

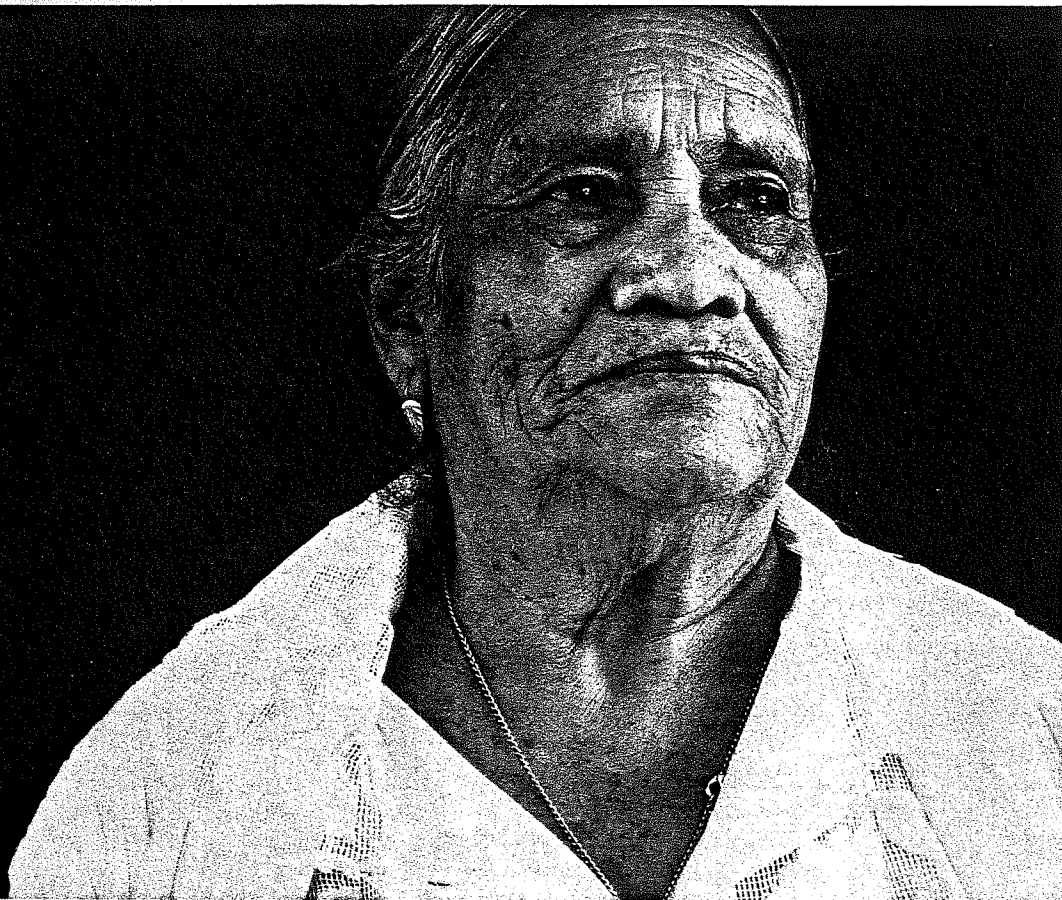
DAVID ROCKEFELLER CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

DRCLAS NEWS



HARVARD UNIVERSITY • WINTER 1998 NEWSLETTER

Photoessay on Women's
Spirituality in Latin
America on p. 14.
Text by Monica Maher,
Harvard Divinity School.
Photos by Terri Ruth Unger.



Women in Latin America

BY SUSAN ECKSTEIN

This issue of DRCLAS NEWS highlights the many ways that the lives of Latin American and Latina women have been changing, how their experiences vary with their social background and turmoil in their countries, and how conditions for women are not necessarily improving with modernity. The articles and essays also show how women's experiences have been affected by their gender, and in doing so reveal how much of the social experience of Latin Americans went undocumented and unanalyzed until gender became recognized as a major force shaping women's identities and opportunities.

As research on women has progressed, we have learned that there is no uniform relationship between level of economic development and women's labor force participation. We have also discovered that women have not been and are not as passive and subservient to men as cultural constructs, literature, and discourse convey.

Silvia Arrom, Boston Area Consortium for Latin America's (BACLA) President and Professor of History



People who wish
to subscribe to the
calendar, DRCLAS
DATES, or the
newsletter, DRCLAS
NEWS, can pick up
a form at 61
Kirkland Street,
obtain an electronic
form on our website,
<[http://www.
fas.harvard.
edu/~drclas/](http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~drclas/)>
or e-mail
<[tstumph@
fas.harvard.edu](mailto:tstumph@fas.harvard.edu)>

at Brandeis, points to interesting lessons from Mexican history (p.16). She defies conventional wisdom in showing that women's labor force involvement, their subordination to husbands, and their family ties did not evolve from confinement to the home and to homes embedded in extended families, to increasing independence rooted in emergent labor force opportunities and concomitant independence from spouses and kin. She shows that tradition and modernity are not polar opposites, and social change has not evolved in a unilinear direction.

Although women in the 19th century worked, like 20th century women in most of the world, they earned less than men. The feminization of poverty is not new. It also proves to be persistent, even when women produce for the global economy and even when men's work evolves around their wives. In her telling narrative, DRCLAS Research Associate Lois Wasserspring, on leave from Wellesley College, takes a look at gender, poverty, and art (p.8). Though nationally and internationally renowned, the women she portrays continue to lead a life of few luxuries and their spouses dominate the commercialization of the pottery they craft.

Women's active role in the economy is not rooted in feminism. Nor is it the result or basis of "liberation." Rather, it typically is grounded in social, economic, and political necessity. Harvard Graduate School of Education's Carola Suárez-Orozco, co-director of the Harvard Immigration Project, examines some of the complexities of the new immigrant experience in the United States and how the experience may be different for women than for men (p. 6).

Deborah Anker, who spearheads Harvard Law School's Women's Asylum Database project along with a small group of dedicated colleagues, discusses the situation of women asylum seekers (p.10). Robert F. Kennedy Visiting Professor Cecilia Medina, a Chilean law professor and an expert on international human rights who spent last semester at Harvard Law School, takes a broader look at why gender is a human rights issue (p.8).

By becoming more involved in the public sphere, by becoming more active in civil society and the communities where they live, women throughout Latin America are helping to bring about change. Despite the horrendous Christmastime massacre in Chiapas, Mexico, women there are beginning to become protagonists instead of constant victims. DRCLAS NEWS editor June Carolyn Erlick depicts how Harvard projects in Chiapas have helped women there reshape their lives (p 12). Government doctoral candidate Mala Htun examines new legislation in Latin America which is giving women in some countries a mandatory share of congressional slots (p. 19). And ACCION International, a Somerville-headquartered non-profit microlending agency, allowed Cristina Lopez from the Harvard Business School and the Kennedy School of Government one summer to help empower Latin American women by promoting their participation in business cooperatives. She describes some of her experiences (p.19).

Latin American women's lives have also been told through literature, traditionally one of the few ways a

woman could find a voice. Harvard Romance Languages and Literatures graduate student Keja Valens, in this vein, reviews *Las Desobedientes*, an anthology of Latin American women writers, including a piece by Harvard Extension School Lecturer Mary Berg (p.23). Romance Languages and Literatures Professor Ana María Amar Sánchez describes how popular culture, often associated with women, has become incorporated into so-called high literature (p.23). W.E.B. Du Bois Resident Fellow Flora María González takes a look at how literature and film have transformed the image of mulata/black women in Cuba (p.21).

Research on women more often than not has been pursued by women. Gender influences research in ways still not well understood. But a number of the authors point to ways that they have both influenced and been influenced by their research. Lopez finds her "Latina soul" through her involvement in communities south of the Rio Grande, and Harvard's Jennifer Schirmer, author of the forthcoming *A Violence Called Democracy: The Guatemalan Military Project* tells what it's like to be a woman interviewing top military officials (p.3) She describes how stereotyping can sometimes work in favor of women scholars and journalists. As she notes, "They didn't believe a woman could know anything about national security."

