

For example, the Council argued that PADECOSMS had a pick up truck and chauffeurs which were not made accessible to the WCM when they needed to visit communities or organize women. PADECOSMS did not coordinate its activities with the WCM, causing schedule conflicts and preventing the women from attending needed workshops in organizational techniques, accounting and production. However, they stated that it was the first to criticize the women for their lack of social base. The women tended to be called upon only when political support was needed in marches, or when there was a need for domestic services in social activities (my notes, Council).

Regardless of these tensions, before the meeting there were friendly chats between the members of the three organizations and there was no talk of conflict. The meeting began with twelve WCM representatives including the four Council members, three AMS members (The President, Vice-President, and the Legal advisor), and the PADECOSMS representative.

The WCM President welcomed everybody and made the appropriate introductions, then the PADECOSMS representative gave a presentation describing the current situation of the WCM as she saw it. She stated that the WCM had lost contact with its base, that it was disorganized, that it began projects for the sake of having projects without evaluating the actual needs of the women and without having the necessary skills to carry them out. She argued that it was possible that the reasons for this were that the Council members were too few and that they were overworked. She added that the small attendance at the meeting would prevent a democratic election of the Council members from taking place at that time. Nevertheless, she told the women that there could be a provisional election until a more representative meeting could be called.

Following this introduction, the AMS Legal Advisor explained that after the Peace Accords the Government agreed to legalize all non governmental organizations that existed during the Revolution if they filed for legalization by a specified date. Those organizations that did not become legal entities would disappear because they would not be able to solicit funds from international agencies.

After the explanation of the positions and responsibilities of the members in the new organizational structure, the WCM President wrote the positions that had to be filled out and next to them, she wrote the names of the nominees. The latter had been pre-chosen by the Council members and

the representative of PADECOSMS. The nominees for the positions of President, treasurer and Secretary were the current WCM Council members with the exception that two of the members had swapped positions. The WCM Board representatives from the communities were asked if they all agreed and there was a momentary silence until a representative from La Montaña said she felt that it was "all right". Then other women nodded their heads in affirmation.

Following the "acceptance" of the nominations, the President of the AMS spoke and apologized for their lack of coordination with the WCM, and stated that from then on they were going to have a much closer relationship. She clarified, however, that they were not there to take the WCM by the hand because the AMS was also in a process of transition and growth. The AMS President added that they had not sent Gloribel to control the WCM, but to help them because she was a historic organizing figure in Morazán. She also told the WCM that the AMS would be willing to lend them a health worker once a month to help them if needed. At this point the faces of the WCM President and Treasurer tensed up as they stared at the speaker.

The health worker that had been referred to was originally supposed to work for the WCM in order to start a women's clinic, but had somehow been derailed and coopted by the AMS. PADECOSMS had asked the WCM to join the women's clinic with the already existing PADECOSMS general clinic so money would not be wasted in the construction of another building, and the funding could be better utilized for medication and instruments. However, the Council was not convinced by the argument and feared PADECOSMS would try to control the funds and the clinic, leaving women's health problems unattended and taking complete credit for the effort.



After listening to the AMS President's offer, the WCM President asked the name of this health worker they were willing to lend. It turned out to be the same person the WCM had been expecting. The WCM President decided that instead of dealing with that issue during the meeting, she would answer the other remarks first. The following excerpt is a verbatim quote of the interaction between the two organization Presidents, the WCM treasurer and the PADECOSMS representative:

**WCM P.** - We are peasants. We have not had a very clear development, but we have achieved some things. We have decided that we have to define with which organizations we will relate. In this Zone it is necessary to coordinate with different women's organizations and other groups like PADECOSMS and the Party. When we were supposedly closely related to the AMS we were actually more distanced. Gloribel would visit us because she is from this Zone. The other AMS members wouldn't. So far the relationship looks good, and maybe it will get better.

**AMS P.** - Our previous structure did not let us assume our responsibilities before.

**Treasurer-** If the struggle is for our own interests as women, it does not mean that this prevents us from having an allegiance to the Party. It's that as women we want autonomy. What Blanqui [WCM P.] meant was that we have to define in a concrete way who we are going to coordinate with.

**AMS P.** - You have to be very careful with that stuff because when you are not well defined as to what you want, you grab whatever is available.

**PADECOSMS-** We have to think about mutual benefits, not only economic benefits. PADECOSMS can no longer give economic support to all the organizations. You must ask the Base to support its directors because it knows that it's for the good of all and not just for the benefit of the directors.

There was complete silence at the end of this interaction and no one seemed convinced that having the Base support its directors was a good idea, especially after what had been revealed in the WCM community visits to La Montaña. In order to break the silence, Gloribel created some guessing games

and exercises followed by her petition for an applause because the meeting had gone so well.

Once the meeting concluded, the AMS women grabbed the first ride they could get a hold of back to San Salvador. Only Gloribel stayed overnight. The AMS did not return to continue counseling the WCM on its legalization before my departure. Similarly to the first WCM Assembly Meeting mentioned in this thesis, most of the participation was done by the PADECOSMS and AMS representatives. The WCM women were evaluated and told how things should be done in the future by outsiders. This meeting revealed a growing rebellion of the WCM towards the other two organizations, and its increased independence, if contrasted to the first Assembly Meeting. However, it also revealed a willingness on the part of the Council to go along with organizational methods that went against the revolutionary ideals of participatory democracy. I asked the WCM President why the women had not been given the chance to nominate candidates for the Council during the meeting and she responded that it was "not good to have too much democracy because incompetent people could get elected".

There was also a divisive competition and manipulation between the two women's organizations which, ironically, were affiliated to the same FMLN party and which, according to their own propaganda, were struggling for the rights of women. However, it was precisely their commonalty in allegiance to the Party and to PADECOSMS, and the power of decision making that they were giving to these organizations that allowed the latter to control and allot benefits differentially among the women's organizations. This caused competition, resentment and division in the women's movement as a whole. A case in point was the health worker being fought over by the WCM and the AMS and the clinic contention between WCM and

**PADECOSMS.**

For example, the health worker finally arrived and made arrangements to help both organizations, but she spent most of her time working with the AMS and enjoyed the approval of PADECOSMS. Also, when PADECOSMS began workshops on the training of paramedics and health technicians it neglected to invite the WCM to participate and nullified their efforts to get involved, causing increased conflict between the two organizations. The WCM Council retaliated by publicly accompanying the DIGNAS when they visited Perquín, revealing a more obvious rebellion on their part. Finally, the Main Council Community Organizer was talking about quitting because of the internal problems of the Council which I will describe shortly. She was considering an offer made by PADECOSMS to join their office. This reveals another attempt by the latter to control and affect the survival of a women's organization that was becoming too independent and was already on its "last legs". At the time, the WCM Council member did not want to accept because she said the women who worked for PADECOSMS only had the men's interest in mind.

The Council's problems referred to by the Main Organizer entailed the actual distribution of tasks, the maintenance of records, and the internal power struggles. At the organizational level of the Council, the members would have weekly meetings to discuss the monthly agenda which they would jot down on a calendar posted in the main meeting room. However, the members had problems in carrying out their program for various reasons. At times they would forget to read the calendar or sudden meetings with PADECOSMS would come up causing conflict with their own. Since there was only one key to the meeting room the members would sometimes forget to return it, leaving the room and the materials needed for the community

visits inaccessible to the others. At other times, the woman in charge of a particular activity would decide not to go at the last minute because she would give priority to a church event, she would be too tired and unmotivated to travel to the communities by foot or bus, or she was not allowed to go by her husband.

The Council also had problems keeping records of their accounts, of project profits and losses, and even of the agencies that supported them. The latter became especially harmful to the Organization as the Council did not report their progress to the international agencies on a timely basis. The extended visits of foreigners who wished to lend the WCM support were also problematic because they became aware of the contradictions between what was being reported internationally about the strength of the popular women's organizations of Morazán, and what was actually happening.

For example, on the return from one of my trips to the communities, I met a foreign woman who was visiting the WCM, and offered to help them with their accounts of the San Fernando store. In most areas they were earning money, but in other areas they were selling the products for less than they bought them. The foreigner also learned that the WCM had never done accounts on the Mora Jelly during the two years of its existence so they had no idea whether they had earned or lost money. The foreigner became frustrated and stated that the women had an attitude of "doing things whenever". On one occasion, she went to the store with two WCM women to do an inventory. However, when the bus was about to leave the women decided they were not going to work any longer that day. Meanwhile, the foreigner told them it had to get done then because they had a dead line and needed to write a report to the agency that funded the store. The women left and the foreigner finished the inventory by herself and then walked back to Perquín.

Another example, of a frustrated foreigner was one who tried to give them some lessons in simple math and inventory making so they could better manage their store. All the Council women and the store attendant showed up the morning of the first day, but began disappearing after lunch. The remaining days of the workshop were scarcely attended by the women, and were finally canceled because of lack of interest. In the actual writing of reports the women asked the foreigners to do it for them and even depended on them to make banners for marches having to do with women's issues.

The internal conflicts of the Council were also quite detrimental to the Organization. They tended to be sparked by accusations that a member was not doing her job, by snide remarks, or harmful rumors. The resolutions tended to be very slow and indirect. For the most part one woman would tell another, and the information would keep passing from individual to individual without an actual encounter with the person who was supposedly causing the problem. When I asked why they did not meet as a Council to arrive at a solution, they would claim they were about to, but never get around to it, or they would argue that for a meeting to occur, all the Council members (three) had to be present, which was often not the case.

Many conflicts tended to end explosively where the women would try to discredit each other. In the more extreme cases this could result in the expulsion and replacement of a member by the Council, or in the voluntary withdrawal of the woman because she was tired of the tension, conflict and gossip. The three essential sources of power revealed in the Council were based on the control over the accounts and project proposals, the presidential status, and the strength of allegiance to PADECOSMS. The stated allegiance to the latter depended on the circumstances.

Three concrete examples of expulsion from the WCM involve the first Council President, a Council member (Carolina), and the cook. According to my interviews, the first Council President was accused of engaging in promiscuous behavior by the current Council President. The former was forced to withdraw by PADECOSMS who, in turn, had a strong influence in the election of the current President. In the second case, Carolina (a council member) was accused of neglecting her work and giving priority to an amorous affair. The Council members expressed their fear that Carolina's behavior was increasing the WCM's already tarnished image because it was feeding the many baseless rumors that the women were running a prostitution service there. For example, Carolina's lover was heard gloating that he could meet with her on the third floor without "the old hags downstairs realizing it".

Carolina was spoken to several times by the President and she was warned to correct her behavior and to be more responsible towards her work. According to the President, Carolina's lover (an FMLN combatant) was also spoken to, and he denied he had anything to do with her. Carolina became incensed at the President's intrusion and reprimands, and she rebelled, telling the latter to mind her own business. The President reacted by speaking to the Treasurer so that she would help pressure the Main Organizer into agreeing to dismiss Carolina for her disrespect .

