THE TRANSFORMATION OF GENDER ROLES
IN MIGRATION

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INTRODUCTION

In the early 1970s when I was clamoring for more participation of women both as investigators and as subjects of research in the Social Science Research Council’s Joint Committee on research in Latin America, and more attention to women’s issues, I recall a colleague asking me, “Just when will we have a critical mass that will satisfy you, June?” I couldn’t foresee an end then and I still can’t see a terminating point. In the 1970s we, as feminist scholars, were preoccupied with gaining women’s perspectives in the social sciences. In the 1980s research on gender issues skyrocketed with interdisciplinary research on gender in the household, the organization of work, education, and in migration. In the 1990s gender studies turned to the construction of models of social transformations that simultaneously analyze gender, race/ethnicity, and class. Looking backward at this trajectory of research goals, we might consider that we have become part of what is often called mainstream social science that we once aspired to. But that will come only when diversity of gender, race/ethnicity, and class are not axes for structuring unequal opportunity.

Today I want to consider the imbrication of gender, race/ethnicity and class in the transformations that occur with migration. This triple frame of reference was often considered a triple oppression, cumulative and inexorable. With historically based and cross culturally comparative studies, we are able to see a greater complexity. Some studies indicate that gendered power relations can be reversed in migration: as women find opportunities for work even in very exploitative jobs, patriarchy may be undermined in the household. Racism takes on a multiplicity of genotypes as migrants bring diversity
into larger settings: Hispanics and South Asians who never considered themselves to be black are designated as such in the rigid categories applied in United States Cities. Class conflict in the workplace may be displaced into the arena of consumption as migrants working in underground shops that threaten to vanish if any protest is raised bring their protests to the retail chains that buy the products they make.

Migration has accelerated with the restructuring of the world economy in relation to the flexible accumulation of capital. This has dislocated production sites of industrial workers and withdrawn land from subsistence cultivators, forcing millions of people to migrate within and outside their countries of origin. The burden of this dislocation is borne almost unassisted by households. In the mutual support groups that link together households in the country of origin with that of residence in order to meet the needs of child care, caring for sick or aged members of their families, women migrants are forming transnational networks\(^1\) to sustain remittances that count as much as one-third of the gross national income of some Central American States or to arrange child care and house-holding obligations. The privatized concerns of social reproduction are moving into these public arenas as migrant women challenge the premises of sexual subordination: wife abuse, genital mutilation and control over sexuality, and reproductive rights formulated in patriarchal societies.\(^2\)

In carrying out their daily tasks of social reproduction, migrant women are cultivating skills in mutual support groups that enable them to act politically. Trade unions, human rights groups and other NGOs are beginning to draw on these skills as they broaden their approach to organizing at grassroots and transnational levels (Smith 1994). As broader community action draws the employed and unemployed, the documented and undocumented, workers into action networks\(^3\), we are seeing multilateral approaches to class actions that bypass confrontational approaches cultivated
in earlier union action. The appeal is more often made to human rights in the wider community than workers' rights defined on the job.

I shall first assess the way in which women migrants are redefining social reproduction needs in transnational settings. I shall then draw on anthropological studies of community based workers' organizations and on a study I carried out with students at the City University of New York to assess how these organizations implement human rights covenants on the job and in the community.

**MIGRATION AND THE TRANSFORMATION OF SOCIAL REPRODUCTION**

Until recently it was assumed that the vast majority of migrants were men, and the paradigmatic basis for migration theory was predicated on male migrants. As a result of gendered perspectives, the dominant theoretical paradigm in migration studies has shifted from one in which migration was conceptualized as adaptation to a given environment to a more creative construction of social groups working together to achieve mutual goals. Migration of women violates notions of woman as homemaker, circumscribed by domestic routines that prevailed in both western and oriental societies. The very fact of leaving familiar orbits raised concerns of rightness and propriety in the behavior of women. Being out of place, women migrants found themselves disadvantaged in their intimate as well as in the public spaces into which they are often forced for their very survival. At the same time, they began to contest their subordination in light of their new experience.

The contested site in the transformation of families and domestic units is in the expanded arena of social reproduction. There the privatized domain of domestic and family relations becomes merged with politicized social spheres. These changes can be
summed up in three processes that disrupt households based on patriarchy and male dominance:

- the commoditization of domestic services once based on non-waged reciprocity of gender relations,
- transnationalization of the sites of reproduction
- feminization of the workplace.

I shall trace how these changes are promoting a changed relation between genders at the same time that they are exacerbating domestic conflict as male prerogatives are threatened at home and in the workplace. I shall also maintain that this new framework tends toward addressing these issues in a human rights

1. Migration and the Commoditization of Domestic Services

Migration stimulates the commoditization of women's services. Because these services were a "free good" in household economy, payment for them takes on an immoral connotation. When men were the principal migrant population, women were recruited as cooks, laundresses, and prostitutes to serve the needs of plantation workers, miners, and lumberjacks. The ethnic hierarchy that prevailed in the male employment sphere was often transferred to the service sector, as women of each ethnic group specialized in clients from that same sector (Bourgois, 1988).

Employers discovered that marketed services performed by women were more expensive than exploitation of female relatives in the household, thus driving up the wages needed to cover bare subsistence costs. For example, indigenous women were encouraged to migrate to the coffee and cotton plantations on the Guatemalan coast along with their husbands, where they performed labor intensive tasks with their children in harvesting and processing crops (Bossen, 1983). Inspired by populist politics of the 1950s and 1960s, the nationalized mines of Bolivia promoted marital units of indigenous rural
migrants recruited into their workforce, with family subsidies supplementing the paycheck, and medical, educational and sports facilities made available to family members (Nash 1979).