But the portrayal and understanding of women's experiences can be furthered through art as well as academic scholarship. The stunning photo essay on women's spirituality (p.14) by Terri Ruth Unger, who accompanied Harvard Divinity School student Monica Maher on her research project in Chile and Mexico, brings to life how women's search for identity may be deepened through prayer and body movement. In an ever-changing world, such photos capture vividly the human experience.

Susan Eckstein, Professor of Sociology at Boston University, is president of the Latin American Studies Association and a DRCLAS Research Associate. DRCLAS is hosting the LASA presidency.

DAVID ROCKEFELLER CENTER FOR LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES

Director John Coatsworth
Executive Director Steve Reifenberg
Publications Director June Carolyn Erlick
Conference Coordinator Debra-Lee Vasques
Designer Kelly McMurray

61 Kirkland Street
Cambridge, MA 02138
Tel: (617) 495-3366
Fax: (617) 496-2802
E-mail: <drclas@fas.harvard.edu>
<<http://www.fas.harvard.edu/~drclas/>>

Copyright © 1998 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.



STEPHENIE HOLYMAN

Interviewing Military Officers

A Woman Researcher's Perspective

BY JENNIFER SCHIRMER

WE DROVE UP INTO THE RESIDENTIAL hills of Villa Hermosa, overlooking the city of Guatemala, searching for the house amongst the many white-stucco, high-walled mansions. I asked the taxi-driver to wait to make sure this was the address the colonel's secretary had given me over the telephone. I pressed the buzzer and gave my name. A man's footsteps echoed in the interior courtyard, large dogs barked, and the small window in the gate was opened only to first reveal the snub of an Uzi submachine gun, the weapon pointed toward me. The taxi sped off. After I explained my presence, I was able to begin the first of two two-hour interviews with the colonel, one of more than 50 Guatemalan military officers I've interviewed in the last decade

While interviewing groups of relatives of the disappeared in Chile, Argentina, Guatemala and El Salvador in the 1980s, I had become intrigued by how military regimes in Latin America had sown seeds of resistance among women. How is it, I kept asking myself, that the tactic of disappearance, meant to censor memory and terrorize on the basis of an absence of bodies, had created such an extraordinary presence of protest? The relatives themselves kept referring to "national security doctrine" to explain the repression. I decided that to understand the actions of a repressive State toward its citizens, especially toward the women I was studying, I needed to speak with high-ranking military officers who shape that doctrine.

Since 1984, I've conducted long, mostly taped, interviews with Guat-

emalan chiefs of State, chiefs of staff, intelligence officers, defense ministers and the so-called "Officers of the Mountain" who staged coup attempts in 1988 and 1989. I've done so to try to understand several things: what do these officers think about national security, rule of law, democracy and human rights; what are their cultural logics of power and habits of mind; and, how is State-crafting based on violence constituted? If the military loots democratic discourse and maintains a threat mentality, what is the nature of such a violent democracy? How does this help us to refine our concepts of demilitarization and democratization?

People often want to know why these officers have been willing to be so frank with me about their "habits of mind". Partly it is pure persistence: it has taken me years to obtain these

Guatemalan Army soldiers protected "national security interests."



PHOTOS: STEPHEN HOLTMAN



Top: Understanding the male world of security matters; Bottom: The female relatives of the disappeared often talked about "national security doctrine."

interviews. But partly it also has to do with an ethnographic approach that attempts to capture the perceptions, categories of thought and systems of meanings of the informants through lengthy and systematic interviews. I used this approach—a blend of testimonial and structured interview—in questioning the female relatives, and applied this technique to interview officers with surprising results—surprising even to myself. This interview technique conveys to the officer that I am

interested in their view of the world. My style is one of "I am here to listen to your side of the story; tell me that story, no matter how long it takes. You are an intelligent person with an interesting and important story." Certainly that story is shaped by my questions, but these often arise from earlier comments by the officers; the story then is shaped in by our dialogue.

This said, I am often asked whether, as a woman, I have an advantage interviewing military officers. This question, I sense, emerges from the traditional notion of women using their wiles to get men to show off and speak more frankly. Or perhaps, it emerges from the idea that military officers are more open with women they believe to be naive and thus, less threatening. More positively, some might be suggesting that as a woman I might be a better listener, providing a sympathetic context in which military officers are more comfortable and, thus, more forthcoming.

As a woman researching a male-dominant institution, I have come to understand that, initially, officers perceive me as a vulnerable and innocent woman in interviews. This is certainly

ly a sexist attitude in many ways but one that, ironically, may provide an avenue into a world that might otherwise remain hidden, especially when one is considered naive about issues usually associated with men, such as national security, guerrilla warfare and threat mentality. At first, I would ask, "Can you help me understand what you mean by the concept 'national security?'" Officers would respond as though I were their student (which, in effect, I was, learning a new language, a new worldview) and they were my teachers. Being a woman asking this question, though, added a gendered element: I was assumed to be in need of instruction in the male world of security matters. In short, by availing myself of traditional gender roles, I turned the tables by accepting their innocent presumption about my naiveté.

Other researchers and journalists on Guatemala cautioned me that military officers would only provide stock answers or no answers at all: the Guatemalan military was one of the most secretive, least researched institutions in Central America, they warned. In my naiveté, I imagined the military willing to talk if only someone were willing to listen. But, I also believed that what they had to say was worth hearing and indeed worth knowing and understanding. This doesn't mean I was perfectly confident in my presumptions. It took me two days to summon up my courage to walk over to the National Palace and request my first interview with the colonel-lawyer responsible for writing all the decrees-laws under the military regimes between 1982 and 1986. But it did mean that with much persistence, as one male *New York Times* reporter said to me later, "You got these guys to talk to you about the war. They wouldn't even give me the time of day."

Women researchers may have some advantage interviewing people about their worldview because we may be more willing to listen and learn about others' political and cultural habits of mind. Whether true or not for other women researchers, I can say that I am honestly intrigued by how these offi-

cers view the world and place themselves within it. When I ask for interviews, I emphasize that I want to know the story of Guatemala from their own perspective. I believe this made a profound difference in how they responded to my questions.

Yet the advantages that accrue to a woman because of her gender can just as easily become disadvantages. I believe it took me longer to get officers to take me seriously and grant me appointments for interviews. Now, after years of interviewing, they deal with me as someone worth engaging in a continual dialogue because of what, in fact, they have taught me over the years. Yet I have not attained nor do I want to attain the status of honorary male. On the contrary, this world is, in some respects, genderless for me now because I have critically interpreted and not embraced these concepts as my own.

At moments, though, I've faced issues of safety and reputation unique to women researchers and journalists. For example, in the torrential month of August 1988, I held a three-hour taped interview with two Officers of the Mountain in my hotel room for two reasons. Wary of army counter-intelligence, they, on the one hand, did not want to be seen or heard talking publicly about their coup attempt three months earlier. And, uncertain of my safety, I did not want to leave the hotel with them for the interview.

How, though, I thought, does it look for a woman to be inviting two infamous officers up to her hotel room? I have never been quite sure whether the hotel staff was protecting me by knocking on my door every half hour to make sure I was all right or was checking to see that there was nothing illicit going on. This is something a man would not have had to worry about. Then again, nobody, at the time, had been able to gain access to these particular officers.