The third case was that of the cook (Carmen), who according to her, had a spat with the Treasurer. The treasurer later convinced the other women that the cook was not doing a good job and that anyhow, the Council did not have enough money to continue paying her salary. Carmen was dismissed even though there was no longer the expense of Carolina's salary and Carmen's was only a third of hers.

The person who had made the sales in the Council Building, at least until November, was generally Carmen, who was paid three hundred colones a month (approximately forty three dollars). She was not involved in any of the WCM meetings because, according to her, she was never invited and she did not have enough time. Her responsibilities were to clean up the premises, cook lunch for the Council and prepare meals for the women when there were assembly meetings. Even though she had no schooling, had limited counting knowledge, knew very little math and could not read, she was the one to make most of the WCM sales from the office. She was the only one to be there all day every day. She lived on the premises with her children and her husband (common law marriage).

Carmen informed me that the WCM had closed its kitchen. The President had proposed to her that she could become a cook at the new cafe which the Council was planning on setting up in San Fernando. Carmen answered that she could only agree if she was paid more and was allowed to feed her four children from the food of the cafe. She was worried that if the food did not sell well, she was going to be accused of stealing money and food. The Council did not agree to her requests, it discontinued her salary, it stopped bringing food for the office kitchen, and it hired the Treasurer's sister (paying her five hundred colones) to cook and clean when necessary. The latter did not have children, she seldom showed up for work and when she did, she would mostly rest and leave early. However, she did receive her salary on a timely basis.

As a result of her expulsion, Carmen was forced to depend economically on her husband so she and her kids could eat. Her husband was given a job by the FMLN to administer a small cafe near a museum of the Revolution that was being inaugurated, and Carmen was asked to cook there.

However, the job was commission based and her husband would only earn according to whatever was sold making their economic situation unstable. Her husband was known to be very controlling, and I witnessed how he did not even want her to learn how to read. When I offered to teach her myself, he answered that he would teach her, but first he needed to give her a test to see if she was intelligent enough to learn. He had no schooling, but he had learned how to read during the war thanks to the FMLN's efforts to have more knowledgeable combatants teach their comrades in arms.

Even though the WCM Council made the final decision over which members, would remain and which would be expelled (rather than having an Assembly Meeting so the Base could decide) PADECOSMS had a strong effect on the relative difficulty of the implementation of such a decision. For example, the female representative of PADECOSMS had several talks with the WCM President asking her to reconsider Carolina's case and re-hire her. According to the WCM President, the Representative's reasons were that Carolina was a single mother who needed to work, and needed a second chance to gain more control over her life and to improve herself. "Anyhow", the PADECOSMS Representative stated, "its not like she was fooling around with just any one, he's a combatant". The WCM President answered that she did not care if it was Joaquín Villalobos himself (FMLN Commander) and that just as PADECOSMS had forced the previous President out because of alleged "unbecoming behavior", the WCM had the right to do the same thing (my notes, President.).

Interestingly, however, PADECOSMS did not take the same interest in the WCM's cook, even though she had four children to feed, she had a longer and more constant work schedule than the other women of the Council, and had been paid a much lower salary than them. A better understanding of



PADECOSMS' view and treatment of the cooks is revealed in the following interview with one of the cooks of the PADECOSMS public "comedor" .

The comedor opened in March of last year. At first the work was really hard because we didn't have experience. At home we would only have to cook for eight to ten people. But in the comedor we have to work all day. At first the cooks earned three hundred colones a month when they were cooking only for the PADECOSMS technicians. But when the comedor opened they began paying us four hundred colones. Our administrator (female cook), told the PADECOSMS director that she did not agree that four hundred colones was enough. He responded that PADECOSMS would have a meeting to discuss it, but it wasn't until last month [November] that they gave us a one hundred colón raise. They also told us that if the comedor made more profit they would raise our salaries to six hundred colones.

In may they told us they were going to give us two days off, but they didn't even give us Mother's Day free. They became angry with us because we decided to take half a day off. We were told that if we didn't work the foreigners would not have a place to eat. But the Spanish women told us that they could easily find food elsewhere. We have not had any vacations since the comedor opened . They only took us to the beach one day after Easter. We had asked to go on Easter but they said no.

Yesterday we were told by the PADECOSMS representative in charge of over looking the comedor, that every week end one of us would get a day off. But ever since we've had a new administrator in the comedor we haven't had any days off. Since we are five cooks we are supposed to get one free day a month each. The PADECOSMS representative also told us that he wanted us to open the comedor at 5:00 a.m. and to close it at 8:30 p.m. Right now we open at 6:00 and we close at 7:30 p.m. But imagine the work! We have to go home, wash clothing, clean our houses and grind the corn for breakfast after we leave the comedor. We are very tired. I don't think we should have to make such a sacrifice.

They also told us that if we need to see a doctor we have to pay whoever replaces us out of our own salary. How are we going to pay someone with our own money if we don't even have enough to buy the medicines? We don't even get paid when we are sick. It's too much to ask us to pay someone from our salary when they are only paying us five hundred colones a month. We are going to give them our opinion about these arrangements the next time PADECOSMS calls a meeting.

They've told us we have to treat our customers better and vary the food more. How are we going to vary the food if they don't get us the ingredients we need? We don't have a freezer so we can't keep meat for very long and its also difficult to get tomatoes and other vegetables. It's true that sometimes we don't pay enough attention to the customers, but that happens when we are eating or when we need to sit down for a while because we've been working all day and all week.

We found out that our administrator is being paid six hundred colones a month for sitting around. But we, who are working all day in front of a hot stove, are only getting paid five hundred. I don't agree with this situation and I'll never agree with it. If this is going to be how we are treated then why did we fight this war? Why have we struggled so hard if we've ended up where we started from?

This interview with the PADECOSMS cook is of extreme importance in clarifying the real value that was given to women , not only during the war but after it as well. As we recall, women were heralded by researchers and by FMLN members as having achieved an equal place and value with men. They argued that a majority of female combatants were asked to cook because they were more efficient at it than the men, and not because they were devalued. However, the treatment of the PADECOSMS and WCM cooks reveals a stark and continuing devaluation, not only by men, but by the women they chose to direct the organizations as well. The interviews demonstrate that the cooks were treated as menial laborers who deserved only enough remuneration and consideration to keep them healthy enough to produce. An administrator, who spent a large amount of time doing nothing, was regarded as more worthy of a higher pay.

The women were subordinated to such an extent that the cook, even in her anger and realization of the injustice of the situation, was not going to protest until PADECOSMS decided to call a meeting. This reaction was similar to that of the WCM's cook who never gathered the courage to demand a meeting with all the Council members to defend her case. It also

reminds me of the WCM Council's reaction to their isolation by PADECOSMS. The Council President would often state that even if they knew that PADECOSMS was having a meeting or workshop which was important for women, they would not go if they were not invited. Her reason was that they should not go where they are not wanted. As an example of the way women are sometimes treated in the meetings, the President told me of a case where one of the WCM members had a difference of opinion from that of the men. When the woman expressed herself, one of the men screamed "Shut up you old gossiping hag!, What do you know of these things?". This incident represents a strong submission on the part of the women resulting from the restrictions and devaluations imposed by a more powerful gender biased male sector.

The WCM's Board organization and neglect problems revealed in chapter six, as well as the internal problems of the Council portrayed in this section would lead almost anyone, to believe, as it has already done with the women themselves, that peasant women are incapable of having a productive, democratic and well structured organization. The immediate impression is one of chaos and corruption with plenty of empty, but heartening rhetoric.

However, all through this thesis there have been many subtle patterns of external forces that have limited the popular women's organizations throughout their history in El Salvador and Morazán more specifically. These patterns which were less visible in the previous chapters, and which mostly revealed themselves in rhetorical contradictions, appeared in this last section as concrete forces which severely limit the structural and ideological development of the women's organizations.

The women's Council was actually reproducing the techniques it had in fact learned by the organization that created and continued to "guide" them. Just as PADECOSMS had chosen many of the Presidents and WCM Board of Directors of the different communities while it advocated techniques of participatory democracy, so did the Council elect those women who it felt would be more beneficial for its individual needs, rather than giving the base a chance to really participate in the election. In the same way as PADECOSMS organized the women to satisfy the demands of international agencies, and its own needs for domestic workers and political protesters, the WCM Council organized several projects that were mostly intended for the salary of the Council members which were otherwise labeled "administration fees" and neglected those who it was supposed to represent. Just as PADECOSMS never had a true understanding or interest in women's issues when it organized the WCM with the help of the FMLN affiliated AMS and CCM, the WCM Council also lacked a profound understanding of the injustice towards women and of the ideological and structural forces which manipulate them.

The result was that the women who had been put in positions of power by PADECOSMS, and who had participated, at least at the rhetorical level in gender theory workshops, were able to learn enough to rebel up to a point as individuals and to take advantage of the benefits which were being made available to them. The pattern of Board and Council Presidents and Treasurers who ended up with the sole control of the productive projects or workshops was dramatic. These individuals emerged with a sense that individual power for women was possible through the control, representation, and manipulation of those with a lower self esteem and fewer resources. As we recall, the members of the social base rarely spoke at the meetings. Rather, their Presidents did all the talking. Similarly, in the face of

a more powerful organization such as PADECOSMS or the AMS, the WCM Council participated little in comparison during their own Assembly Meetings.

The evidence reveals that women were told about democracy, but they were never taught democracy. They were instructed in an authoritarian and centralized regime which attempted to portray an image that it could not substantiate and which, in turn, was reinforced by the authoritarian structure of the family and of male-female relationships where the man made the decisions. Cases in point are those of Carolina and of women whose husbands did not allow them to attend meetings. The WCM Council and Board Presidents never internalized or truly believed that women have an equal value to that of men. Their experience with PADECOSMS did not demonstrate this, and neither did their experience with their own husbands who continued to dominate and in some cases abuse them. Therefore, the women were incapable of passing on to their "social base" what they did not themselves experience to be true.

In trying to understand how such seemingly powerful lessons as those revealed in the courses on gender theory, and monetarily supported by international agencies could fall so short of actually being practiced, I attempted to find out what institutions were competing for the women's time and affecting their understanding of themselves. I found that the traditional view of women was perpetuated in very subtle ways through the most socially powerful institutions: the church and the school.