Sexual activity is the most intensely contested area in cultural control over the commoditization of domestic services. Where male dominance is absolute, control over women's sexuality may become a prerogative of their own husbands, fathers, or other relatives. This contradicts the patriarchal premise of protection of women's sexuality, limiting the control over it is even more distorted in migration circuits. The most extreme form of commoditization of sex resulting from the dislocation of men and women in the global order is that of mail order "brides" from Southeast Asia delivered to German residents as described by Mies (1986), or the selling of wives and daughters into sex work and production by male kin in India (Chopra 1985). In contrast to misogynous practices condoned in such male dominant Asian societies, the forms of commoditized sexual exchanges by Latino immigrants makes up for the dislocation of families. Women abandoned in the Caribbean Islands, or those who have not found an economic niche in U.S. cities, compensate for the lack of sanctioned marital relations with much needed income from sexual partners. For example, liaisons with migrant males who returned to the Dominican Republic for visits provided a source of income for some women left behind in the island (Georges, 1992). Caribbean women have greater recourse to kinship and ethnic support groups than Asian women, whose low status in their countries and within their families cuts them off from access to formal or familial support. The need for flexibility in response to the disruption of lives in migratory circuits feeds back into domestic arrangements. With the increasing frequency of such arrangements, it is quite possible that the stigma related to commoditization will lessen.
2. Transnationalization of Social Reproduction

The commoditization of domestic services at a transnational level has opened up new circuits of female migration and along with it, more intense levels of exploitation of women's services in the sending countries as well as in the receiving countries. Remittances from migrants to their families in the sending countries accelerates commoditization of other activities once considered part of "free" household exchanges. Through remittances and transnational migration a new petit-capitalist class has emerged in some rural villages of the Dominican Republic (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991:114). With their investment in enterprises in the island, transnational migrants also promote artisan and wage work in the sending country (Grasmuck and Pessar 1991:123-4). It also stimulates a market for low-paid services. Georges (1992:88) found that New York City migrants' remittances paid for child care services by women who remained in the Dominican Republic to take care of children left by their parents. By introducing more cash income into the local Dominican economy, remittances also encouraged informal sales with women selling snacks to better-off families or to school children, always careful to select contexts where they would not be criticized (Georges 1992:90). Remittances to wives and children left behind by the migrants also provided cash for investment as well as daily expenses, often interrupting subsistence activities.

Transnational migration entails a shift from petty commodity production to proletarianization that may occur in earlier migrations from rural to urban areas within the country of origin. This transformation is more threatening to male workers than to females who find greater continuity in their roles defined in social reproduction in the new setting. With the diminishing land base for small holders in Latin America and the Caribbean, combined with declining real wages, men's contribution to the household is rarely sufficient for the subsistence needs of a family (Safa 1986, 1996). Their inability to
support their families contradicts the basis for male dominance at the same time that it erodes the ideological basis for patriarchy. This disparity in the relative dependence of men and women on the household creates greater tension for men than women in the new settings to which they migrate. Rouse (1992:26) demonstrates this in his comparison of the life of Mexican migrants from Aguililla in west Central Mexico to their new community in Redwood City, California.

A similar syndrome was found by Escobar, Gonzalez and Roberts (1987:60) who studied migrations in Guadalajara and in the United States. They found that women are more likely to remain in abusive relations in Guadalajara, since they are enjoined to do so by the church and other family members, than they are in the United States. In foreign settings where abusive gender relations may not be taken for granted, migrant women often develop a perspective on their own society that may lead to separation or divorce, or to a restructuring of gender relations.

Patricia Pessar (1986) found both of these outcomes among Dominican Republic migrants in New York City. Men experienced a loss of prestige in the home and on the job that translated into a greater rate of return for men to their communities of origin than for women (Pessar 1986:278). In those families that settled in the United States, Pessar found that there was a decline in the control over the earnings of household members operated by senior men and a concomitant rise in women’s management of the household. This creates greater tensions in the middle class migrant household, since women intend to reinforce the middle class status of their families by migration and wage work (Castro 1986). The unintended consequence of improvement in gender relations brought about in this transition increases the tension experienced by an improvement in their own status (Grasmuck and Pessar 19991:155).
For many women, the female ties between generations and among neighbors become more crucial in maintaining their families than the sporadic assistance of men in low-paid and insecure jobs. This often takes on a transnational dimension as mothers' female relatives and friends take care of their children while they are in domestic service to others. Women's networks provide the essential cues in gaining access to public assistance. In her study of Dominican women in Washington Heights, Mika Miyosha (1995) found that women developed networks of female friends in the waiting rooms of government agencies where they sought welfare assistance. These women shared important information that enabled them to gain access too much needed income and medical assistance. Public services provided alternatives that allowed them to reject the abuse of unemployed men who often take out their rage and frustration on them.

Management of the transnational networks making possible the reorganization of migrant households and the enterprises they stimulate is principally the task of women. It evokes all of the cultural resources available in the sites of social reproduction. Religious and political cargo systems that once served to reproduce autonomy in indigenous communities in Mexico (Stephen 1993), or regional patron saint fiestas in Puerto Rico (Davila 1997) are the sites for reinforcing the ties between generations and genders in the transnational migrant circuits.

3. Feminization of the Work Site

The "feminization" of the work force in major cities during the transition period of post-industrial cities in the 1970s responds to economic restructuring that replaces old industries with financial, insurance, and real estate enterprises (Sassen 1985) as well as marginal garment firms (Waldinger 1985). It has had profound consequences on social reproduction. Underground shops in garment and assembly work in New York City employ young women migrants in preference to men (Waldinger 1985). This is also true
of jobs in government bureaucracies and banks, where Latino women are often preferred because of their language skills and willingness to accept subordinate positions in the job hierarchy.

Despite the limited employment opportunities for men, young Hispanic men often reject jobs in these settings with predominantly female employees who often supervise their work. Instead, they may turn to drug sales in the streets that bring with it the risk of imprisonment and even death as they search in vain to fill the ideal position of authority and prestige in the family that comes from providing for their needs (Bourgois 1993; Sharf 1997).