Whatever advantages and disadvantages

women accrue in researching the powerful, it is also critical to ask, finally, why is it important for some-

Women accrue different advantages and disadvantages in researching.

one who has written about women's resistance to State repression to engage in such research? What does military thinking have to do with women's issues? My book on the Guatemalan military is an attempt to understand State

structures from the perspective of the powerful. If, as women researchers/scholars, we limit ourselves to the study of the powerless (be they women or men), women will never learn how to change the State to serve our own

interests. And if women researchers/scholars do not study the shifting logics of State power, we will be even less likely to understand the nature of either women's resistance to it or our collaboration with it.

Jennifer Schirmer is a Lecturer on Social Studies at FAS (where she teaches the course "An Anthropology of Violence, Memory and Reconciliation") and Program Associate at the Program on Nonviolent Sanctions and Cultural Survival (PONSACS) at the CFIA. Her book, The Guatemalan Military Project: A Violence Called Democracy, based on interviews with officers, will be published by the University of Pennsylvania Press as part of its Human Rights Series in Spring 1998.

AN INTERVIEW

"We aren't renouncing the use of force. If we have to use it, we have to use it, but in a more sophisticated manner. You needn't kill everyone to complete the job. [You can use] more sophisticated means; we aren't going to return to the matazonas [massacre zones]...We have created a more humanitarian, less costly strategy to be more compatible with the democratic development for 70 percent of the population while we kill 30 percent. Before, the strategy was to kill 100 percent."

Q: How did you arrive at this percentage?

"One said 30 percent just for the sake of saying it. We said 30 percent so that the repression would appear to be less."

Q: Ah, so it's entirely theoretical?

"Sure...we had to speak out against the 100 percent solution because we [in the military government] knew we would never progress otherwise."

Q: I was assuming that the 30 percent was a norm that you calculated annually that would decrease over time.

"No, forget it! Whatever euphemism one uses--police, militia, national guard, armed forces--the reality is that you are the fuerza coercitiva [coercive force] of the state. The state cannot renounce its coercive force, you must use the weapons [at hand]..."

Q: How long will this 'stage of transition' in which the 30/70 formula will be used continue?

"We don't know. When the opponent is no longer significant, when he is no longer influential enough to impose actions against the State..."

Jennifer Schirmer, Interview with former Defense Minister General Héctor Gramajo, excerpted from Harvard International Review Spring, 1991 (Volume XIII, No. 3:10-13)

The Transitions of Immigration

How are they Different for Women and Men?

BY CAROLA SUÁREZ-OROZCO

A WOMAN'S IMMIGRATION EXPERIENCE CAN BE QUITE different from that of a man. However, in order to comprehend this experience, I believe that it is most important to understand the specific circumstances surrounding her immigration. What were her motivations to immigrate? What context does she find herself in once she immigrates? What is her social-economic background? Did she come by herself or with family members or friends? Is she married and does she have children? Only with this information can we begin to make assumptions about and comprehend her immigration experience.

Transitions have long been regarded by social scientists and mental health professionals to be stressful. Events such as moves, job changes, and ruptures in relationships are known to be highly disruptive, often triggering a variety of reactions such as anxiety, anger, or depression. By any measure, immigration is one of the most stressful events any person—male or female—can undergo.

Immigration is stressful in a variety of ways. Most critically, it removes individuals from their familiar and predictable contexts—extended families and friends, community ties, jobs, living situations, customs, and (often) language. Immigrants are stripped of many of their sustaining social relationships, as well as of their roles which provide them with culturally scripted notions of how they fit into the world. Without a sense of competence, control, and belonging, they may feel marginalized. Certainly for many, immigration may bring gains (in the form of economic advantages, social mobility, and a feeling of adventure) or relief (from political or religious persecution or extreme poverty). At the same time, these changes are highly disorienting and nearly inevitably lead to a keen sense of loss.

As a woman, I have been intrigued by how the immigration experience is different for women and men. However, I have found little solid research in the area of how the immigration experience differs for the two sexes, so that it is difficult to allow for much in the way of valid generalizations. Gender theorists have argued that most women tend to be more concerned with interpersonal relationships and intimacy than most men. From this assumption then, we would surmise that the extraordinary social ruptures that often result from immigration would lead to particularly high levels of depressive responses for women. Men, on the other hand, would be more likely to suffer from anxiety (resulting from losses of social roles, job, and status) as well as anger (resulting from frustrat-

ed aspirations and expectations). There is some evidence in both the clinical literature and the ethnographic literature to support these basic assumptions.

By and large, people immigrate for three reasons: to better economic circumstances, to escape political and religious persecution, and/or to reunite with family members who may have immigrated earlier. One can think in terms of relative losses and relative gains surrounding each of these migratory patterns. For those immigrating for economic reasons, while there may be a variety of personal losses resulting from immigration, acting as a sustaining antidote is the sense of empowerment and pride that comes with knowing that one's earnings may result in the improvement in the quality of life not only of the individual but often for many members of the family (including those in the country of origin). Escaping forms of repression may bring a relative sense of relief from persecution and terror but is accompanied by the cumulative psychic toll of trauma and results in a sense of never being able to return. For most, family reunification is often

By any measure,
immigration is one
of the most stressful
events any person—
male or female—
can undergo.

a relatively positive experience, but whether or not the immigration was self-initiated may be key. Women are far more likely to be following a man's lead (following a spouse, boyfriend, or father) than the other way around.

The new context in which the immigrant may find herself quite obviously is critical. Whether or not jobs with decent wages and working conditions are available will have result in very different migration experiences. Being a Mexican domestic worker in a climate of xenophobic disparagement (as in the California that brought us Proposition 187) will clearly result in a different experience than being a Colombian engineer in Boston. The availability of safe neighborhoods and ample social support networks also have predictable effects. The new context is important in understanding all immigrants but does not lead to particularly obvious patterns of differences between men and women.

Gender and social-class, on the other hand, demonstrate interesting patterns of interaction. On the whole, upper middle-class immigrants sustain the least losses. They are able to retain much of their prestige and have the means to travel back and forth to maintain their social relationships. Men from middle class backgrounds often suffer from significant losses in prestige as they frequently find employment in positions far below their training and qualifications. Middle-class women also may suffer

downward trends in jobs and are often significantly cut off from loved ones with only infrequent opportunities to visit. In addition, their quality of life often goes down as they may no longer be able to afford the domestic help to which they may have grown accustomed.

Furthermore, both middle class men and women immigrants may often suffer for the first time, the painful experience of prejudice and discrimination in their new country. The poorest immigrants who are largely members of the lower classes in their country of origin suffer tremendous adversity as a result of immigration. In spite of these difficulties—which may include xenophobia, racism, and fierce competition for the least desirable jobs—they may often achieve relative improvements in their economic circumstances. In addition, while they certainly suffer from discrimination in the new country, social disparagement may not necessarily be a new experience, for as members of the lower class, they are likely to have suffered such treatment in their country of origin.

Understanding the family context is also key in exploring the immigration experience. What was the nature of the gender relations prior to immigration? Patterns of extremely rigid male dominance may not be as easily accepted by women in the new context—frequently leading to significant marital discord. Immigrant women who come into close contact with members of the host society may become aware of the roles and opportunities available to women in the new setting. When one member of the family precedes others in immigration, ruptures in relationship patterns may result. The wife and mother who was left behind for a long period in the country of origin may have become quite independent and may resist returning to a system of male domination after reunification. By the same token, children who were raised for a number of years by their grandmother after the mother immigrated are often emotionally distanced and deeply resentful of their parents and may not respond to their authority. Women who are raising children alone without the help of a spouse will obviously be under significantly greater stress than women who are in steady relationships and can share the burden of supporting the family.

Clearly, gender is one of many factors critical in understanding the immigration experience. However, much of the research on immigration has focused on economic, demographic and sociological factors of work. Very little



PHOTO BY ANNA LEVINE

has been written about the psychological and cultural aspects of immigration. The immigration literature has tended to take a male lens which focuses on the social role of the world of work. We still have much to learn about the social spheres dominated by women—these include not only the world of work but also that of the home and family. One may ask, and just why is that important? Beyond the intrinsic interest of the question, I would argue that how women, men, and the family system function have a critical influence on how well the children of immigrants adapt to their new context. Given that children of immigrants are the largest growing sector of the U.S. school age population, we should not lose sight that children are our future. Understanding key contributors to their well-being should be a matter of priority in our intellectual and social agenda.