Even though I originally had little interest in getting into the women's religious practices, I was continuously confronted with the fact that the Council members' particular denominations were of utmost importance in their lives and acted as strict behavioral guides. Having known the

incredible influence of Liberation Theology in supporting and strengthening the revolutionary struggle because of its advocacy for the poor, and recalling Golden's insistence that it was this which inspired the sense of community in the women who were the first to organize, it became important to interview the priest who had walked side by side with the combatants during the Revolution and who still remained to give them hope and comfort. This priest was also the Director of CEBES and helped organize the CCM. One of the members of the CCM mentioned that when the Party asked that the WCM be formed, he instructed the CCM women to participate in the effort even though the latter felt this would cause confusion and division between the organized women (my notes, CCM). The following excerpt is part of an interview which dealt with this priest's ideal view of the place of women in society.

**I noticed that most of the Congregation in Last Sunday's Mass was made up of women. There were only two men. Why is that?**

It's a phenomenon of Latin America that has to do with "machismo. It's the idea that religion is for women. This does not mean that men don't believe in God, but religious practices don't reach them. Men also have a need for religious signs and symbols, but we need to work harder on them and to create a new liturgy that will allow them to enter.

**Did you have any experience during the war with female combatants who had conflicts about having an abortion because of religious beliefs?**

I have some experience of female combatants who really rebelled against aborting a child because of religious reasons. But, I can't say they were many... The other thing is that the life and death of a child were not considered to be anything out of this world . . . . It wasn't a tragedy, it was seen as something natural. Here, when a child is born it doesn't cause extreme joy, it is humble and simple. When I had to tell people that their child had fallen in combat, I was always very worried, but my experience revealed

that I was always the most affected.

I think that the Party did pressure the women to abort. Well, [the women] didn't consider this to be a triumph or a defeat. "Since we've had one we can have another" they thought. I think that the commanding officers abused their authority a little. They didn't order the women to abort, but it was like an order. I spoke to them about it, but very little. It wasn't a confrontation. It was about understanding a point of view where one cannot apply the Catholic morals as one could in another situation.

**Have you created any church sponsored programs dealing with family integration and interpersonal stability?**

The situation of having children out of wedlock is an evil that existed before the war. It always surprised me when a man would tell me "My wife has two [children] and I have four over there" . . . . As Christians, our message now has to be much broader. It cannot be reduced to our commitment to the [revolutionary cause]. In that sense a course about interpersonal responsibilities is going to be part of our 1993 program.

**How do you feel about women becoming Catholic priests?**

In theory I'm convinced that a woman cannot be denied any position. There are no theological arguments to deny her this. Jesus was a man, but this is not the most fundamental thing. However, it is important to evaluate this carefully. Today a woman is a lot freer to participate. She is not absorbed by the structure of the Church. We need women who will promote the parish, not women who will be tied to the requirements of the Church. When they jump the walls of the convent they are heroic! We [men] are timid in comparison. We don't have as much ease to introduce ourselves in other people's homes as they do. I'm not against women becoming priests, but I think it's better if women don't tie themselves down. It's better if they become integrated with the community and that they be given the appropriate value.

To give a woman value is not to make her a priest, but to foster her role in the community. I feel that there is deviation in these feminist movements. I'm afraid of these women. They make an analysis that they are the most marginalized and despised. It's not the content that bothers me, it's the aggressive tone that they use to badger men rather than society. Frankly, I am more moved by a kind woman with all her beauty, than by a

woman who screams.

**Have you noticed any changes in women thanks to their participation in the war?**

The war has been very positive for women. The woman used to be tied to the grinding stone and to her children. She has freed herself from those ties and has been able to participate in community life. She also became aware of her abilities in public speaking, leadership, and organization. But if they are liberated at a moral level in the sense that everything is OK, they are going down the wrong path. A woman's true responsibility is not to "mess around" with many, but to have her dignity respected.

**How does this logic apply to men?**

You can never change everything at once because you create an exaggerated feeling of guilt if you tell a man "you can only have one woman" when he already has three. You have to give him a chance. It has to be presented as an ideal without justifying the other. A priest must advise people to correct their sins without condemning them. You have to take the social context in mind and lead the people towards a goal.

**How would you counsel a woman who has an unfaithful husband and is being physically abused by him?**

First we must listen. Then we have to explain that to have more than one partner is a sign of disrespect. We also have to explain that this problem is the product of the social circumstances. It must be defined as incorrect without insisting that she break up her marriage because it is part of a common cultural pattern. I'm not saying that she should allow herself to be hit. I think that from a moral standpoint, the couple should remain united. But if she is mistreated, it is her duty to separate from her husband. But, I would advise a temporary separation because one begins to give greater value to what he no longer has.

This priest's evaluation of the situation of women allows for a better understanding of the continuing ambivalence of women to take a stand for themselves. He stated that, theoretically, there are no theological arguments to deny a woman equality with men. However, in practice he justified his



preference for women not to become priests by arguing that women supposedly had more ability in dealing with the community and should not waste their talent by tying themselves to a hierarchical position in the Church. This, however, was all right for the men to do. His fear of feminists and preference for women who reveal their beauty and do not scream, and his advise that women who are not respected by their husbands should give them a chance and understand that the causes of this behavior are social and cultural, perpetuate the nurturing, submissive and sacrificial role which has traditionally been expected of women. The priest was worried about causing an exaggerated feeling of guilt in the men, but he did not seem to be as strongly concerned with the emotional and physical pain of an abused woman, or in the incapacitation which this pain would cause her. As I understand it, his reasoning was that these are cultural and social patterns that both men and women are used to, and should only be changed slowly in order to maintain as much social "harmony" as possible. Ironically, his statement that "this problem is the product of the social circumstances" removes moral and ethical responsibility from the individual and places it on culture and society, although he, himself, had participated in active efforts to correct other social injustices during the war.

In this context, his assessment that women had freed themselves from their traditional social burden thanks to their participation in the war, is weakened. The women's new abilities in public speaking, leadership and organization continued to be subordinated to the needs of the male power holders and decision makers. The Priest's conception of the reaction of women to the death of their children was also very illuminating. Since he observed that they would take the news quietly, rather than screaming hysterically, he assumed that it was seen as something natural and which

they interpreted as a situation which was resolvable because they could have another child.

I cannot claim to have this Priest's extensive experience in dealing with the Salvadorans when they received the news that their children had fallen in battle, had perished because they were mercilessly tortured, or had died from starvation and disease as the families fled the military's persecution. However, my interviews with women who lost their children, and my observations of the nurturing treatment given to children leads me to believe that the death of a child was not felt so indifferently. Rather, I wonder if the mothers' stoic appearance was a result of their feeling of impotence in the face of a savage and chaotic situation. I also wonder if the Priest's evaluation of their reactions reveals a more profound inability to understand what women feel and experience. I do not agree that a repetitive event is automatically seen as natural, especially when it has to do with destruction of one's own.

The Priest's justification of his reluctance to confront the Commanders who pressured female combatants to abort, reveals an attempt to justify his submission by blaming the circumstances. The Priest admitted that even though he felt they had abused their authority, he did not intervene, he only tried to understand their point of view. This fear of "rocking the boat" was passed on from the most powerful institutions to the most marginalized individuals: from FMLN to the Church, to the Catholic organized religious groups, to the popular organizations, to the population and its women.

For the other two Evangelical religions represented in the WCM Council, I was not able to interview the highest representatives before my departure. However, I spoke to an ex-WCM woman who before the war had held a position of the upper hierarchy within the Seventh Day

Adventist church. I also visited a vigil of the Assembly of God Church and spoke to one of its female members.

The woman who had been a member of the Seventh Day Adventist Church, had also participated in the three women's organizations of Morazán (CCM, AMS, WCM), she had been very active in protests and in organizing the women, and she argued that her main interest had always been the advancement of women. I asked her to tell me a little about women's participation in the Adventist Church, and about the Church's view of the Revolution. The following excerpt reveals this woman's conflict in deciding whether to remain faithful to her Church or to struggle for a social cause she believed in.

In the Adventist Church women participated in almost all the levels except the highest which is the Elder's. There has never been a female Elder. If a woman is pregnant or is having her menstruation she cannot preach at the altar because she is thought to be impure. The members of the Assembly of God Church also believe this because it is written in the Bible. I have never thought too much about the role of women within the hierarchy of the Church. But I think it is very important to see what it is. The problem is that even if we have the ability to be in the hierarchy, we don't have the necessary development. Women are never given the opportunity to advance in this society. We are only taught that we are supposed to have children and to tend to our husbands.

The Bible doesn't say that women have limits, but no one gives importance to this aspect of the Bible. The Adventists do not allow political topics to enter the Church. There are limits in the way the Bible is studied. In the Catholic Church Jesus is seen as a political figure, but this is not so in the Adventist Church. Jesus was a conformist. They did whatever they wanted to him and he let them do it. Christianity should also be conformist. The Bible says that he who does not humble himself like a child will not enter the Kingdom of God. I participated in the war and in political meetings because I was clearly not faithful to God. The Bible says that no one can serve two masters. It must be one or the other. I decided to leave my Church because I did not want to contaminate it with political

issues.

Before I used to tell people that we had to struggle for political changes, but I think this is going to be difficult. I'm going to return to my Church because one has more problems when [she] lacks religious principles. In times of war, I only accomplished criticism and disagreements with the communities. In this town there are people who are my enemies. From 1987 until now, I feel I have not accomplished anything. I lost the benefits I had within my Church, and I lost the opportunity to educate my children. I lost the formality of being a Christian.

When I was an Evangelical, I was tested many times by the Lord, but he also granted me miracles. He would resolve my problems. In 1982, my son had leukemia, but with a pill and a prayer he was cured without the treatment of a doctor. However, two years ago my oldest daughter also became ill with leukemia. she was seen by many doctors who told me "Buy a coffin and whatever else she will need". I had faith, but I was not one to kneel down. She died because I was more involved in politics than in the Church. I think it was a test.

I feel a lot has been achieved in the war, but not in terms of the economic situation. Personally, I don't think these achievements have been sufficient. It's not worth it to lose your life. If we were to evaluate the changes that have been achieved, they are not many and it's more convenient to return to the Church. However, it's true that if everybody became an Evangelical at this moment, our twelve year struggle would have been in vain because we would have remained with our arms crossed. But, personally I am going to return to Church. Let others continue the struggle.

The interview with this woman reveals a stronger presence and more direct pattern of subordination through guilt in the Adventist Church as compared to those revealed by the Catholic Priest. In the Adventist and Assembly of God Churches women were thought to be impure precisely when they were in a state relevant or conducive or to the creation of life which is considered by most religions to be God's greatest gift. Even though this woman had participated in three women's organizations, she had never thought about the role of women in the Church. She had a strong internal struggle between her religious beliefs of conformity, and her conviction that

to achieve social justice, political action was needed. The guilt resulting from her religious indoctrination led her to assume the blame for the death of her daughter and to acquire a self image of unworthiness before the Being which she admired and loved the most: God. The conflicts and gossip she faced as a female organizer strengthened her low self image and led her to believe that all the efforts and sacrifices she had made during twelve years of war were of little worth.