The immigration of domestics from the Philippines and Caribbean Islands enables U.S. women in professional employment to undertake demanding full-time jobs. The revelation of the employment of undocumented workers in domestic service of highly placed political appointments—viz Zoe Baird—reveals the subterranean labor force engaged in this work. The demand for domestic workers enables women—especially those without documents—to find work more readily than men. But as Sarah Mahler (1995:153) points out, the lives of these women are turned upside down as they abandon their own children to take care of the children of others. Harris (1995:78) found that nations worldwide are less responsive to the labor needs of professional women than to those of agricultural enterprises or factory owners, since domestics are rarely, if ever, given priority by immigration authorities. However, nurses are a category of immigrants who are exempt from most controls because of the difficulty in recruiting them, given the low pay and adverse working conditions. In the United States they are drawn from the Philippines and South Korea, and in Britain from Nigeria, Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and Hong Kong (Harris 1995:37, 41).
The emergent form of households in the global labor market is that of migrant women maintaining chains of female support networks from New York to the Caribbean, or Chicago or Los Angeles to Mexico, as they become domestics in the homes of professional women or enter marginal factories operating underground or on the margins of fashion centers in New York. In this commoditized domestic sphere, men lose their priority as provisioners at the same time that they lose ground in employment. This undermines their dominance in political arenas of struggle as well as in the family.

In the contest over who is entitled to the American dream, the anomalous position of women migrants in the sites of reproduction often raises to the level of consciousness their sense of their rights as humans being violated. I shall try to show how these disadvantages translate into a desire and action toward gaining new positions in their households and jobs.

ORGANIZING AGAINST NEOLIBERAL ATTACKS ON SOCIAL REPRODUCTION

We have seen that neo-liberal policies in Latin American countries encourage migration by reducing wages to levels that can barely sustain a single male worker at the same time that social subsidies are eliminated (Hamilton and Chinchilla 1993). Concurrent with these developments in the periphery, nation states throughout the world have become increasingly stringent in their treatment of migrants. The United States attempt to gain control over its borders with the 1986 law granting amnesty for undocumented migrants provoked new flows of migrants who arrived during a stagnant economy. This had two contradictory consequences. The provision requiring that employers check the work authorization papers of prospective employees gave them a tool to hold undocumented workers in an underground economy. Countering this, Chinese and Latino neighborhood centers sprang up in many urban communities, and even trade
unions began to see a new venue for organizing, assisting migrants to legalize their entry (Gonzalez Behar 1997:6). The large increase in migrants led to a backlash and the passage of the extremely restricted 1996 Immigration Reform and Immigrant Responsibility Act. This act rules that spouses, parents, and children of a legal migrant who are living in the United States without documentation must leave the country until they can get alien registration cards, allowing them to become legal residents (The New York Times, September 25, 1997:A1, B5). The catch 22 is that is that they will be barred from reentry for three years if they have resided illegally for 180 consecutive days, and for ten years if here for a year or more. Women were net losers, since they had a harder time establishing a "paper trail" (Gonzalez Behar 1997). The law also requires that each person who sponsors a relative to come to the United States has to earn 125% of over what is considered the poverty level income, or $16,225 for a family of three, and they must sign a document swearing financial support until the new immigrant is a citizen. These provisions effectively end the family preference, which was the keystone of immigration policies in the past.

This legislation comes during a period of resurgence in anti-"illegal alien" sentiment brought about by their rise in numbers over the decade (Chavez 1997:67). Claiming that immigrants pose a threat to national security, sovereignty, and control of the territory, California State representatives targeted the sites of reproduction, especially women and children in the reproduction of immigrant families. This is marked in proposition l87 passed in California with the support of 59 percent of the constituency (Chavez 1997:61-71). This law deprived legal as well as undocumented workers of education, medical attention, and other social benefits taken for granted for all residents in advanced industrial states. The denial of services to family members in effect rejected the possibility of incorporating migrants as citizens into the wider society. At the same time,
since it did not target the production arena nor criminalize employers who hire undocumented migrants, as Chavez (1997:71) indicates, it reinforced the control of employers over labor. In this sense, it evokes the bracero program of 1965 that contracted workers for limited periods of time and without families, but neglects the security provided to workers under that law.2

By targeting the sites of social reproduction, the recent state and national laws rule out the chance of incorporation in the American dream. Yet the anti-immigrant sentiment has stimulated unity among Latinos, erasing the division between native-born, mostly English-speaking Chicanos and immigrant, Spanish-speaking Mexicans, since it affects all Latinos (Martinez 1995:30). This sentiment led to a political change in California in the last elections that overturned the more punitive aspects of legislation.

This is precisely the setting in which Latino centers, community organizations of civil society, and a revitalized labor movement are developing a sense of their potential power as they seek solutions to the problems aggravated by declining public support. I will explore these new settings for political participation of immigrants in the following section.

In coping with the changes in their life circumstances, migrant women are moving some of the privatized events of social reproduction into public arenas, thereby expanding the scope of the political. This has been true of migrant women's participation in the United States in their own institutions such as "mothers' clubs" in settlement houses and ethnic women's organizations. Throughout the twentieth century, these settings prepared them for their struggles to gain control over their political and personal lives. (Seler 1994:9). Kinship and ethnicity are cognitive frameworks for relating migrants to their new homes, whether it is the internal migrations of rural people to towns or transnational movements.
Latino Centers

The spread of independent, immigrant-led, community based labor organizations, or "workers' centers" grew in the 1980s when huge numbers of Latinos immigrants were forced into exile by U.S. military backed interventions in Central America and the Caribbean (Lamphere 1994). These new leaders have the political savvy eradicated in union ranks during the McCarthy period in the United States.