Carola Suárez-Orozco is a cultural psychologist. She is the Co-Director of the Harvard Immigration Projects, a lecturer at the Harvard University Graduate School of Education, and a Research Associate at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies. She is the Co-principal Investigator of a new five year initiative examining the adaptation of immigrant adolescents from five different countries.

Towards the future: an immigrant Mexican child in New York skips past her family's U.S.-style Christmas decorations.

Women and Human Rights

The Inter-American Human Rights System

BY CECILIA MEDINA

IN A SMALL TOWN HIGH UP IN THE Andes, a middle-aged woman with two grown children was knocked unconscious by her husband when she returned home from a meeting organizing to bring running water to the community.

In a medium-sized city in Central America, a 23-year-old woman is raped by five men in an attempt to coerce a male relative to join their political movement.

scends that which is purely individual, since it is obvious that one does not speak of rights unless there is somebody against which or with relation to whom these rights can be exercised. International human rights provisions are, indeed, minimum rules for treating your fellow human beings, derived from the idea that all of them are equal in rights and dignity (as the Universal Declaration of Human Rights states).

and discrimination against vast sectors of the population, mainly women and indigenous people. Actually it seems almost incredible that in the midst of all this the system has been able to develop.

The creation of the Inter-American Commission for Human Rights in 1948 was the beginning of the inter-American system for the promotion and protection of human rights. The system developed further and in 1969 an American Convention on Human Rights was adopted, a proper treaty containing internationally binding obligations for States. The Convention entered into force in 1978, retained the Commission, working since 1960, and created an Inter-American Court of Human Rights, which started to operate late 1978.

It should be noted that about 70 per cent of all the cases before the Inter-American Commission still involve the right to life and the right to physical integrity, while in the European system until now complaints about the violation of these rights are a definite exception, most cases being related to problems of due process and privacy. Furthermore, elected governments in Latin America still have a very difficult time trying to tame—if I may use the word—the military. This shows that the remnants of authoritarianism are still very much present, and that, as expected, it continues to manifest itself in the relentless domination of women.

The Inter-American Commission on Human Rights has begun to address the problem of women only recently. This is a welcome development, as international involvement, particularly in the form of activities by the regional human rights organs, is of vital importance for addressing the problems of women in an effective



STEPHENIE HOLLYMAN

Guatemalan mother and child: "If women cannot support themselves or their children, they are unlikely to speak up against abuses."

In a large, sprawling city in the Southern Cone, a peasant woman is subjected to forced sterilization. And in another city, yet another young woman is prevented from access to an abortion.

One often thinks of these cases—and about human rights in general—in individual terms, something that happens to each individual in particular. But there is more to it than that. The idea of human rights tran-

Thus the idea and justification of human rights have to do with organizing society in a way that will prevent conflict, and usually this will mean, in one form or another, organizing society as a democracy. The link between human rights and democracy explains the difficulties that the Inter-American Human Rights system has encountered in our continent, plagued as it has been by dictatorship, exploitation of the poor,

tive manner.

The most egregious form of the violation of women's human rights is violence. Violence is not a rare phenomenon in our region, but in general it is repudiated, at least in the rhetoric. Violence against women, on the contrary, is at best excused on grounds of culture and at worst accepted. One cannot fail to acknowledge that this is not an isolated phenomenon that comes out of nowhere. Violence is the culmination, the grossest manifesta-

tion of the situation of subordination in which women find themselves. Violence is exercised against women because they are considered inferior to men, and in fact are placed in a position of subordination. People in such a situation are prime candidates for mistreatment, and it is not to be expected that a formula will be found to eradicate the tendency that many have to abuse the weak.

Therefore, we need to fight for a change in the situation of women, and this struggle is a struggle against culture. I do not think -and this opinion, I might venture, is shared by many- that there is any possibility of swift progress with regard to women without the involvement of the international community. Repressive trends in a culture are hard to overcome by the repressed without help from those who are free to speak up, who are able to take a stand without fearing major reprisals.

Even without the threat of reprisals, the sheer lack of economic, political and social power may impede effective action by the victims themselves. If women cannot support themselves or their children, they are unlikely to speak up against abuses. Those who have privileges are very reluctant to have them taken away. This is often the case in Latin America, but it is not a situation that is unique to our continent. I could give the example of Switzerland and the granting of the right to vote to women to prove my

point. Switzerland gave women the right to vote only in the 1970's, and the pressure from other European countries was instrumental for this. One canton, however, remained recalcitrant: periodically women managed to put the issue to a referendum; periodically only men would vote and it would be defeated. A ruling of the

federal Supreme Court, in the late 1980s, was needed to force the canton to amend its constitution and allow women to vote in cantonal affairs. If this

happens in the heart of Europe, I cannot imagine what the prospects are for eradicating discrimination against women in our continent without a joint effort at the national and international levels.

The regional organization has finally started to concern itself with the violation of women's human rights. A Special Rapporteur on Women has been appointed by the Commission, and for the first time since 1960 a report on a country, Haiti (1995), contained a small section on the effects of repression on women. The very recent report on Ecuador, 1997, also contains a section on the general situation of women in that country. The report makes recommendations to the state to amend or repeal existing discriminatory legislation, to take steps aimed at modifying social and cultural patterns of conduct, and others. This section will be a powerful support for Ecuadorian women struggling to achieve equality in that country. And it will be used abundantly by women throughout the continent, because all of us face similar problems.

Human rights abuses against women are often thought of in terms of individual situations. Indeed, when they are thought of collectively, they are often dismissed as unfortunate byproducts of the culture and no consideration is given to the fact that disrespect for human rights and violations of human rights have consequences

which far exceed the individual. However, consequences for society of the violation of women's human rights are particularly important because women constitute half of the population. A consensus exists that women's participation in development is a must, since a main factor for development in our countries is the human factor.

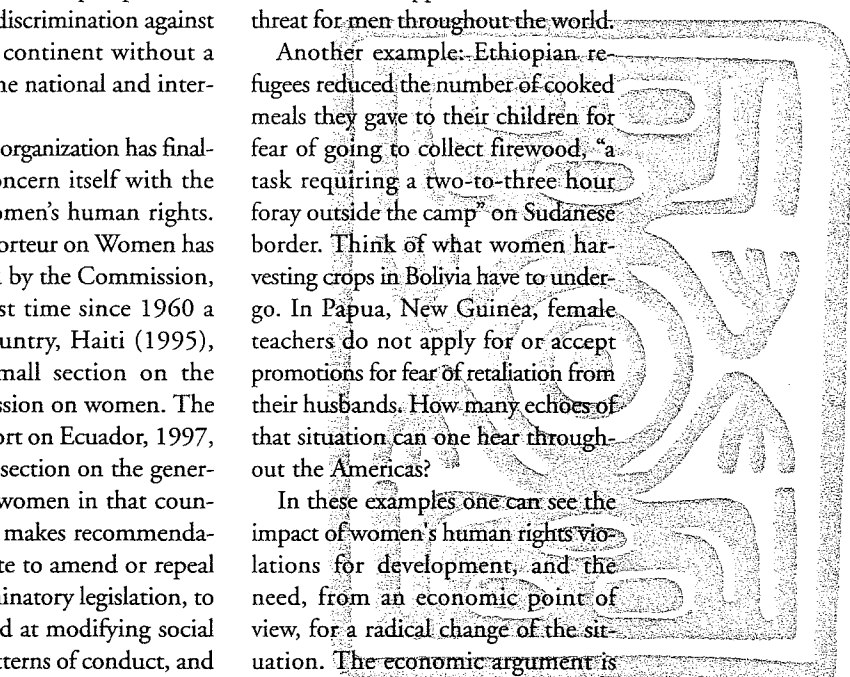
In the book, *Violence against Women, The Hidden Health Burden*, World Bank Discussion Papers, Lori H. Heise and other authors show that women have, for example, refrained from participation in development projects because their husbands objected by beating them up, or locking them up, or dragging them home away from meetings. Empowerment of women is, it appears, an enormous threat for men throughout the world.