The woman I interviewed from the Assembly of God Church was fifteen years old and was intent on converting me and my Australian friend (Christina) to her religion. She kept deviating the conversation away from women and into the need to fear God and humble ourselves before Him. This young person was extremely articulate and had plenty of experience preaching before her Congregation. When we met with her, she was tending her mother's comedor and blatantly ignored three customers for the sake of trying to get my friend and me to repent and join the Assembly of God. Unfortunately, I was not able to get information from her on the place of women in her Church because she got into a most interesting debate with Christina on social justice. Christina asked the young woman how the Assembly of God Church explained the existence of poor people if he loved everybody the same. The woman responded that God kept giving the rich more and more so they would realize that he was with them. He kept the poor penniless so that he would not lose their souls. "If the poor are given riches" she said "they will forget about God. Every one knows that". Christina almost threw a fit so I convinced her it was time to leave.

In a last attempt to get a better impression of women's participation in this church, I went to one of their vigils from 12:30 to 4:00 a.m. The young woman I had spoken to earlier was ecstatic at my presence and seemed

convinced her Church had gained a new soul. She asked me the whereabouts of Christina, and I told her that she was dancing with a few guys at the PADECOSMS party. The woman's eyes opened wide and she told me that dancing was the work of the devil and that I should go rescue her and bring her to Church. I responded that I did not think Christina would be very pleased with the idea.

I finally entered the Church and everybody stared at me. Most women were seated on the benches on the left side and the men were on the right. Even though there was no electricity in Perquín, or in Northern Morazán in general, this Church had purchased its own generator, a drum set, a microphone with speakers, and two electric guitars. I only remained for two hours which were composed of continuous singing on the part of men and women who would lead the congregation. The latter clapped along with the music which was so loud it could be heard throughout the town. They had a break around two a.m. and a group of women stood up and began to give coffee and cookies to the people who were attending so they could last another two hours. The men either remained seated or went outside to talk.

There was a woman sitting by my side and I asked her if she also preached. She smiled looking at the ground and told me she did not know how to read. She added that the Church had begun a reading course, but they only continued teaching the members who learned the quickest. She said there was only one man left in the reading course who was now very advanced. This woman had originally been a non practicing Catholic. She had been converted by her sister who had just returned to the Zone. I asked her if she was married and she said no, and added that she was living with her sister and her husband because she did not have money to get a place of her own.

The Assembly of God Church was described to me by people from various denominations as being as strong as the Catholic Church in Perquín. They, as well as the Adventists claimed to stay out of political issues. Most of the members left the Zone during the war, and many of them were wealthy land owners who opposed the FMLN. The Church was experiencing a revival as the members returned after the Peace Accords. Many combatants and PADECOSMS members expressed resentment towards the Evangelicals because they chose to flee rather than support the Revolutionary cause.

In terms of the position of women in these three religions, it became evident that they all shared an ideology of female subordination and devaluation. The Evangelical Churches proved to be the most limiting of women's progress by their indoctrination based on guilt, conformity and female servility. Of the three, the Catholic Church proved to be the most conscious. Unfortunately its consciousness was limited by the traditional view of women as beautiful sacrificial and nurturing beings, and by the Revolutionary social structure that determined according to its own needs, what was expected of women and how, when and why they would be organized.

The strength of the views of women represented in the religious doctrines which were so salient in the lives of the council members acted as another restraining force in their ideological development. The religious doctrines justified and strengthened women's servile role and their control by the mostly male organizations. This helped perpetuate a conflict between the gender theory they were being exposed to and the actual experience they were living. However, the philosophy of women's liberation was not only competing with traditional religious doctrines and concrete structural restraints. Even after the creation of three women's organizations, a Platform

which espoused women's advancement, organizational publications showing pictures of women who were involved in technical endeavors, and the women's own comments that they had achieved equality with men, there was a continued and overt ideology of female devaluation being transmitted through the educational system as well. I was surprised to witness a children's play done by the elementary school in the town plaza which took the issue of domestic abuse as a laughing matter.

On September, 15 the elementary school's celebration of El Salvador's Independence Day took place. The children lined up in the plaza and began to march around it in a very militaristic way swinging their arms straight up and down and following the count of one of their teachers. The activities began with a taped instrumental version of the Salvadoran National Anthem. They had several activities which represented each age group. The gender roles in the skits were clear as day light.

In one skit, a peasant (played by a boy) walked up to his wife (a girl) and started screaming at her and threatening to beat her up and break her face. He grabbed her by the hair and hit her because she was putting make up on instead of cleaning his house, washing his clothes and cooking. The woman replied that when they were dating he used to bring her flowers and now he would only beat her. They finally decided to go to the Mayor (a boy) so that he could decide for them what they should do.

When they arrived, they asked for a divorce and each told the Mayor his and her side of the story. The Mayor told them to dance for a while so things would get better. During the dance the man kept banging into his wife and pushing her once in a while. During all this, the public was laughing quite enthusiastically. Finally, the couple told the Mayor they felt better and they would go home together. The Mayor concluded by telling the public that



if they wanted to prevent that sort of thing, they should not get married. The public (mostly young children) applauded. There were other skits where six year old girls had to dance to songs that exalted their sexuality by telling them that they had to wear skirts that were short and would fly up when they wiggled their hips.

During an interview many weeks before this event, I was told that the Director, and most of the teachers of the school were either the land owners of the town before the war or they were close family members. They were organizing a pro-government organization called Fundación Perquín, and they were imparting right wing ideology to the children of the school. A woman from the WCM had told me that she did not want to send her child there because she did not want him learning their ideas after so many people had fought and died to defend the rights of the poor.

Perhaps PADECOSMS had little control over the educational programs that the Fundación Perquín teachers were implementing. However, there were no protests against these skits or even signs of indignation. Rather, the public made up mostly of children, a few PADECOSMS representatives, and a few combatants who were watching from the outskirts of the plaza, laughed and applauded during these skits. This light hearted reaction to the topic of domestic abuse and sexual exploitation of women, was being assimilated by the children of Morazán who would supposedly inherit the task of creating a more socially just system based on human dignity and respect.

The interviews with the women from the different organizations, the comments from the men and women of CEBES, the FMLN and PADECOSMS, and my observations of the WCM's organizational problems have demonstrated that the WCM's disintegration cannot be understood by solely looking at the Organization's internal power struggles and strife. These

are only symptoms of a greater problem defined by an overarching ideology of female subordination, devaluation and manipulation that was unaffected by the economic improvement of the women, and by their placement in positions of relative power within their organization.

In the next and final chapter, I will discuss different theories which portray the dynamics at work in the women's organizations studied, and I will analyze the results according to a broader perspective derived both from my findings and from patterns that have been established by other studies of women in socialist movements. The purpose is to clarify in an analytical way, the ideological and structural forces which have collided during the duration of the WCM, and which have, in turn, created conflicting dynamics and patterns of organization and action.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### EXPOSITION AND ANALYSIS OF THEORIES DEALING WITH THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

The evidence discussed in the preceding chapter amply demonstrates that the assumptions that gender equality resulted from the war in El Salvador are unfounded, and that the machista or patriarchal ideologies that predated the war gained special viciousness and ascendancy during the crisis.

That this should be so is not surprising, given the control exercised by the military (a traditional male enclave) over all aspects of life. In a world in crisis, characterized by disruption, chaos and disaster, the armed forces, (government and revolutionaries), ironically supplied the main semblance or parameter of order, and the attempts to win the only hope for the solution of the crisis. Regarding the government forces, I have discussed evidence of the vicious tortures against women and children, especially those of a sexually debasing nature, aimed at the former's life-generating capacities.

In the revolutionary forces which had democratic goals, some women fought beside the men and some even became officers. The WCM developed as an inspiration of the FMLN and PADECOSMS. However, the accounts analyzed earlier prove that the roles assigned to the majority of women were of cooking, healing the wounded, working the fields, providing sexual and psychological release for the men, marching as women to help the men, and assuming full responsibility for their families as well as for their war duties.

Furthermore, the women's organizations were created to assist the men and were dependent on the men's organizations for funds, resources, the materials to carry out activities and education. These women in military positions had to emulate men and their agenda in order to succeed and, for the most part, did not address women's concerns. The role of the church, the other stabilizing force during the war, seemed to advocate the equality and social participation of women as such, but proved to be otherwise. This aspect will be more fully discussed in relation to the specific theories I will analyze.

Not only did men control the women in private and public life, but the women themselves had also absorbed the patriarchal ideology blaming the lack of success of their movements and activities on their own lack of organization, education and capacities. In some cases there was a new awareness of the inequality between men and women in their society, but attempts by women to achieve equality were constantly impeded by the men. Whether this incipient awareness will eventually lead to a new social parity and contribute to the achievement will be considered at the end of this chapter.

Before dealing with the possible future of the WCM, it is necessary to return to the questions presented in the introduction of this theses. These concern

1. the sway of the patriarchal ideology before the war
2. the factors that led to the creation of the WCM and which affected its functioning,
3. whether patriarchal ideology has truly become inoperative and the causes for this.

Of these questions, only the last one needs to be addressed from a more theoretical stance.

Perhaps it is difficult to visualize the extent and power of the forces of patriarchal domination within the Women's Communal Movement because the Organization's extensive internal strife and deficiencies could easily lead us to attribute its problems solely or mostly to individual inadequacies, lack of interest and internal power struggles. This interpretation was not uncommon among other organizations, the population, and among the women themselves. However, this would be a myopic and limited view of the circumstances surrounding the existence and functioning of the WCM.

I feel it will be helpful to compare five theories which describe the circumstances of the WCM. The "Gender Equality or "Change of Spheres and Roles Theories" are the ones observed by those who believed women had gained an equal status with men through their participation in the public sphere. Advocates of these theories include PADECOSMS, many combatants, and Golden. The second, or "WCM Obstacles Theory, portrays the Council members' evaluation of the organizational problems they were experiencing. "PADECOSMS Theory of The WCM" is the third, and it represents the interpretation of the WCM by community members who were directly or indirectly involved with PADECOSMS and/or the FMLN. The fourth and fifth, are theories which resulted from my observations and which were guided by the "Social Ideology" and "Forces of Continuity and Change" theories. These are based on Bourque and Warren's, and Axin's work. The notion that patriarchal ideology and structure are continuing forces that manifest themselves in varying ways underlies these theories. The last, is the "Extension of Spheres Theory". It is a result of my analysis and it counters the "Gender Equality Theory". Through this representation, I attempt to give

a more accurate explanation of what has been described as a change of spheres and roles for the women. The fourth and fifth theories take into account both the role of the church and the international organizations in the situation experienced by the WCM.