I discovered the Centro de Trabajadores Latinos through a leaflet distributed by women supporting three Hispanic workers fired by Citarella, an upscale fish store on the Upper West Side when they attempted to organize the workers. The split labor force at Citarella's reveals the divisions among workers on ethnic and cultural lines that often inhibit labor organization. The "upstairs" crew consists of countermen who speak English, were born in the United States, are documented, and are paid well. The meat manager Charlie Gagliardo, is a child of Italian parents who were strong union members, but he feels that Citarella's workers don't need a union (Wax 1997). The checkout cashiers are young Hispanic women who rarely interact with customers as they scan and pack the food. The "downstairs" crew is packers, working in crowded and some community observers claimed, unsanitary conditions. All would be included in the vote on union representation for the company. When three of the downstairs crew were fired, the owner, with the advice of his lawyer, prepared for the vote by firing twelve undocumented workers and rehiring a dozen new faces. This created unease and dissension. The divisions within this company are found throughout service industry that has become the target for union organization. In restaurants it is the "front room" vs. the "back room" work force, with the monolingual immigrants invisible in the rear guard action.
The impasse at Citarella's was overcome by the mobilization of Latino workers through the Centro. Accompanied with four graduate students, Maria Gutierrez, Maria Hart, Patty Kelly, and Tiffany Francisco, we went to the address on the leaflet supporting the workers on New York City's Lower East Side. The Centro, fixed up as an office and a social center, involves workers in a wide range of educational seminars related to their rights as workers and as migrants. They address these in relation to the changing laws, citizenship participation, and social activities. Although women do not exclusively run the Centro, it is clearly influenced by female organizers and members. Coffee and cookies are available for visitors, and women staff members predominate.

The Centro Latino shared facilities with the Chinese Staff and Workers Association. This grassroots labor organization based in Chinatown from 1980 developed in reaction to the increasingly abusive labor conditions in the early 1980s (Chen 1993:138). The failure of the AFL/CIO unions to address the abysmal conditions of Chinese garment workers prompted the organization of this alternative labor group. In order to meet the specific needs of Latino workers from Mexico, Salvador, Ecuador, Puerto Rico, Honduras, and Argentina the Latino members formed their own organization in 1992. By mid-1995 they had a radio station, a newspaper, and then they began a period of enormous growth with the many public events.

Among their activities are meetings of Chicanos, Mayas, and Chaberetes with the Federal Department of Labor about the influx of Mexican migrants. They organize protests in front of restaurants and shops where workers have been unfairly treated. In their first protest, that of four restaurant workers who had been dismissed unfairly, Monica, the director of the Latino Center said laughing, "On this occasion, we broke out of clandestinidad!" Regaining wages that are withheld by employers that count on the fear of undocumented workers in carrying charges against them is a major issue for immigrants.
On the 12th of October, 1996 they staged the march to Washington D.C. with discussions in the church in which they discussed the rights of workers.

The Centro works with coalitions of the church, trade unions, and consulates of various countries. They go to the consulates to discuss workers' grievances with construction work, and they bring these issues to TV channels 41 and 47, as well as the newspaper, *El Diario*. Money comes from foundations such as *Programa de Nuevas Ciudadanos*, *Caridad*, and *La Iglesia Presbiteriana*. Since some churches are reluctant to donate money because some of their members are the bosses, the Centro must also rely on membership pledges of five dollars a month. Those who recuperate wages with their help contribute 10 percent.

The primary goal of the centers is to educate migrants to their rights as citizens and workers. Discussion leaders engage the students in issues that relate directly to their job and community problems. In the class we attended, about twenty male and female students learned the articles of the National Law on Labor Relations and routines to follow with the "*Migra*"—Immigration and Naturalization Service—through drills and role taking. What does an undocumented worker do when the *Migra* enters the Workplace? Run for cover? Refuse to answer any questions? Ask to see the credentials of the agent? Students are urged to report violations of their rights to the National Labor Relations Board, and are supplied with the address and telephone number. Cartoon illustrations with Spanish captions accompany the chalkboard exercises.

The Centro provides a non-threatening alternative to government bureaucracies and trade unions as a place to redress rights. Their principal function is to develop awareness of laws on the books that are not enforced either because of lack of funds or because of corruption and compliance with employers. The political consciousness of the immigrants we met, particularly those from El Salvador and others who have experienced
regressive U.S. backed anti-Communist military takeovers in Central America, was clearly apparent in the Centro.

The migration experience for some workers who were caught in ethnic hierarchies in their countries of origin created the conditions for transforming the very symbols of subordination into social protest and resistance to exploitation. As Nagengast and Kearney (1990: 6) have shown, Mixtecan members of the peasant union CIOAC are now active in San Quentin California agroindustrial enterprises. In this transnational organization they are reconnecting with a Mixtecan identity that gives them a cohesive presence. They are concerned with a broad spectrum of issues, including discrimination based on ethnicity, health and human rights abuses in the Mixtec enclaves in California and Oregon, along with standard issues of exploitation in the work setting. They are also influenced by U.S unions: Mixtec farmworkers’ union is now serving as a labor contracting association in which members sell their labor directly to growers.

It is in these contexts that migrants are now expanding the forms of organization within working class movements that depart from conventional labor tactics. As we will see below in the recent increases in recruitment into trade unions, these new tactics adopted by both men and women in the trade unions are overcoming the apparent impossibility of gaining representation for an unskilled (in the formal sense of that term) and vulnerable cohort of migrant workers.

Community Support for Migrants

A new dimension of the transnational interaction of migrants in homeland and receiving countries emerges as organized sectors of the host countries perceive the need to engage in support networks for the migrants. Latino Centers are increasingly working together with community organizations. The alliance of U.S. citizens with the Latino community centers provides important resources in direct access to legislators at the state
and national level. In addition, the liberal and progressive leaders of community groups
often provide free professional services to the immigrant organization.

Our first encounter with this dense web of activists came about when we
accompanied the Centro organizers to a hearing held by the Workers' Rights Board, an
organization formed by the New York Jobs with Justice Coalition and composed of
community leaders, elected officials and clergy. A coalition of Upper West Side
community activists who had supported the pickets in an eight month boycott called by
the United Food and Commercial Workers Union against the Citarella Fish Market for
firing three workers who had attempted to gain a collective bargaining unit in the shop.
The meeting was attended by democratic state senators and assemblymen, union
representatives, community and neighbor coalitions, and the Citarella workers and their
supporters city-wide. About 100 people were packed in the Presbyterian Church hall
when we joined them at 7:30 p.m.