Another example: Ethiopian refugees reduced the number of cooked meals they gave to their children for fear of going to collect firewood, "a task requiring a two-to-three hour foray outside the camp" on Sudanese border. Think of what women harvesting crops in Bolivia have to undergo. In Papua, New Guinea, female teachers do not apply for or accept promotions for fear of retaliation from their husbands. How many echoes of that situation can one hear throughout the Americas?

In these examples one can see the impact of women's human rights violations for development, and the need, from an economic point of view, for a radical change of the situation. The economic argument is not more important than the moral one, but it puts in focus the grave consequences of human rights violations against women for society as a whole.

Cecilia Medina, Robert F. Kennedy Visiting Professor of Latin American Studies at Harvard Law School for the fall 1997, is a Professor of Law at Diego Portales University in Santiago, Chile. She does research at the Netherlands Institute of Human Rights of the University of Utrecht and is a member of the United Nations Human Rights Committee.

The most egregious form of the violation of women's human rights is violence.



Delivering the Data

Women Refugees and Human Rights

BY DEBORAH ANKER

MARTA WAS 18, LIVING AT HOME in El Salvador, when she dated a man who raped her. She told her father about the rape, and he responded by threatening to kill her for damaging the family's honor; her mother advised her to marry her rapist. After they married, the husband beat her regularly, breaking bones and leaving scars, and raped her repeatedly, several times in front of their eldest daughter. She never sought assistance from the police, because her husband was a respected member of the community, and his brother was a member of the presidential bodyguard. After he threatened to kill her, she went into hiding, and escaped to the United States. Although Marta's name is not really Marta, her story is a true one, and one that is typical of a pattern of abuse against many Salvadoran, Latin American, and other women. The stories of the Martas of Latin America are personally powerful narratives. However, I found in my work with the Harvard Law School Clinical Program in conjunction with the non-profit Boston-based Refugee Law Center, Inc., that no one had tried to establish the patterns found in these cases. Each case had to be tackled by itself, often without the benefit of useful precedents.

Judges in most state and federal courts rely on precedents, decisions in earlier cases, to reach their decisions. However, decisions at lower

levels of the administrative process in immigration court, under U.S. Justice Department regulations, do not have to be published, in contrast to the requirements for other court decisions. I and several of my colleagues were finding that the results of cases decided had largely been unavailable to the people presenting these cases—immigrants and their lawyers. So Marta's lawyer might never have found about a similar case in El Salvador or Guatemala or, for that matter, the Congo.

Together with Nancy Kelly, John Willshire Carrera and Margaret Hal-

lisse of the Refugee Law Center, we decided two years ago to begin to record and document the treatment of women refugees seeking asylum from Latin America and the Caribbean in a systematic fashion. With a DRCLAS faculty grant, we developed a database to chronicle these women's stories, to monitor the progress of the cases, and to examine the decisions in those cases as they are made. Margaret Hallisey, our invaluable collaborator, helped put the database in place. Then

we began to network extensively with attorneys around the country and to enter in all significant information. We collected first hand accounts of human rights violations against Latin American women, and of their attempts to escape violence against them because of their gender. The database has become a record of their lives and a primary resource for the

identification of patterns and legal arguments which can emerge from such personal narratives.

The sophisticated but user-friendly database also enables us to keep a record of cases decided, published and unpublished, so that the decisions would be easily searchable and usable by all sorts of researchers—academics, attorneys, judges, Immigration and Naturalization officials. Many of the previously unpublished cases (including many of the most interesting ones) wouldn't be known or available at all if we didn't do this. This seems especially critical in a developing area of law, like gender-based persecution.

The database also helps systematize published cases, and contains cases, as well as published and unpublished decisions from around the world. Attorneys and researchers can find cases from Canada, Australia, New Zealand, United Kingdom, Sweden, and elsewhere. Asylum cases contain first-hand accounts by the victims of gender violence. We hope that eventually this will be a resource for non-lawyers doing fieldwork research in this area, and provide information to researchers in different disciplines.

The database is now used frequently to assist attorneys representing refugees. There is a critical shortage of lawyers nationwide to assist asylum applicants, and they are all short on resources and time. We felt that a data base would keep track of cases for them and help them network with other lawyers working on similar cases, so that they could share resources and ideas, theories that worked and did not work.

News of our database project has spread to Europe and Australia, so we also are providing information and assistance to attorneys there, networking lawyers working on similar cases and in turn using information provided by them to expand our own database.

The database has become a record of women's lives and a primary resource for the identification of patterns and legal arguments which can emerge from such personal narratives.

While the reasons women flee Latin American countries are many, we specifically focus on tracking reasons related to gender-based persecution.

We have now been able to identify two of the forms of persecution which cause Latin American women to flee: domestic violence and rape by soldiers or the police. As the number of cases in the database increases, we are increasingly able to provide dramatic empirical evidence that these are two major human rights violations against women of this region, and to emphasize further the intersection of asylum law and human rights law. One third of the cases we have involve women fleeing domestic violence.

The second human rights violation cited by Latin American women applying for asylum is rape by military or police. Two thirds of the cases we have worked with involved this kind of persecution. By examining how these cases are handled within the asylum process, we have learned that many judges have been requiring some form of external corroboration, without which the case will not be considered: this is a standard which does not exist in criminal and civil cases decided under our domestic law. After examining this issue in detail, we produced a report on rape as an asylum issue in the United States and in Canada, and submitted it to the UN Human Rights Commission, Special Rapporteur on Violence Against Women. It also has been published in an immigration law publication, and available thereby to practitioners.

We also have produced a legal analysis of domestic violence as a human rights abuse and basis for political asylum which, in collaboration with programs at other law schools and some NGOs, we have submitted as a position paper to the Immigration and Naturalization Service. It also has just been published as an article in a law journal.

Because conditions are changing so rapidly in Latin America, the database is crucial to maintain updated documentation in a consolidated form.