Figure 7 is a depiction of the Change of Spheres and Roles Theory. Women's progress has been analyzed as resulting from their mobilization from the private or domestic sphere to the public or political sphere through protests, marches and community organizing. The result of this mobilization has been described as a creation of a stronger self esteem in the women, which in turn, has allowed them to influence and exercise power over the socio-political structures which affect them. Consequently women are described as having accomplished a change in the way they are viewed by society and in the occupational roles that are available to them.

## Women before the Revolution

## Women during and after the Revolution

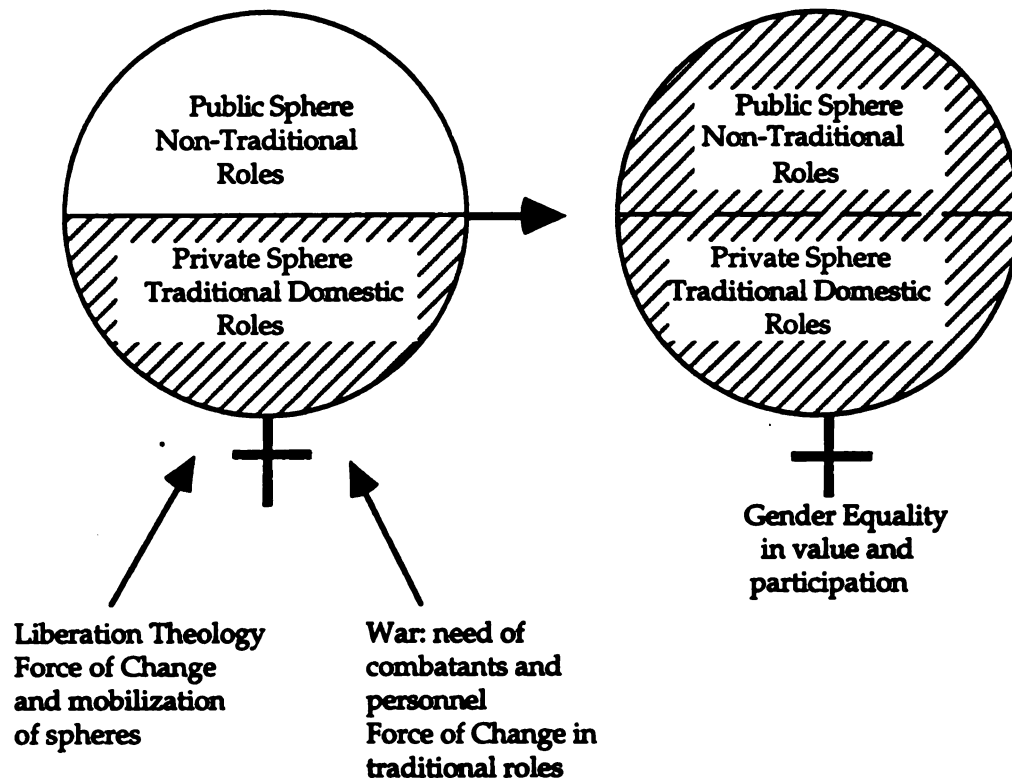


Figure 7: The Change of Spheres and Change of Roles Theory

The Change of Roles Theory asserts that thanks to the change of spheres, women have been able to expand and/or change their domestic roles by assuming positions considered untraditional such as those of combatants, communications personnel and community organizers. Most importantly, however, women are described as having achieved equal status in the revolutionary hierarchy.

The forces depicted as responsible for causing this change of spheres are Liberation Theology and the war itself. Liberation Theology is characterized as an ideological and structural force of change among the women. It encouraged them to leave their households in order to protest in the political fronts. Women's participation in these activities is viewed as untraditional

because it has entered the political arena relegated, up to that point, to the men.

The Revolution's need for "people power" and its connection to Liberation Theology is depicted as striving for and achieving gender equality as part of its social justice agenda. According to the advocates of this theory, women were incorporated in the military and organizational roles as well as in traditional domestic roles (i.e. cooks). The change of roles helped the women transform their traditional spheres of action, and gave them the opportunity of choosing what position or part they wished to play within the Revolution and society.

Many of the accounts written about women's organizations in the Salvadoran Revolution tended to follow a pattern which defined their participation in combat and community organizing as having resulted in gender based social equality. Their apparent achievements in gaining the value and recognition they deserved was depicted as something that they had consciously struggled for within a politico-ideological system that supported them. An example of this view can be found in the following quote by Golden.

In a special way FMLN women shaped the emerging process of self governance. Their very presence in the zones overcame Campesino reticence about women's social roles. The newly forming democratic process aimed at transforming gender and class limitations (1991: 169).

However, the evidence in this thesis contradicts evaluations such as this one. The structural and ideological obstacles faced by the different women's organizations in their attempt to gain communal land for the enhancement of women and to create productive projects in areas where a mostly male organization had the power of decision, revealed that not only



was the "campesino reticence about women's social roles" very much present, it also continued to exert enormous control over the development of the women and their organizations, as did the FMLN and PADECOSMS.

Ironically, the various feminist critiques done of Marxist inspired revolutionary movements do not seem to have had a strong critical effect on the analysis of those who presented pictures of gender equality in the Salvadoran Revolution and in the communal movements that were created within it. For example, the place of Liberation Theology within the Marxist Movement and the subordination of women intrinsic to these traditions were disregarded. Rather, both the religious and military structures were characterized as examples of liberating and mobilizing forces for women as women, who were engaging in apparently untraditional roles.

The Marxist ideology, which so fundamentally influenced the Theology of Liberation to which Golden attributed power in inspiring the women to implement an almost permanent sense of community, has been severely criticized in Sargent's anthology Women and Revolution. The various authors in this anthology contend that Marxist theory and movements have consciously disguised the sexist tendencies inherent in this ideology in order to maintain power and dominance over the decision making process in the political structure.

In her article "The Unhappy Marriage of Marxism and Feminism: Can It Be Saved?", Heidi Hartmann (1981: 5) described the lack of concern within Marxist theory and practice towards the questions of "how and why women [have been] oppressed as women", of men and women's differing experiences under Capitalism, and of the lack of recognition of "the vested interest men have in women's continued subordination" within the theory and its

practice. Hartmann defined Patriarchy and its material base as being the culprits for the subordination of women under capitalism.

We define Patriarchy as a set of social relations which have a material base and in which there are hierarchical relations between men and solidarity among them which enable them in turn to dominate women (Hartmann in Sargent 1981: 18).

The patriarchal ideology created sexual segregation where women were relegated to roles that were less valued and remunerated than those of men, causing an economic dependency on the latter. As a result, women have functioned as the material base of men and, I will add of the mostly male headed revolutionary movements. The women acted as the sustenance base for the revolutionary cause in the alimentary, health, and even sexual aspects of the term. They were also the reproductive force of the revolutionary "people power". The men's control over women's labor power has perpetuated their subordination and, in practice, their view as property to be controlled and manipulated (Ehrlick in Sargent: 127).

The reasoning expressed by male and female combatants and organizers, that women should not confront or deal with the issues of gender inequality because it would create division and conflict in a time when unity was needed for the political struggle, can be better understood. The leftist movements and the institutions inspired by them (i.e. revolutionary church) had a lot to lose if women were to gain the independence, mobility and acknowledgment they deserved. In fact the fear of feminist women expressed by the leftist priest, his evaluation that women would be better off not aspiring for priesthood, and his encouragement for abused women to give men a second chance and understand that their actions were culturally based, are further evidence of Hartmann's analysis that leftist movements have a

stake in women's continued subordination, and therefore fear the possible emancipatory effect of women's movements.

The limits of the Change of Spheres and Roles Theories lie in that the creative agents of the seemingly untraditional actions (i.e. those who sponsored the organization of women), structures and norms involved in the women's activities, are not closely examined by their advocates. As stated earlier, the feminist critiques of Marxism are not dealt with. As a result, the contradictions which appear within the texts that assume gender equality in the Revolution are not analyzed or explained. The Change of Spheres Theory takes for granted that there is a prevailing ideology which includes gender equality as a major premise and which has created structures to accomplish this goal. Although women's involvement in protests and marches did prove to strengthen their self image, the theory does not explain why, structurally, the women and their organizations remained subordinated to the control of the male dominated organizations, why they lacked a clear sense of goals, why they experienced so many contradictions between the rhetoric of gender equality and their access to resources under the control of the "men's Boards", or why they were of a shorter duration as compared to the men's.

The "Theory of WCM Obstacles According to Council" reveals the Council member's attempt to affirm their independence, initiative and power as women organizers, even to the point of inspiring fearful men into following their example. It also describes how the men, instead of being grateful for the women's participation, they decide to take over the positions of authority and relegate the women to positions of subordination as soon as they have a chance. The women, however, are ultimately depicted as

resisting the men's attempts at female subordination in a conscious, strong and self determined way.

In this theory, the Change of Spheres Theory is not accepted in its traditional sense since the women reveal a strong awareness of their position of inequality and subordination in relation to the men. The theory reveals a continuous ideology of subordination towards women, which, however, during the time of crisis is unable to restrain the power and strength which the women argue is specific to their gender because of their role as mothers and nurturers.

The women are portrayed as organizing on their own to defend their family members and community, and in inspiring and encouraging the less courageous men to organize as well. The men, realizing that those who they believe to be weaker than themselves are able to struggle and mobilize, receive a blow to their egos and decide to organize. Once the men organize they begin to exclude women and to take control over their objectives and their resources. The women rebel by affiliating to women's organizations (i.e. DIGNAS) of which the men disapprove, and by absenting themselves from activities in which they are told to participate.

This theory contradicts the first in that it makes gender inequality in the controlled zone quite apparent. However, the strength which the women describe as specific to them is derived from the traditional Christian ideology that views them as sacrificial and nurturing beings who must rescue all others in times of crisis. This theory is limited in that it does not acknowledge that the women, although they were the first to organize, were organized first by a male dominated religious institution (the Catholic priests and catechists) and then by a male dominated communal organization which set limits to the type, kind and degree of participation the

women could have. These two institutions also had a strong influence on how the women perceived themselves.

The limits of this theory are also apparent in its lack of explanation of the Council's problems with its social base and of the internal strife of the organization. With the exception of the dependency of the women towards PADECOSMS, other external and internal forces of dependency are not acknowledged and all decisions to not organize "appropriately" are described by the Council members as their own acts of resistance to institutions that do not value them, or to individual problems of the Council members. Internally, the women did not state an awareness that they were reproducing similar structures of manipulation in their own social base as the ones they were experiencing from the different male dominated organizations.