Mr. Engler, a Gray Panther community leader of the Upper West Side embodied
the new unity among newcomers and the old liberal community. Thanking the three
workers who had joined the picket lines for giving the community inspiration, he went on
to say, "Where do we go from here?" he asked. "Workers are working twelve to fourteen
hours a day, and are not able to enjoy their families. We need community monitoring of
shops like Citarella." Later in our interview with him in his Central Park West apartment,
hung with posters from earlier community struggles, he told us of his many community
involvements from the 1930s when he was involved in support for the Spanish Republic to
current concerns of the aging.

The Citarella boycott awakened the community to the depth of the problem
citywide. It also revealed the generational rifts among workers and within the wider
community. The younger generation of Upper West Side “Yuppies” has little concern for
social problems, we were told by long term residents who gave the district its reputation as a socially conscious voting constituency. It is a problem that crosses class lines, as we learned from the labor organizers whose organizational efforts are described below.

**REVITALIZATION OF TRADE UNION ORGANIZATIONS**

Sociological analyses of the organization of the work process in the United States have stressed managerial initiatives and the technological basis for the major transformations (Gordon, Edward and Reich 1982, Edwards 1979, Burawoy 1979). Yet historical evidence indicates the initiatives of labor, particularly large scale immigrant labor, provide the motor for changes in the labor process that provoke counter action by management. In mid-nineteenth century, refugees from Ireland and Germany, fleeing the potato famine, provided the basis for craft unions as they tried to protect their skills from subsequent influxes from those same countries later in the century. Their success provoked owner/managers to debase the labor process, following the recommendations of Frederick Winslow Taylor, minimizing the importance of skills in protecting jobs (Braverman 1973). Immigrants from eastern and southern Europe toward the end of the century formed trade unions that reflected their position in a volatile labor market: the International Workers of the World (IWW) represented workers without specific skills, drawn from poorer rural settings. The immediate reaction of owner/managers was outright repression, using the full armed force of the state to thwart strikes and other forms of militant action developed by the IWW. The streams of migrants in the early twentieth century began to develop the strategy of industry wide strikes to counter the pressure of redundant workers in the recurrent cycles of depression. Though interrupted by the depression, this strategy bore fruit with the resurgence of the economy in the post world War II economy. Bureaucratic controls exercised through trade union and
management negotiation of wages and hours was settled in the climate of anti-communism in the 1950s and the depoliticization of union leadership. The subsequent era of flexible production and capital flight is now being countered by the latest migrant wave made up of Latinos and a greater proportion of women to men in the labor force.

Migrant labor provides a wider pool of resources with which workers could respond to regimens of work. Cultural identities and communal commitments of the migrants defined both the divisions and the collective bases for action in the struggles in which migrants found a place in the new settings. The structural position migrants occupy in their own transitory path, being outside the norms and past commitments of the established work force, provides a critical basis for their actions. But the experience of being outside the mainstream is not predictive as to what directions these actions will take: it can cultivate both transformative actions to change the structures of discrimination or it can seek accommodation by finding a place within structures of inequality. Complicating the analysis is the fact that "ascribed" racial and ethnic categories are also changing, just as the political category of enemy alien or preferred candidate for affirmative action is changing.

I shall consider here the latest wave of migrants, Latinos who are arriving in a political climate in which immigrants as a group are experiencing the backlash of resurgent nationalist identity that emphasizes homogeneity and rejection of foreign born. The criminalization of the presence of undocumented workers has, throughout the 1970s and 1980s, allowed employers to gain control over an underclass of workers and evade unionization (Bustamente 1985:187-8). Immigrants have become the scapegoat in structural adjustment programs that limit state welfare and pit competing interests for limited funds against each other. But at the same time, immigration officials undercut the
validity of the laws (Bustamente 1985:187) by permitting labor contracting in violation of restrictions.

The kind of out-reach work needed in organizing a culturally distinct group in the context of racist right to work communities of the south requires politically conscious activists. The cynicism and disengagement of Northamerican workers born and brought up in the United States mitigates against the devoted commitment required in the current organization drives. Latino organizers, who are often the targets of racial discrimination as well as ethnic discrimination, are often better able to see the essential link between civil rights and workers' rights. Their transnational connections with members of their communities of origin and their recourse to human rights activists in the transnational context is helping to overcome the provincialism of trade unions in the United States.

In overcoming the contradictions rife in labor relation, unions are turning to familiar organizational forms based on community and working-class organizations (Zamora 1993:8, Zavella 1987). This is particularly marked by the presence of women in trade union organizations, who draw on their skills in networking in a transnational context just in the process of surviving. The unprecedented election of a Latina woman, Linda Chavez-Thompson, as the new Executive Vice President of the AFL-CIO, indicates the priority now being given to represent and incorporate workers who have never been organized (NACLA 1996). Latino rank and file workers in the garment industry are rebuilding unions in Texas, Florida and Chicago, according to Hector Figueroa (1996:19), and demolition crews and dry-wallers, janitors, and hotel workers are making inroads in New York City's "unorganizable" immigrants (Delgado 1993, Figueroa 1996:24).

Among the strategies promoted by Latino labor organizers is the boycott. During the 1970s, Dolores Huerta and Ceasar Chavez took advantage of the exclusion of farm laborers from the Taft Hartley Act in organizing the Union of Farm Workers. In 1984 the
UFW initiated a boycott of grapes, appealing to consumers with information on the cancer causing effects of chemicals used in food production (Guerin-Gonzalez 1994:137). This strategy was also used by workers in lettuce and tomato farms (Valle 1994:150). Coming at a time of rising consciousness of environmentally deleterious consequences of pesticides and chemical fertilizers on health, consumers throughout the United States responded to the appeal to ban chemicals in food production.