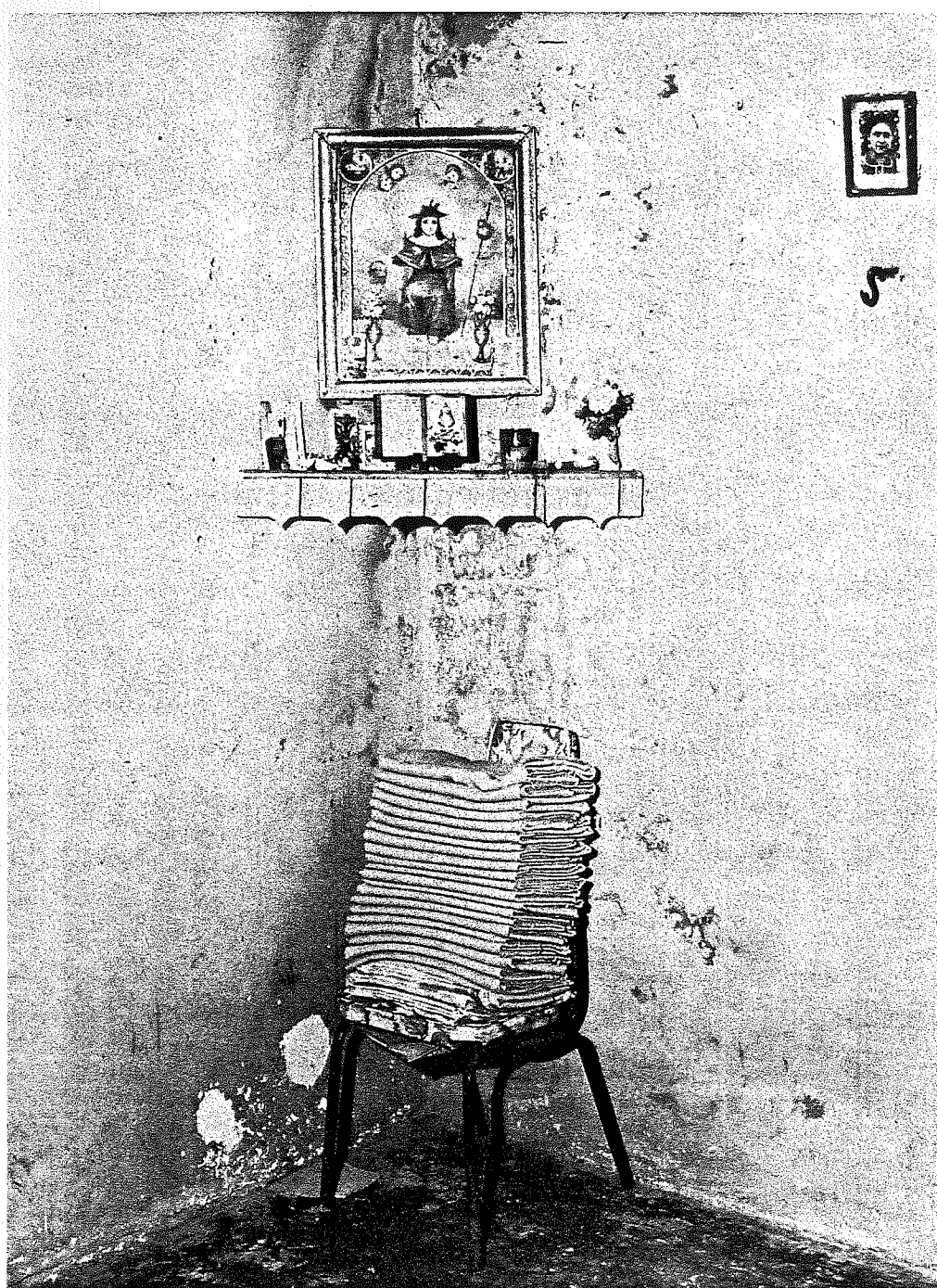


PHOTO: DANA SALVO FROM *Home Altars of Mexico*, UNIVERSITY OF NEW MEXICO PRESS, 1997.

Such data are particularly useful to practicing attorneys, but also informs the kind of policy recommendations and position papers to which innovative academic research leads.

With the recent changes in immigration law, the database has become a timely tool to help women immigrants from Latin America at a moment when it is desperately needed because of the extreme backlash against immigrants and the accompanying dramatic decreases in legal

and other resources to help them attain justice.

Deborah Anker, coordinator of the Harvard Law School's Immigration and Refugee Clinic, is a Lecturer on Law at the Harvard Law School. She also assists the Human Rights Program in supervising clinic projects. A co-founder of the private, non-profit, Refugee Law Center, she received a DRCLAS faculty grant to develop the Women's Asylum Database.

Another aspect of women's lives: Dana Salvo took this picture of folded sheets before an Mexican altar, evidence of the woman's work as a laundress. Photographs from Salvo's book, *Home Altars of Mexico*, were featured in a joint exhibit with Jack Lueders-Booth in the first DRCLAS Latin American and Latino Art Forum fall semester.

The Women of Oaxaca

Gender, Poverty, and Art

BY LOIS WASSERSPRING

FOR THE LAST FOUR YEARS I HAVE SPENT SEVERAL weeks each year in the homes of six women artisans in Oaxaca, Mexico, talking with them about their lives. I became interested in the life experiences of these women because of the seeming contradiction between their stature as folk artists and the difficult eco-



Guillermina Aguilar

nomic circumstances of their lives. In contrast to male artisans of comparable stature, who have often been able to translate their status into concrete, substantial material gain, these female artisans seemed locked into lives of hardship enmeshed in rural poverty.

All of the women I have studied have become famous. All have remained poor. Four are sisters who live in Ocotlán de Morelos, a village to the south of the capital. (Henry Glassie refers to "the brilliant Aguilar family" in *The Spirit of Folk Art*.) Two live in the pottery producing village of Santa María Atzompa, which lies to the west of the city of Oaxaca. The fame and achievements of each of these six women is remarkable: they are among the most internationally renowned of contemporary Mexican folk artists. Their work is in museums and private folk art collections throughout the world; individually they have represented Mexico at international art competitions and have received scores of national awards. My research uses the story of these women's lives as a vehicle to explore the meaning, and impact, of

gender in the Mexican countryside.

What is particularly intriguing about these women is that their fame and success as artisans have seemingly had little impact on their lives as rural, poor women. All work long hours struggling against poverty. All continue, despite their international exposure, to be committed to, and deeply rooted in, the traditional cultural values of their own village communities. Like other Mexican rural women, these artisans continue to spend their resources and energy participating in the annual cycle of religious village festivals. Only one of these women attended primary school for more than one year, and although all are mothers, most are not committed to the value of more education for their offspring. Education continues to be perceived as valueless activity, particularly for daughters.

Their lives must be understood in the context of their birthplace in Oaxaca, one of the most marginal states in the Mexican Republic preeminently poor, rural and Indian. It is part of the "invisible" Mexico of the Third World, far from the glittering modernity of Mexico City and industrial Monterrey. The world in which these six artisan women live is a poverty belt in which 44% of the potentially economically active population receives no income at all and fully one-fourth of all paid laborers receive less than the official minimum wage of \$3 per day. Oaxaca's women are especially disadvantaged. Among all Oaxacans, the illiteracy rate is 27%, but among Oaxaca's women, a dismaying 37% are illiterate.

Yet Oaxaca is also famous for its artisan creativity. The Mexican government has encouraged the production of popular folk art in an effort to develop symbols of national identity, and the expansion of both tourism and an international crafts market have further helped to encourage traditional handicraft activity. It is indeed ironic, as scholars have noted, that the art of rural, often women, who are the most marginal producers in rural areas, have come to be seen as symbols of "Mexicanness," coveted by tourists, gallery owners, and art collectors the world over.

The four Aguilar sisters' reputation stems from their father's fame as an artisan and it is said that they each learned their craft from him. In fact, he never created earthenware figures at all, but he did

sign his own name to his wife's pieces since she did not know how to write. Concepción, the youngest Aguilar sister, only eight when her mother died, had to become

My research uses the story of these women's lives as a vehicle to explore the meaning, and impact, of gender in the Mexican countryside.

"mother" to her two younger brothers and "housewife" to her increasingly alcoholic and abusive father. These responsibilities prevented her from attending even one day of school in her lifetime. Angélica Vásquez, of Atzompa, never knew each time she won four major national competitions, because her father-in-law, with whom she lived following patrilocal custom, took her entries and signed his own name to them. Dolores Porras, also of Atzompa, was beaten by her husband after each of her first five pregnancies for the "sin" of producing only daughters.

Clearly all of these women have lived lives of hardship, suffering and poverty. The simple fact of being born female has dramatically affected each of their lives. Yet their life stories are not maudlin or depressing. Quite the contrary, like the inherent vitality of the art which they produce, these women's life struggles reflect indomitable spirits, the ability to strategize cunningly, and the essential triumph of human spirit over dire material circumstances. My research examines the myriad relationships connecting these women to their personal and economic worlds. It focuses on household labor production and the gendered division of labor embedded in it. It emphasizes these women's relationships to their children and the creation of generational chains of gendered constraints. It examines the relationship of these women to Mexican government artisan bureaucracy and to the shop owners and gallery dealers who buy their works, as well as the different ways with which the international art community deals with female and male artisans. And it links prevalent Oaxacan myths and legends, and their underlying conceptions of gender, to the folk art output of these artisans, showing how popular art in Mexico produces moral lessons about appropriate female behavior.