Examples of this manipulation of the social base are the withholding of information, education, funds, and resources coupled with an apathetic attitude towards members which in turn felt distrust and frustrations towards the Council. On the other hand, external forces of dependency included international organizations pushing feminist agendas on the women as a condition for the release of funds which were, after all, channeled through the men's organization. Solidarity workers also fostered dependency through paternalistic attitudes towards the women.

While all of these elements were influential in causing the "inappropriate organization" of the women, the Council ascribes this situation only to the women's own acts of resistance to institutions that do not value them, or to individual problems of the Council members.

This theory which is also inevitably forced to deal with the reality of the problems of the women's organizations, ironically, accepts the assumptions of the Change of Spheres and Roles theories. It claims that

women of the WCM organized as a result of their own initiative for the purpose of advancing as women while advancing, at the same time, the revolutionary cause of social justice. However, it describes the problems faced by the women's organization as resulting from foreign feminist ideologies and cultural patterns of female subordination which the women have not been able to shake off. The feminist ideologies are described as culturally alien and immoral. They are believed to promote and foster promiscuous behavior among the women as well as a conflict between the genders.

Unlike the previous theory, "PADECOSMS Theory of The WCM", which includes male and female members from the community, takes into account the effect of internationals and their agencies on the women, and describes the relationships of dependency which are created. It also portrays well meaning, yet ignorant internationals as inappropriately counseling the women in terms of their goals and objectives. As a result, the women are described as getting involved in irrelevant projects where the goal becomes the funds rather than the communities and the projects themselves.

This theory also describes the problems facing the women as a result of internal forces such as a "female peasant mentality" characterized by gossip, personality conflicts, jealousies and rivalries. The result of these negative internal forces are described as the creation of inappropriate goals, inappropriate behavior, an inability to assess women's needs, and a focus on personal rivalries rather than on the advancement of women and their organization.

The limits of this theory are obvious. It inherently contains an ideology of female devaluation, takes for granted the Change of Spheres Theory, which contradicts it, and does not examine the role of the male-

dominated organizations in the development or lack thereof of the WCM. It generally assumes that the social justice struggle of the Revolution included gender equality and that the revolutionary structures encouraged female participation in the hierarchy and in the decision making process. The existence of tokenism is vehemently denied and the revolutionary and communal structures are perceived as only having a positive effect on women's advancement and participation, contrary to the evidence analyzed previously in this thesis.

The fourth and fifth theories are an attempt to focus on, and explain the contradictions between the women's actual involvement in political or organizational activities and to understand their portrayal by advocates of the gender equality portrayal. The fourth theory is primarily based on the Social Ideology Approach while the fifth focuses more on the theory of Forces of Continuity and Change (Axin, 1993). However, the Social ideology Approach and the Forces of continuity and Change are inevitably intertwined in both theories. The theory of forces of Continuity and Change proposes that as long as the two forces are in equilibrium there will be stability or a continuation of the previous situation. However, if one force becomes stronger than the other change will occur.

Until now the term "ideology" has been used to characterize the way women have been generally viewed and what has been expected of them by men, male dominated structures, and by the women themselves in this particular society. However, in order to better analyze the dynamics of women's participation in the Revolution and their own organizations with respect to the theories presented, I will define "ideology" at this point as a way of understanding and reacting to life which is shared by, and expected of the

members of a particular society, and which is so pervasive as to function at both the conscious and subconscious levels.

This social understanding is mostly unconscious, but becomes especially apparent at the conscious level when it is confronted with a conflicting ideology or a structure which represents it. A case in point would be the Salvadoran women who had understood their social roles and position as natural until they were exposed to feminist rhetoric and to structural changes during the war. The conflict between two ideologies may result in an active and overt manifestation of the threatened ideology through concrete structures or institutions which represent it so as to insure its survival. For example, the WCM women as well as the other women's organizations, faced many concrete obstacles created by the FMLN hierarchy and men's communal organizations when they tried to develop and define their own agendas.

However, the conflict may also bring about an increased flexibility in the carriers of a particular ideology which may result in a modification of the ideology and of the social structures which represent it. Some evidence of this is revealed in the contradictory and conflict laden arguments of the women in the PADECOSMS hierarchy.

Ideologies function at the subconscious level in so far as they guide or even predetermine actions which are defined by individuals as natural and which prevent them from searching or being aware of the need for alternatives. For example, it was often stated to me that the sacrifices made by the women were really no different from those of the men. The women would ask how they could concern themselves with gender issues when hundreds of people were being slaughtered in their midst. In view of the evidence already analyzed regarding the inhuman burden of the women



during the war as compared to the men's, I argue that this justification of the lack of priority of women's issues, and disguise of women's inequality through a rhetoric that depicts equality, is a strong subliminal ideological force of subordination used to perpetuate the status quo. The violation of women's bodies for defense and during torture (acts which are socially and culturally unacceptable) were condoned and even expected because of the crisis. This is utmost evidence of the women's subordinate status and social value from a male perspective.

In Anthropologies and Histories (1991), William Roseberry cites Raymond Williams's concept of dominant culture where unequal relationships are presented as equal and reciprocal "which give a product of history the appearance of natural order . . . by those who have the means of control over cultural production, the means for the selection and presentation of tradition" (Roseberry 1991: 45). Roseberry makes a distinction between a mere ideology and culture. In this distinction, ideology is an element of culture. Here, I will use the concept of "ideology" in the same way "dominant culture" has been defined above.

Taking this definition as a basis for the Social Ideology Approach which is common to both models, I also make a rebuttal of the Change of Spheres Theory and a contextualization and re-interpretation of the Change of Roles Theory. Both of these were used in previous models and texts as evidence of achieved gender equality.

The Social Ideology Approach claims that gender distinctions persist over class, ethnic and racial distinctions. Although both men and women are exploited within a class system, women remain in a subordinate position to men within their specific economic class. Therefore class and gender are

understood by the advocates of this approach to be equally important dimensions of social reality.

This approach is based on the fact that the predominant ideology is one of patriarchy which results in the social and economic subordination of women, and is a constant force, even within social movements which strive to move away from a class based society. According to Bourque and Warren, sexual hierarchies are a result of cultural-patriarchal ideologies which manipulate "the material conditions of the lives of men and women". This ideology establishes a political and material reality and creates and perpetuates sexual inequality "through exclusion, segregation and avoidance" (Op. Cit.: 77-80).

The uneven distribution of power is revealed in the control of institutions, of cultural attitudes and values which further reinforce the structural value of women to men, therefore the Social Ideology Approach establishes that there is a circular, reciprocal and mutually reinforcing effect between patriarchal ideologies and structures. Within this approach, the change of spheres, and change of roles become unlikely in so far as they ignore the ideological and structural elements which perpetuate female subordination within the spheres, based on traditional stereotypes.

A more likely description of women's participation in the Revolution and after it could be characterized by what I call the Extension of Spheres and Tokenistic Roles Theories (see Figure 8). After reviewing the problems that the WCM and other women's organizations which preceded it have faced, it became evident that the Change of Spheres Theory lacked strength in its representation of the changes which were attributed to the women.

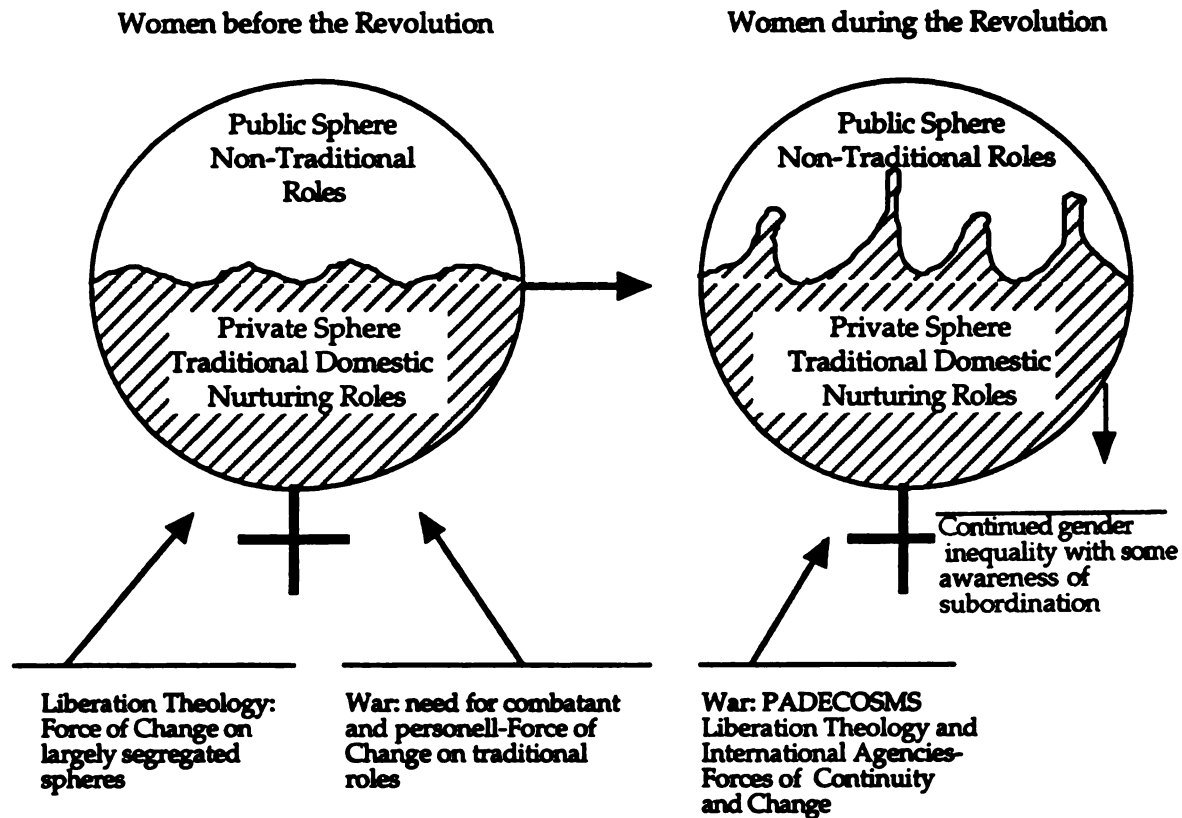


Figure 8: The Extension of Spheres and Roles Theory

The marches and community organizing done by women were sponsored by male representatives of the Theology of Liberation institution which, like the FMLN, was based on gender biased Marxist principles. The view of women in the traditional Catholic Church as nurturing, beautiful sacrificial beings was unquestioned by the Theology of Liberation which ironically inspired the Congregation of Christian Mothers to "change their spheres" of participation. This organization, as well as the WCM, included members of different Evangelical denominations whose doctrine espoused conformity, passivity and guilt. As we saw in the interview with the ex-participant of the women's organization, religiously inspired guilt can reach exorbitant levels causing severe psychological stresses. In all of these

institutions women were portrayed in one of two ways, as Saints who were willing to give everything for everybody else, or as prostitutes and perverters of men.