Delgado (1993) demonstrates the potential for organizing among migrant workers considered to be unorganizable. He found in his study of a California mattress factory that this depends more on the organizational capacities, forms of labor control, and market forces and legal environment that the workers confront than their status as undocumented or legal migrants. A principal element reinforcing the solidarity of Latinos from several countries of Latin America was the network of companions and strong family and friendship offering the striking workers alternative employment and resources to tide them over (Delgado 1993:14). These requisites for workers confronting management in marginal, competitive firms are more frequently found among Latina migrants. The boycott was one of the most effective strategies in the strike by workers in the Camaguea mattress studied by Delgado (1993), especially in white affluent areas where store managers came to a settlement before the striking workers mobilized a picket line because "they didn't want a group of 'dirty Mexicans' to picket in front of their stores." (Delgado 1993:52). Mexican women workers in the company also responded positively to the organizer's organization of a daycare center in the middle of the garment center supported by the employers and the Unions (Delgado 1993:101). The success of the strike was due to the fact that, according to Delgado (1993:103) "The union succeeded in making the issue more than simply a labor dispute drawing in community activists, including clergy, concerned with the rights of immigrants and Latinos." Zavella's (1987) study of
Chicana cannery workers in the Santa Clara Valley corroborates the importance of cultural sensitivity related to gender and ethnicity.

Labor organizers throughout the country are also learning to avoid sharp confrontational approaches used by labor unions in the past. This is particularly important with strategies for organizing immigrant women. May Ying Chen found that such tactics created polarization and negative feelings by both workers and bosses towards the union in New York, Korean-owned garment shops targeted in an ILGWU drive (Chen 1993:141-2). Many Korean garment workers were housewives from middle-class families in Korea, and they did not readily identify with the "working class". The notion of strikes and conflict in the workplace is embarrassing to them.

Cultural sensitivity in the workplace is the new slogan of the revamped unions. This new slogan comes from trade union workers who have kinship connections with working class communities prior to World War II. We spoke with Nick Unger, an organizer for UNITE, the AFL-CIO bargaining unite for garment workers, who grew up in Bedford Stuyvesant when Puerto Ricans arrived in the 1950s. As he led us past the conference rooms where women organizers were hardly distinguishable from the rank and file members--an extraordinary makeover in a union that had been characterized by white Jewish males in a predominantly female based union—Nick Unger commented "Our union hall is like a day-care center." He swiftly outlined the trends that had weakened the unions since 1965:

There was a current--you didn't have to create it to be more or less carried on--which started with the Immigration Act of 1965. There was a huge shift in migrants in the garment industry that went from black to white to Puerto Ricans to no-holds barred in a short time. With the collapse in the garment industry, there was unstable entry and disappearance of port of entry occupations, immigration with
no base to hook them into. Where there is no political or cultural leadership and where there is no organized working class, there is no thread. All is polymorphous and perverse. People are drawn in and pushed out. The push-pull immigration destroyed the basis for incorporating them.

The workers themselves were split, he explained:

There were left wing Dominicans, a left Communists split, intense political movement arrived with factory full of radical lefts, but none joined the union. Their minds were in the Dominican Republic where they were thinking of the struggle there. For them it was a waste of time to devote organization to a Bronx furniture factory. But they had the dynamic of consciousness of power. They brought that with them.

When the bottom fell out, the sweat shops reemerged. The Chinatown comprador bourgeoisie becomes the national bourgeoisie. From Chinatown to uptown the battle for the market is fought out with workers as troops.

The leadership in unions is responding with new initiatives to the changes in the industry and in its work force. Responding to the shift in power from producer to distributor, the AFL/CIO has targeted retail chains to drop contracts with sweat shops. Instead of a moral appeal, they address the self-interest of managers concerned with image who do not want picketers announcing that they are selling sweatshop products. They are also targeting consumers, concerned with their own health when union members campaign about the unhealthy conditions working in chemically contaminated fields. Outside the shop, unions are working in educational and cultural programs for developing a broad awareness of workers for their rights as citizens as well as workers.
CONCLUSIONS

Migration in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries used to be considered the beginning of an assimilation process that tended to obliterate cultural distinctions treated as an obstacle to progress (Lamphere 1992:16). Assimilation was so much a part of the hegemonic accord that labor organizations embraced it to the same degree that employers and the gatekeepers of society did. The appeal to class unity was a way of bypassing ethnic loyalties felt to be counter productive to labor union organization. As a result, gender and race discrimination were deliberately underplayed, and rarely became a subject for organizing protest.

The new migrants, especially those that arrived after 1965, faced a different labor market and found their place in it with a variety of paths that diverged from those in the early part of the century. Flexible production schedules demand a multiplicity of adaptations that cannot be accommodated in the contract relations of formally organized labor organizations. As a result, the most innovative programs are developed outside of the usual trade union channels in centers sponsored by churches, human rights groups and foundations concerned with social problems. Because they provide settings outside the workplace and often in ethnically distinct neighborhoods, these centers, often directed by leaders drawn from the same ethnic group, can develop the basic adjustment programs for the particular group. Unions are beginning to adopt programs initiated in these centers that respond to a broad array of family, community, and international problems faced by migrants.

Inequality based on gender and ethnic hierarchies is transformed in the migration process. Entering on the lower rung of the occupational scale, both men and women
migrants confront discrimination, but they experience it in distinct ways. The earlier wave of migrations in the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries resolved the dilemmas faced by a severely discriminated female labor force by seeking a “family wage” agreement in the workplace. In the present wave of migrations, social reproduction in global labor markets is becoming transformed. The “myth of the male breadwinner” is unmasked, as women become chief breadwinners in many households (Safa 1996). They develop transnational networks from New York or Los Angeles or Chicago to the Caribbean, Mexico or the Philippines or other low wage countries as they strive to maintain households. In this transnational commoditized domestic sphere, men lose their priority as provisioners at the same time that they lose ground in employment. As women become domestics in the homes of United States professional women, or enter marginal factories operating underground or on the margins of the fashion centers, they are beginning to politicize their concerns as housewives and workers.