My research in Oaxaca has led me to believe that our understanding of "tradition" has remained so flawed because of the underlying male lens of political science in this area. The brittle zero-sum relationship between "tradition" and "modernity" that political science

posits misses the complex richness and continuing dynamic innovation of customs and values in Mexican rural life and women's central role in this

on-going process. The study of gender also has other implications for rural development. In the world of

Oaxacan women today, education is not a valuable option in rural women's fight for survival. Understanding why can help us create educational options of use to women in their real-world struggles. Studying women artisans also

ELIZABETH AUGERSON



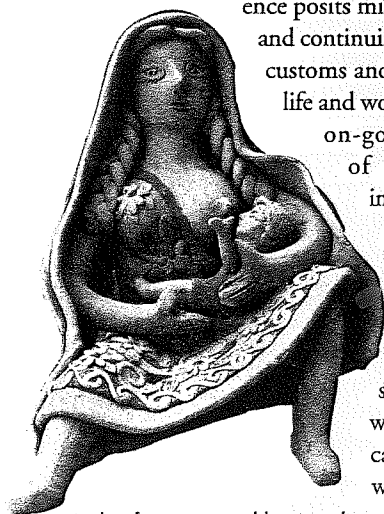
Above: Dolores Porras; bottom: Angélica Vásquez

LOIS WASSERSPRING



helps us understand the impact of the critical process of globalization in Mexico, since folk art has created vital economic options in an economy characterized by low levels of industrialization and limited agricultural production. Tourism is now the fastest growing industry in Oaxaca, leading to the remarkable development of the contemporary arts and crafts market there. The story of female artisan lives in Oaxaca thus also becomes an opportunity to analyze the ways in which the global economy, and tourism in particular, affect the process of development in rural Mexico.

Lois Wasserspring, a DRCLAS Visiting Affiliate this semester, is a professor in the political science department at Wellesley College where she also co-directs Latin American Studies. She is the author of the forthcoming book, Virgins, Mermaids and Marchanta: Women's Art and Lives in Oaxaca, Mexico (Chronicle Press). She is now completing a manuscript based on her Oaxaca research entitled The Women Artisans of Oaxaca: Gender, Poverty and Art.



A clay figure created by Angélica Vásquez celebrates maternity.

"I am a woman
of faith in the
Great Energy and
in myself as
a part of Her."

Victoria Martínez (CERP),
Santiago, Chile.

Above: Doris Muñoz,
Centro de Educación y
Reflexión Popular (CERP),
Santiago, Chile; Right:
Inside Conspirando
Workshop, Santiago,
Chile.

"We work the body in
order to see that the
body isn't bad and in
order to have another
concept of God that
is not oppressive."

—Women of Danzadanza
Talca, Chile

Women in Latin America

Evolving Spirituality

BY MONICA MAHER AND PHOTOS BY TERRI RUTH UNGER

DURING THE SUMMER OF 1997, I VISITED EIGHT WOMEN'S GROUPS in Chile and Mexico on a Tinker Research Travel Grant awarded by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies as preparation for writing my Master of Divinity thesis on emerging theologies of Catholic women activists in Latin America. Accompanied by professional photographer Terri Ruth Unger, we sought to document the evolving spirituality of women in Latin America.

Through visual images, Unger documents the spiritualities and theologies of the women we visited, which according to members of "Women's Space" in Mexico City, break with religious myths and taboos about gender and sexuality and allow women to reclaim their dignity. Participants of the Chilean group in Talca, "Domodungu" (Mapuche word for "Voice of Women"), shared similar sentiments with us, including the discovery of their bodies as sacred and their newly found confidence to trust their own experiences and ideas over Vatican dogma on women. Finally, members of the ecofeminist collective, "Conspirando," and their colleagues at the Center of Popular Education and Reflection (CERP) in Santiago, Chile, expressed through flowing and prayerful body movement the corporal and intellectual freedom, peace and power which characterize these new theologies.

Depictions of more traditional Catholic scenes, like that of Seroína León in Mexico City, reflect another face of Latin American women's spirituality and dignity, offering points of interesting contrast and comparison.

Monica Maher is a graduate student at Harvard Divinity School.



Left, top: Seroína León, Centro de Desarrollo Integral de la Familia, Mexico City; Left middle: Inside the Basilica of Our Lady of Guadalupe, Mexico City; Left middle: Luz María Troncoso, Domodungu, Talca, Chile.



Mystery.
Silence.
Solitude.
Solidarity.
Energy.
Laughter.
Pleasure.
Peace.
Wisdom.
Motivating
Power.

A 19th century view:
women in downtown
Mexico City



PHOTO ARCHIVE OF THE UNIVERSIDAD DE MEXICO (AFUM)

Mexican Women

Historical Perspectives

BY SILVIA MARINA ARROM

WHEN I BEGAN MY RESEARCH ON 19th century Mexico City women 20 years ago, it did not take me long to realize that what Mexican women were supposed to do, and what they actually did were sometimes quite different.

Mexican women in the past were supposedly sweet but passive and powerless human beings, whose lives revolved around family and home, and who were completely subordinated to men. This, in fact, was the cultural ideal. A famous Spanish proverb declares, "El hombre en la calle, la mujer en la casa," that is, "men in the street and women at home".

Although a huge gap almost always exists between the "supposed to's" and actual behavior all around the world, we have too often believed that in Latin America things really were that way. That Latin America was more traditional, that the separation of male and female roles was indeed greater there.

But this is not entirely accurate, not even for the most "traditional" of times, the early 19th century.

One day early in my research, I was sitting in the archives sifting through the dusty, worm-eaten papers. As I examined the documents—which is what I most love to do in the whole world because they are always full of such amazing things—I stumbled across a lovely court case. In the case, a gentleman testified that his sister-in-law, Doña María Antonia Reyna "has excellent qualities...and is much devoted to her home"—exactly the way women were supposed to be. But then he added "virtues difficult to find among women in these times." So, according to this gentleman, she was the exception in 1816. Thirty years later, statesman-writer Manuel Payno complained that women shunned their destiny by avoiding marriage and motherhood, and termed rampant spinsterhood the "cancer of the very fabric of morality."

What's going on here? I would like to paint a picture of Mexican women in the "traditional" 19th century that is at odds with our standard stereotypes. In the process, I would like to

challenge two deep-seated assumptions many of us have—one about progress in history, and another about Latin America and the United States.

The first assumption, about history, is that things were worse in the past, and had steadily gotten better. It turns out that this trend is not always true. Much of what we consider traditional is in fact relatively new in historical terms. It was more common for women to marry and have lots of children and to live out their lives in a male-headed family in the 1930s, 40s, and 50s than a hundred years earlier. It does not take long, however, before some patterns became associated with tradition, and we assume that they always have been around because we see it was that way in our parents' and grandparents' times. The "traditional" patterns of Mexican women's lives are more often mid-20th-century patterns than 19th-century ones. So in a sense things deteriorated, or at least there has been no straight path from tradition to modernity.

The second assumption I want to challenge is that the situation of women was worse in Mexico than in the United States, then and now, that we are and always have been more modern and better than undeveloped, Hispanic Mexico. However, a feminist

movement did not develop as fully in Mexico precisely because Mexican women enjoyed certain legal and social advantages U.S. women did not.

Demography, as well as women's work and legal status, gives us some clear indications about the huge gap between the "supposed tos" and the reality of the 19th century woman.