The marches which involved the women were approved by society and the church. That is why they gained such wide public support and why women were initially safer than men when involved in these activities. The protesters were manifesting their traditional nurturing roles in so far as they protested against human rights violations of family members and neighbors. The women's participation did not represent a change in kind in terms of their traditional roles, but a change in degree in terms of how and where they manifested these roles. This becomes more apparent when we ask why it was the women, and not the men who organized to protest non-violently for human rights. The institutions encouraging and supporting this type of action were employing the traditional gender stereotype.

The evidence revealed in Jelin's anthology referring to the short duration of women's protest movements that arise in times of crisis, supports my theory of an extension of traditional subordinated roles into the public sphere, rather than a change in these roles. The so called "new roles" are sponsored, and supported by institutions such as the church, the government and the educational system, which represent and perpetuate social ideological forces of female subordination in both private and public spheres. The permanence which Golden attributed to the sense of community which she thought characterized the women, was based on a politico-religious ideology that focused on "class equality" while dismissing, in practice, the issue of gender inequality.

The interview with the priest of Morazán revealed that although Theology of Liberation had been active in trying to bring about social equality

among the classes, it had perpetuated the traditional patterns of gender subordination. Women had to be understanding and tolerant of these ideological and behavioral patterns among men, while the latter's actions were condoned and justified as being a result of cultural influences. In essence, the men were relieved of their individual power of moral decision-making by depicting "culture" as wholly responsible for their actions. The women were also viewed as better off and more useful to society if they did not compete for hierarchical positions. This is a clear example of what Roseberry and Williams referred to as "dominant culture".

The Change of Roles Theory also loses strength in light of the previous analysis and of the contradictions which are found in the stated numbers of women in hierarchical positions within texts such as Golden's. Further evidence against this theory is revealed in the interviews with the few women who occupy these positions, and in the critiques that women in women's organizations make of them. Their own comments, as well as those of the women who described them, reveal a prioritization of class struggle over one of gender equality. The two are seen as separate and possibly mutually exclusive issues. The women in hierarchical positions derive their main identity from their class allegiance rather than from their biological and social engenderment (Chartkoff 1992).

Here lies another limitation of the Change in Roles Theory . It does not examine the forces of identity formation which in turn affect the goals of those women who do reach positions which are traditionally occupied by men. The mere fact that a woman becomes a leader does not mean that she will take up the cause of women. Rather, the history of other organizations (Jelin, PADECOSMS, Sargent) demonstrates that women who reach these positions tend to be manipulated even more so than men by the male

dominated structures, with the purpose of portraying a tokenistic image of gender equality. In practice, however, the women do not have very much power in the decision making or political process. This is more so the case in situations which question traditionally accepted male views and tactics.

Now that I have illustrated the appropriateness of the Extension of Spheres and Tokenistic Theories in arguing against the allegations of women's achieved equality with men, I can proceed to explain the theory of structural and Ideological Forces of Subordination. Essentially, this theory reveals an overarching ideology of subordination that has been present in the whole of society even before the Revolution. It continued through it, and after it, despite the chaos of war which disrupted most other institutions.

There is an interplay between the ideology of subordination and its representative structures in mobilizing the women during the war by extending their traditional roles to the public sphere. The Revolution's need for funds relied on the women for economic and structural support, as it did while engaged in combat by relegating most women to the tasks of cooks, health care workers, day care workers, and reproducers of combatants. In order for the Revolution to receive international monetary support, it was pressured to include women's organizations in its agenda. The revolutionary and communal organization hierarchy continued to control the organizational structure, information, funds and resources of the women's organizations.

This control limited the transformative power of the gender theory the women were receiving. For the most part, theory ended up being viewed by the women as empty rhetoric which clashed with a centralized, gender biased and dominating ideology and structure. As women tried to put their new knowledge into practice, they met up with obstacles by the male dominated

institutions which defined and limited their agendas. The latter also promoted a division between the women's organizations and between the women themselves by distributing resources unequally.

The international organizations which were supporting the advancement of women, ironically also engendered dependency rather than self sufficiency by allowing lines of communication and information about the women to go through PADECOSMS. The dependency pattern was reinforced by the very short term and inadequate evaluations done by the agencies when visiting the women and by the encouragement of solidarity workers who had a paternalistic attitude towards the women. The solidarity workers would often do tasks for the women that they were capable of participating in, or of doing themselves.

The dependency relations derived from the male organizations and the international sources, compounded with the women's lack of control over their agendas and resources, resulted in a feeling of incapacity, dismay and in disorganization. The power struggles and manipulation represented by the male dominating organization were repeated at the level of the Council which was not democratically elected to begin with, and continued at the level of the women's community Board of Directors. This resulted in a lack of democratic procedures, lack of participation, lack of true understanding of women's issues, interpersonal strife over resources, and continued patterns of domination among the women.

The fifth theory makes the Forces of Continuity and Change more explicit. It reveals why the women's organizations, despite the strong input of gender theory, have begun to disintegrate. The forces of continuity include a mostly male hierarchy in the revolutionary structure as well as in the main communal umbrella organizations. The latter are based on an ideology of

female subordination and manipulate different structures of domination and dependency to maintain the subordination of women. The purpose is to be able to mobilize and utilize the women according to the male needs and agendas. The forces of change are fewer and contain contradictory dynamics within them as revealed in the previous theory through the international agencies, the women in hierarchical positions whose main allegiance is to class struggle, and the creation of women's organizations by men who have an agenda other than the advancement of women.

The visits to the WCM Boards and to the assembly meetings, demonstrated that the gender and democracy rhetoric sponsored through PADECOSMS engendered a series of detrimental effects in the Council and the Boards of Directors. This resulted from its contradictory practices, its domination and centralized structure. The Council lacked knowledge of organizational techniques, it lacked technical and structural support from PADECOSMS, it had to deal with the latter's favoritism of specific Council members and of different women's organizations which spawned division and weakened the women's movement and agenda as a whole.

The WCM Boards of Directors, in turn, received even less gender theory and technical training than the Council members. They found themselves in a much worse economic situation than the Council who had a salary derived from international support. The Boards were characterized by a pattern of presidential appropriation of communal productive projects, which was, to some extent, inspired by the Council's appropriation of utensils and funds from the Board projects.

The consequences were discouraged women who ended up losing faith in themselves and trust in each other. As revealed in the Forces of Continuity and Change Theory, the effects which hinder the development of



the women's organizations far outweigh the ones which promote it. However, one limit of this theory is that it does not stress the possibility of the future effect of forces which at the present are weak and unstable. Nor does it explain how forces which are relatively weak, still have enough impact to cause contradictions. Earlier in this thesis, I noted that the greatest positive results observed as a result of the conflict and contradictions between the forces of gender equality and inequality occurred at the individual level. Here women began to question their position of subordination within their already subordinated economic class. It is here where what was defined as natural became unnatural as two ideologies clashed. The ideology of subordination which for the most part had remained at a subconscious level was brought to the fore and had to be dealt with consciously by men and women.

The women began to educate their children to share in household chores. They also began to aspire other roles than those which had been traditionally ascribed to them and which they had previously viewed as natural and good. Unfortunately, at the time of the investigation these changes in the organized women were generally subsumed in a struggle for individual power alienated from democratic processes. There was also a continued control on the part of PADECOSMS, even as the WCM began to rebel and make allegiances with other women's organizations like the DIGNAS, which was supposedly in conflict with FMLN sponsored organizations.

The last news I received about the WCM is that another of its Council members left and was chosen by PADECOSMS to create a PADECOSMS Women's Secretariat. This council member was one of the main organizers of the Boards during my fieldwork and demonstrated a genuine interest and

capacity to organize the women and develop productive projects in a systematic way. However, the method of her election to the Secretariat is a repetition of PADECOSMS's control over the structure and agendas of the women's organizations. The fact that this Secretariat is much more subsumed under PADECOSMS in structural and legal terms, and the fact that as revealed in Joaquín Villalobos' book the emphasis of change continues to be one of class structure over and above gender equality, foretells a very slow process in the development of a women's agenda in the popular sectors.

During the revolution Rebecca Palacios wrote the following statement describing the situation of women within the military structures;

The fact is that the whole culture is sexist, and there is not a single comrade who is not affected by this. If it's true that organization provides the opportunities for women to develop themselves in daily concrete work, it is also true that the woman herself had to overcome a thousand and one obstacles with her compañero, with her children, with her co-workers, with the organization itself (Golden: 172).

What concrete prospects are there for women's development in the future in a political-economic theory and structure (FMLN's) that has a tradition of disregarding women? Will women be able to contribute in the future to the FMLN's stated goal of social equality? Villalobos' (FMLN's Political President and former guerrilla Commander) entire book; Una revolución en la izquierda para una revolución democrática (1992), is devoted to the explanation of how economic well being can be achieved through a free market economy founded in political democracy and social justice (Ibid.: 11-12). However, it only contains one sentence acknowledging the value of women which it never elaborates or defines (Ibid.: 17).

If Villalobos' goal is to end social injustice and poverty, it is ironic that the issue of women's place in society is not given more importance since

women are the poorest, the most oppressed and carry the largest load and responsibility of reproduction within the impoverished sector of society. This is especially true after the war where a large number of men have perished, and those who have survived have left children scattered in different areas. This has forced women to have the sole responsibility of rearing and educating the future of this "new just society" which Villalobos hopes will be created.

Villalobos' theory seems to take for granted that the norm in the popular masses is the nuclear family where both parents are present to raise their children. In that way if the father's economic status improves by way of a new socio-political structure, his family's status will also improve. Because of the situation described above, this could not be farther from the truth.

If the specific situation of women is not given special consideration, the popular masses will continue to perpetuate the political and economic inequity already present in the different social classes. The fact that women are a numerical majority and a political minority in charge of educating the youth will cause severe contradictions in a politico-economic model that advocates social justice. It is not possible to accomplish national development of the type Villalobos expects when a large part of the population is alienated and excluded. Women cannot be depicted as equal to men when there is a clear difference in power and when the former are subordinated to the latter.

If, according to Villalobos, the popular masses have been an obstacle to national development as a result of malnutrition and lack of education (Ibid.: 32, 64), a continuation of female subordination will continue the pattern of underdevelopment. Economically speaking, educated and well nourished women will be more useful to the process of national development. The

evidence rests on the fact that many of the women in the FMLN hierarchy had a university education. Also, as the different women's movements in the city became more developed, university educated women were being placed in positions of leadership while the peasant women were, to a large extent, being relegated to positions of community organizing within the organization.

In a system of free market and competition, it is essential to educate the female sector so that women can compete equally with the men. Men must also be educated to understand that a patriarchal system would perpetuate a mechanism of subordination and dependency that contradicts equal competition which Villalobos defines as essential for a healthy society.