In these multilateral approaches to community organizing and union building, women’s participation breaks down the distinction between production and reproduction, merging the focus and strategies of each domain. Women are, in the process, translating their disadvantages into political issues through which they are gaining a changed status in their households and jobs. As yet, they have just begun to relate to the United Nations covenants on human rights for immigrants and for women. Central to these is the assertion of the right to family integrity denied in the current immigration regulations. Just as their presence in transforming the workplace, so is it transforming the community and trade union organizations.

The new labor struggles take place in a variety of settings, only one of which is the production site. The very nature of the new sites of employment for most migrants is either underground, transitory, illegal, or a combination of these traits that make it
difficult to enforce labor regulations. As a result, the new union actions turn to retail outlets and consumers themselves to impose boycotts that force recognition of labor demands for wages, healthy work conditions or a product free of pollutants that affect the consumer as much as the workers.

The new awakening in the labor movement is an outcome of immigrants—women and men—who are the organizing drive in the rank-and-file. The internationalization of the membership of trade unions has opened up a space to challenge internal hierarchies within the migrant group at the same time that revitalized trade unions challenge the hierarchical ordering of ethnic and class relations. Issues of social reproduction are taking a central place as a leadership that reflects the feminized and ethnically distinct labor force takes charge.
REFERENCES CITED


A DAY AT THE LATINO CENTER, LOWER EAST SIDE, NEW YORK CITY.

APPENDIX 1

A particularly intriguing exercise involved questions given by Monica, the class leader, which were printed along with Yes or No responses which students were asked to choose. For example:

1) If the Migra doesn't have order to enter a workplace, is it better to let them in voluntarily? The preferred answer was no, there are many abusive persons, and if you say you are going to call the police, then he may reveal his identity by fleeing.

2) If you don't speak English and are Latino, is this suspicious? Best response is to remain silent until a legal representative is available. The agent puts himself in jeopardy for suggesting any alternative.

3) If you lack documents, is it possible to avoid income tax evasion charge? Yes, you can acquire a social security number to pay taxes for 8 or 9 months, and this does carry benefits.

4) Is it better to show some document to the Migra even if it is false? No, never.

5) What can you do as a group when the Migra comes? Those who have documents should not proffer them if asked. Show solidarity with those who are undocumented.

One of the students commented, "In Washington Heights, there is a great deal of fear. Let's organize at a community level, then they cannot arbitrarily mistreat a person. If a community refuses to buy at a place that pays less than minimum wage, then the employers are forced to conform to the law. If a community organizes and is solid, then
abuses will not happen. We ourselves have to raise our consciousness with neighbors, with our families, speaking not as Dominicanos but as gente de la comunidad."

A student asked what one should do if they were short-changed in their pay. Monica advised them of the need to carry their own record of work, and especially if it were piece work, the number of pieces finished and whatever fines charged.

Another exercise was to analyze what should be the characteristics for an optimal workplace. Each student, including us as visitors, received a phrase and was asked to pin it in the column “Que debe ser” or “Que no debe ser”, and then defend their choice. Among the terms were: comprometido, planificado, democratica, liberador, colectivo, lento, verticalidad, educativo, consciente, estrategico, critica, creativo, participativo, informativo, discursivo, paternalistica, acritica, burocratico, espontaneo, pasivo, problematizado, autoritario, rapido. The resulting discussion of each term was revealing. With verticalista, one said it could be ordering from the top down in a dictatorship, and therefore should be rejected. Others felt that the vertical hierarchy brought order to the workplace. Another said lento was preferable to rapido in the pace of work, since if people are learning they have to have time. In discussing the work condition liberador, an older man pointed out that it may be resistance to a process, and another suggested it should be open discussion. The leader added that it should be taking action for oneself. With respect to espontaneo, the group felt that it was good only if tempered with planificado. Comprometido led to a good deal of discussion: it was good if responsible to commitments. Problematizador also could be positive if it meant thinking in depth.

In the discussions following the class, workers shared information on their wages and hours. One man said he worked from 6 a.m. to 6 p.m. for $35., another that he was paid $120. a week for nine hours of work a day, but made $45. in tips. Monica commented on the march of migrants to Albany the previous year. The principal demand was for
jobs. Some who were on public assistance, others concerned with health, feared losing rights or even their documents.

We have to counter this by organizing from below. If you do it from above, it deprives people of their political participation. I went to church with 150 people from Central America organizing to support the Alliance for Amnesty with so many present they could not deny their demands. Both the Salvadorans and the Guatemalans are trying to stay permanently despite the peace agreements. They could be a step ahead if they organized together, along with citizens who will make the demand. This would give them greater weight. You have to involve families and friends, then you get results. Monica closed the meeting with an announcement that next week they would discuss discrimination at work.

**UPPER WEST SIDE COMMUNITY BOARD HEARING**

**APPENDIX 2**

What had been planned as a hearing turned out to be a victory celebration for a settlement of the dispute that allowed the three workers to go back to work. However the issue that had precipitated their firing—i.e. the workers attempt to gain representation by the UFC Local 1500 in a bargaining contract—was not settled. Thanks were proffered to Upper West Side community leaders Phyllis Gunther, Richard Starky, and Nora Ephron and to State Senator Franz Leichter, for his support of the three workers. "We showed that we could bring all these people together," one of the community leaders said. "Some say the Upper West Side is not what it used to be. It is! We won." "Maybe this can be the first of many struggles against Pataki’s government," a union leader added. Ben Eisler, a labor lawyer, said that in 95 percent of cases workers are fired and do not get their jobs back.
He remarked that the National Labor Relations Board usually drags on for months, but in this case, community support made the difference in their coming to the decision that the former employees were unfairly dismissed. Nick Oldenberg of Jobs for Justice said that employers every day are not doing the right thing, and the government lets things slide. "They know that workers often have to leave the country," he added. "We have to get the laws changed and give the government backbone. Citarella is not unique. What is unusual is that we put up a 'helluva' good fight, but it isn't over yet."

Nora Ephron, screenwriter (Harry Meets Sally, Dreaming in Seattle) spoke at the meeting, claiming that the press was not with them: the New York Observer had an anti-union editorial, and The New York Times story never mentioned the right to organize—just talked about the consumerism of the upper West Side. The Upper West Side News gave the owners a free page and a half, and only a paid ad for the union. Nor were the police neutral. There were more police cars than picketers most days. She concluded, "We are willing to pay a few cents more so workers can have a living wage."

Ed Cordero, Director of Organizing for the United Food and Commercial Workers said that the community support sent a message to employers throughout the city that they can't get away with paying workers less than minimum wages, forcing people to work in sweatshop conditions. Larry Plunk from Local l74 commented that there seems to be an anti-labor feeling in the press for the last two decades. Our members of l54 and l74 were on the picket line day in and day out with the police threatening them with arrest. Jerry Golden got a woman who was arrested for leaf-letting released. The owner of the store, Joe Guerrera, has hired a notorious anti-union lawyer, Alfred DeMaria who monitors his public statements. Guerrera writes personal notes to the community leaders who have spoken against him. In a letter to the minister of the Presbyterian Church, he blamed the union for driving a neighborhood store out of business. "Citarella employees
are not on strike," he stated, "The people you see picketing and misbehaving outside our store are strangers who have been hired by the Food Workers union to disrupt our business. The union is picketing my store in order to coerce me into signing a labor contract."

ENDNOTES

1 I use the term transnational as defined by Schiller, Basch, and Szanton (1992) those social fields that immigrants build linking together their country of origin and their country of relocation.

2 I use the term patriarchal in the restricted sense of a system of complementary responsibilities in which men carry the obligation of protecting and provisioning familial dependents and women provide non-compensated services. The excesses in exploitation of such services without reciprocation, which are often conflated with patriarchy I refer to as male dominance (Nash 1988).

3 Hondagneu-Sotelo (1994) shows an increase in public and social roles in the household, in the labor market, and in government and private assistance institutions among Mexican migrant women. Support for the research was provided by the National Science Foundation fieldwork experience for graduate students.

4 A special issue of International Migration Review (1984) corrected the myopic vision of migrants as men only. See also Patricia Pessar (1986) who sums up the literature on Latin American migration based on the premise that migrants were men who occasionally were accompanied by wives and/or mothers. Paradigms based on such assumptions were, notably, Piore (1979), who imagine an anomic individual who lacks personal attachments until those are formed in the new setting. Schenk-Sandbergen (1995:10) and Karlekar (1995:27) also report little interest in female migration in South Asian studies because the movement of women is considered “marriage migration”, or part of the domestic and private sphere rather than the sphere of production. Yet women constitute 46 percent of the agricultural labor force, and constitute much of the rural-rural migration reported. As the contributors to her edited anthology show, migration of women from “tribal” areas in India and elsewhere is closely correlated with environmental degradation and the loss of subsistence possibilities for women, which is of international concern.

5 For example, in 1870 congress gave immigration officials the right to judge the character and bearing of female, but not of male migrants (Seller 1994:4). Guerin-Gonzalez (1994:6-7) found in her study of Mexican migrants from 1900 to 1930 that when women traveled or worked or lived alone, or together but without children, they were extremely vulnerable to predatory attentions of both Anglos and Mexicans.

6 A rash of books and articles have responded to the anti-immigrant sentiment, exposing the contradictions in American policy regarding immigration. This is expressed in recent legislation sponsored by a broad spectrum of political interests from Diane Feinstan to Patrick Buchanan. Liberals find themselves on both sides of the controversy regarding restriction, from Arthur Schlesinger, who asserts that multiculturalism, which he calls “the apotheosis of ethnicity” “has revived the dismal prospect...of a society fragmented into ethnic groups, to Joel Millman (1997) who documents “how immigrants renew our country, our economy, and our values.” Failure on the part of the employer to pay wages
is one of the most common complaints of workers. Of the 72 cases filed with the Wage and Hour Division of the state Labor Department in recent years, only two resulted in back payments and both were only partial, according to Jennifer Gordon of the Workplace Project, a Hempstead-based advocacy group. (Daily News, Friday, February 16, 1996.) Minimum wage laws are consistently violated in sweatshops that violate sanitary and safety conditions, as well as forcing overtime work without additional compensation. New York State Commissioner of Labor John F. Hudacs estimated that of the 6,000 garment industry employers in the state, two to three thousand are illegal sweatshops (Feitelberg 1994). Senator Franz S. Leichter, a liberal Democratic state Senator, estimates two to three times that number, commenting in his memorandum supporting an increase in damages and civil penalties that there were at least 5,000 in 1992 according to the New York State Labor Board, compared to 200 in 1970 and 3,000 in 1980. Laws are ignored, in part because of light fines. Chris Goldman (1987) includes Appendix 4, Convention No. 143, in her study "Human Rights and the Migratory Labour System." Human Rights Project No. 3 Monograph Institute of South African Studies, National University of Lesotho. The convention repeatedly enjoins member nations to make provisions for the accommodation of families, defined as spouse and dependents, of migratory workers.

7 The attack on the reproductive rights of migrant workers is addressed in United Nations Convention No. 143. The convention repeatedly enjoins member nations to make provisions for the accommodation of families, defined as spouse and dependents, of migratory workers (Goldman 1987). This fits the profile of Yanira Merino, a Salvadoran forced into exile who fell into the hands of death-squad activists when she arrived in Los Angeles. (NACLA 1996)

8 This fits the profile of Yanira Merino, a Salvadoran forced into exile who fell into the hands of death-squad activists when she arrived in Los Angeles (NACLA 1996). The elevated political consciousness of Salvadoran and other Central American exiles was a leavening element in trade union organization in eastern sweat shops and in western agroindustry.