Unfortunately, as revealed in my fieldwork, the prospects of instituting real democratic processes that go beyond rhetoric and that will help the advancement of women are not very good. Villalobos states that the centralization and lack of democracy in the revolutionary structures were necessary because of the need for rapid mobilization and decision making, and because of the dependency on external funds (Ibid.: 29, 36, 40, 42, 47, 51). Villalobos' justification could lead us to reconsider the theories of community disintegration espoused by Adams and Foster as appropriate for the analysis of the women's organizations. However, the fact that men and women's organizations are experiencing similar patterns of difficulty does not explain their differing rates in dissolution nor the different intensity of their problems. These differences can only be explained by analyzing the double subordination of women within the social system, and the forces which play a role in their perpetuation as I have attempted to do with the theories I have presented.

It is important to note that the ironies, contradictions and different theories deriving from various sectors who are interpreting the so called "same reality", bring to the fore the epistemological question of the origin, purpose and creation of knowledge. It is evident that the objectives of each theory described were different. Herein lies their power as tools of representation and of their use for the perpetuation of women's status quo. The theory commonly presented in the literature searched for, and tried to promote an image of gender equality and relative social justice in a situation of social chaos and human calamity. The objective was to create an awareness of the extreme adversity and struggle the women were facing, and to promote support for their cause. However, in so doing, it disregarded important evidence that contradicted its premises. It created an illusion of well being that has presented an image of gender equality to international audiences, obscuring the problems and needs of the women who are not members of the Councils or of the organizations in general.

The WCM 's own theory is a description of the women's attempt to rationalize and justify the problems which they were facing as an organization, while attributing all the blame to the male dominated organizations. It represents the Council members' beginning awareness of, and resistance to male domination. Unfortunately, it also reveals a lack of self criticism and evaluation. It was strategically used to represent an image of female strength, creativity and power over continuing female subordination to international agencies and to solidarity workers in order to appear worthy of funding.

The PADECOSMS theory is a promotion of the rhetoric of gender equality and a protection of the mostly male-headed communal organizational structures and procedures which, at the time, were struggling

for funds and making an exemplary effort to deal with class inequalities while disregarding the pressing problems of gender inequality. It resembles the second theory in that it does not accept responsibility for the demise of the women's organizations and does not reveal any self reflexivity. It is a justification and defense of the status quo. This theory is more realistic than the one presented in the literature, but functions to justify women's problems as resulting from their own incapacities and helps to perpetuate the image of a general ideology of gender equality to the international audience which is contradicted by women's actual situation. In so doing, it leaves little room for critical analysis that will enable actual gender problems to be dealt with realistically and concretely while it accomplishes continuing funding for women who, in the end, are not benefited.

The fourth and fifth theories are the ones I propose. The fourth theory, which developed from my research, attempts to show why women extended rather than changed their roles and spheres of participation. Its contribution lies in its capacity to reveal, and account for, the complex dynamic interplay between internal and external forces which affect the women's movement, leading to the situation described above. This theory also illustrates the relevance of the Social Ideology Approach. The reciprocal and mutually constitutive dynamics of patriarchal ideology and the male-dominated institutions of the family, the revolutionary structures, and their ensuing hierarchical structures, become evident. These institutions, in turn, reinforce the ideology that feeds them. The Social Ideology Approach helps to understand why men such as the "Responsible" in the revolution, and women in the organizations such as Mariana, both professing to believe in women's equality, expressed a strong, but unconscious patriarchal ideological bias which resulted in contradictions.

The fifth Theory substitutes the concept "Extension of Spheres" for the older concept of "Change of Spheres". This older theory posed the view that the women's participation in war automatically conferred equality on them by virtue of their new positions in it. On the contrary, my fieldwork revealed that the women's roles in the war were truly an extension of their traditional roles in a new scenario. Thus, they represent a change in degree and not in kind since they are still encouraged, guided and controlled by the same male biased and male dominated structures and priorities.

The fourth and fifth theories, therefore, clearly portray a feminist stance which views women as a dominated gender. Women experience very adverse social, cultural, structural and ideological limits to their development and to the acknowledgment of their value as economic and cultural participants of society.

Dominant culture, works through representations that are pliable and powerful enough to conceal its exclusions and its internal contradictions through a rhetoric of inclusion and universality. My analysis has demonstrated different, subtle, yet powerful ways in which the neutralization of women's adversarial presence has been attempted by the dominant patriarchal culture. My analysis has also attempted, however, to reveal spaces of possibility and resistance available to women. Perhaps Raymond William's "epochal analysis of culture" (1977: 122) could enlighten us about this process, and help us to resolve the limitations of the "Theory of Continuity and Change".

What matters, finally, in understanding emergent culture, as distinct from both the dominant and the residual, is that it is never only a matter of immediate practice; indeed it depends crucially on finding new forms or adaptations of form. Again and again what we have to observe is in effect a pre-emergence,

active and pressing but not yet fully articulated, rather than the evident emergence which could be more confidently named. It is to understand more closely this condition of pre-emergence, as well as the more evident forms of the emergent, the residual, and the dominant, that we need to explore the concept of structures of feeling (Ibid.: 126-127).



## CHAPTER NINE

### CONCLUSIONS

The exposition of the historical antecedents of the war and of the women's movements in Morazán, as well as the analysis of the interviews and the theories, provide answers to the five questions that were posed at the beginning of this study. First of all, both the historical background and the interviews with the women show the hegemony of patriarchal ideology before the war. Women, especially those of lower income, were completely subordinated to men in their own homes, in financial, as well as public and political affairs.

Secondly, once the war began, men needed the women to enlist sympathy and financial support for the war effort. Women could use their roles as mothers and wives for this purpose, especially with the aid of the church. This gave rise to the women's movements. The functioning of these movements was affected by the men's control of the funds that international agencies granted the women to foster feminist oriented organizations. They also controlled supplies, placed obstacles to the celebration of women's meetings and activities and, in the military, rewarded only those women who obeyed their norms.

Thirdly, for the reasons stated above, during and shortly after the war, the women's movement was not an effective agent in limiting or doing away with patriarchal ideology. Fourthly, the hierarchical, male--controlled

military institutions, not only did not help women achieve equality, but actually reinforced and perpetuated old patterns of male domination. The women were asked to postpone their needs and aspirations for the sake of the revolution.

Most of those who participated in the war effort in Morazán, did it in addition to meeting their responsibilities as wives and mothers. Furthermore, they merely extended their traditional female roles as supporters, nurturers, cooks, and sexual partners into their war-related activities without changing the nature of these.

No new ascertainable powers were born from their participation in the war effort. In fact, those who participated as soldiers and officers had to submit to norms which undermined their gender. In this way, the data gathered in the field supported my initial hypothesis that gender equality was at least doubtful and at most incipient.

As I have struggled to analyze all of the events I observed and experienced in Morazán, however, I realized that every process entails a passage from one situation to another, undergoing conflict in each transition, confronting old ways of thinking and acting with new ones, which inevitably create contradictions. Viewed from this perspective, it would be unrealistic to expect the Women's Communal Movement of Morazán to be a perfectly functioning organization with a clear gender-oriented agenda at this point. A visible limit in the theories I have proposed is the undermining of the struggle for survival and the way priorities are determined in a situation of chaos, strife and death. However, I believe that to have dwelled on this would have prevented me from analyzing the causes of the women's continued status of subordination and could have led me into an exposition

that would have ultimately justified, as did some of the theories described, their not so "equal" status quo.

To disregard, however, the possibilities available to the women would be disingenuous and overly pessimistic. The tokenisms created to satisfy an international demand for women's programs and to disguise the continued manipulation and control over women, ironically initiated a process of female awareness (at the level of the individual) which might slowly transform the gender-biased institutions and ideologies that were used to support the Revolutionary struggle. It remains to be seen whether this new awareness is strong enough to outlast the solution to the war crisis which brought the women together in the first place, strong enough for women to participate equally in the creation of a more just society.

## EPILOGUE

I would like to address, once again, the problem of the "Other" and the inequality of power in the interview situation. As stated in the Preface, it is obvious to me that the ultimate power is in the anthropologist's created text, no matter how much she wishes to give those being interviewed their own voice. However, to deny the transformative power which they have over us would be to fall into an attitude of condescendence and paternalism. I have been warned about being euphemistic and ignoring the inequality inherent in "interlocution" when I use the terms "work with" rather than "study". Yet, I would argue that the term "study" throws us in the other extreme and depicts a totally unidirectional understanding which cannot possibly occur when one is involved in a conversation and interpretation of ideas with another social and critical being. I believe that both I and my informants learned from each other and were mutually transformed to some extent. For me this is sufficient to interpret our interaction (at some level) as one of working towards a goal of mutual understanding. I have often wondered who the women I interacted with really were, and I realized that the most I could get a glimpse of was who they were in the particular context of a women's organization created by a male dominated organization and foreign institutions. Many times I have asked myself who was speaking to me through the mouths of the women.

This is a problem I cannot resolve and this research is not a definitive account of what happened to the women in the WCM. It is an interpretive

analysis whose aim is to achieve an understanding of the dynamics which affect a sector of a population in its attempts at self definition under critical conditions, and its claim at social space in the society to which it contributes. It is also an attempt to understand the different forces and effects of representation to which the organized women are exposed. I cannot deny, for example, that my presence in the Zone acted as a similar source of pressure as the international agencies. I was perceived as a threat by those who did not wish me to get a close view of the problematic interactions between the WCM, AMS, and PADECOSMS. Although I never offered money or promised to bring in projects, I was also treated as a solidarity member who could ostensibly bring in funds or support in the future. Therefore, the information presented in this thesis must be viewed within the context of my interaction with the women and the identities which I assumed or could not "shake off".

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Association of Salvadoran Women [AMS]

Center for Feminist Studies [CEF]

Christian Base Communities [CEBES]

Congregation of Christian Mothers [CCM]

Farabundo Martí National Liberation Front: female and male Combatants

International Solidarity Members

National Coordinator of Women of El Salvador [CONAMUS]

Patronage for the Development of the Communities of San Miguel and

Morazán [PADECOSMS]

Central Office Administrators

PADECOSMS' Comedor Cooks

PADECOSMS Maternal Health Care Workers

Women for Dignity and Life [DIGNAS]

Women's Communal Movement [WCM] Council

WCM Boards of Directors: Arambala, Torola, San Fernando, Zancudo, Galera,  
Nahuaterique, Carrizal, Caimán

Observation of Meetings and Workshops during 1992

AMS Gender Theory Workshop (Observation)

WCM-AMS-PADECOSMS Meeting (Observation)

WCM Council Meetings

WCM-DIGNAS Meeting (Observation)

WCM Workshops