Everyone knows that the traditional Mexican family was headed by the all-powerful patriarch. Wrong. In 1811, one third of all households in Mexico City were in fact headed by women. Adult single women were a normal part of everyday urban life in the 19th century—far more so than in the 20th, when spinsterhood became much rarer. For a variety of reasons, such as a surplus of women in Mexican cities and a high death rate that killed off husbands, many 19th-century women were not directly subject to men.

The women in charge of households were usually widows, occasionally spinsters and abandoned wives. I found this pattern in two Mexico City censuses; other historians have now found large numbers of female household heads in nearly every Latin American city in the 18th and 19th centuries. In fact, marriage was not nearly as widespread as we have assumed: there were lots of bachelors and spinsters. One out of every six Mexico City women never married in the early 19th century, and was listed in census at the age of 45, 50, or 55 as single and childless. And although many couples lived in consensual unions not legalized by Church or State, if they had children, they listed themselves as "widowed" after separation, rather than "single." Despite the oft repeated assertion that women had but two career options, marriage or convent, this was simply not true by the 19th century, when very few women entered convents.

Widowhood was even more common than spinsterhood. In fact, one-third of all adult women in the Mexico City census of 1811 were listed as widows. Whether they had ever been legally married or not, they shared the experience of being on their own, free from direct male control. These women had full legal rights: they could work

without anyone's permission, sign contracts, buy and sell at will—and they did all these things. However, they earned considerably less than men, which meant that unless they inherited property, widows and spinsters saw a drop in their standard of living when their husbands or fathers died. So the feminization of poverty we recently discovered is nothing new—it is centuries old.

Nevertheless, Mexico's legal system gave women more protection and rights than they had in the U.S. or England at the time, especially in the area of property rights. Four-fifths of the estate had to be divided equally among all the children; daughters received the same portions as their brothers. A man could not leave his wife penniless either, for she was automatically entitled to half the

community property. Widows also got their dowries back—that is, the property that had come from her parents when she married. During the marriage, a husband controlled both the community property and the dowry, but he did not ever own the dowry: the wife did. The law tried to preserve the dowry, so that it would still be there if she became a widow. Widows were not subject to male guardianship, not by fathers, or brothers, or sons.

In 19th century Mexico City, one-third of all Mexico City children were brought up by their mothers in female-headed households without a strong father figure. Given the relatively short life expectancies of the time, many of these children did not know their grandparents either. Indeed, our image of the extended household where several generations lived together under one roof applies to very few families. The nuclear, not extended, household, was the rule. This contrasts with mid-20th century Mexico, where higher marriage rates and greater longevity meant most women lived out their lives as daughters, then wives subject to male control.

Other patterns that we think of as new, women's work and migration, are also very old. During the 18th and 19th century, Mexicans faced a terrible crisis in the countryside; many women traveled on their own to the cities to find work, since men could often find alternative jobs in mines or on rural estates. In 1811, women made up a third of the identified labor force: the same proportion of female employment as in the 1960s. Many women were not included in the 1811 census, such as

wives and daughters who helped in a family shop or women who worked as prostitutes. Although there was a strong view that women should devote themselves to domesticity and that it was a misfortune for women to work, these ideals were not attainable for perhaps half the population. Consequent-

ly, the ideal is not a good indicator of what people did.

Clearly, some of our deep-seated stereotypes about Mexican women continue to persist. They persist because we look only at the literature with its fantasized ideal of patriarchy rather than at hard data such as censuses. They persist because we often fail to distinguish among women of different social backgrounds, and because we assume that progress is a continuum with the 19th century flowing ahead into the mid-20th century and to modern-day Mexico. Finally, we all too often draw on our own sense of superiority. Unfortunately, the Black Legend of Latin American backwardness and inferiority is very much well and alive, and still providing the lenses through which we view Latin America—often, as I hope I've convinced you, leading us astray.

Silvia Marina Arrom is the president of the Boston Area Consortium on Latin America (BACLA), director of the Latin American Studies program at Brandeis University, and a DRCLAS Affiliate.

One out of
every six Mexico
City women
never married
in the early
19th century.

**ATTENTION,
HARVARD FACULTY!**
**DRCLAS provides
support for
research and
teaching on
Latin America
through a
program of
research and
curriculum
development
grants. Deadline
for proposals is
March 13, 1998.**
**For more
information,
see the Center's
"Guide for Harvard
Faculty" or contact
Tim Stumph,
<tstumph@fas.harv
ard.edu>.**

The Women of Chiapas

The Harvard Connection

(FIRST OF A TWO-PART SERIES)



Top left: Marie Hernández Pérez, daughter of one of the first Tzotzil informants to collaborate with the Harvard Chiapas Project, poses with her daughter Rosie; right: Two sisters in a Chiapas hamlet.



PHOTOS: JUNE CAROLYN BRICK

CHIAPAS, MEXICO—They might be peasants or prostitutes, actresses or activists, Mayans or migrants.

They are all women of Chiapas, women whose lives have been touched directly or indirectly by the myriad of Harvard projects over the last 40 years in Mexico's southernmost and poorest region.

The horrible Christmastime 1997 massacre, in a remote Chiapas hamlet, of 45 indigenous peasants, 38 of them women and children, drew the world's attention to the violence and instability permeating the region. Yet, even as women—and men—struggle against their victim status, Harvard-linked projects have been instrumental both in understanding and coping with often violent social transformation.

Dr. Pablo Fariás, director of the College of the Southern Border (ECOSUR) in Chiapas and a Lecturer on Social Medicine at the Harvard Medical School, notes that reproductive health and population concerns, as well as rapid cultural change, have put gender issues in the spotlight. ECOSUR, a member of the Harvard-linked Consortium on Social Sciences and Health (COSSAH), has established formal links with community-based organizations so that its research on reproductive health and other gender-related subjects can make a difference in the lives of local women.

The highland Maya in Chiapas, the site of an armed uprising by the Zapatista Liberation Army in 1994, find their lives changing because of the rapid transformation of the agrarian economy over the past 25 years. Farming

now depends heavily on chemical inputs, which in turn require cash rather than simply domestic labor. This means that family members now must migrate to the cities or the coffee plantations to earn cash, rather than working as an interdependent family unit at home. According to Stanford anthropologist George Collier, who first came to Chiapas almost 40 years ago as a Harvard freshman with Professor Evon Vogt's Harvard Chiapas Project, this new division of labor radically affects the lives of women. When men and women worked together in agricultural production, women had corresponding rights in shares of the harvest. Now male wage-earners often control—and spend—the money.

The new roles often mean more domestic violence, or at least more visible domestic violence. They sometimes mean that women want fewer children, because fewer agricultural workers are needed. At ECOSUR, Fariás says, researchers and doctoral candidates are investigating these different aspects of what it means to be a woman in Chiapas today. Community outreach workers have been trained to work in their own communities. Women's realities are reflected in ECOSUR's health priorities: reproductive health, emerging diseases, and violence and mental health. However, the role of men is not ignored in the investigations: ECOSUR is just beginning an innovative project on masculinity and gender issues from the male point of view.

Lives are
changing because
of the rapid
transformation of
the agrarian
economy over the
past 25 years.

Immigration into the city by peasants and Indians fleeing from unstable conditions in the countryside, coupled with the constant presence of military assigned to "control" the Zapatista rebels, have generated a proliferation of prostitutes or "commercial sex workers," as they are called by the Center for Health Investigations in Comitán. This increase in sex traffic, an indirect side effect of the Chiapas unrest, has heightened the threat of HIV/AIDS in the area.

Together with ECOSUR and community organizations, Center researchers set up separate focus groups with commercial sex workers and their clients, conducted an anthropological study with key women in urban communities, and developed a linguistic study to determine the main concepts and terminologies used in the sex trade. The researchers also compiled data on 120 AIDS-related risk factors associated with the sex trade. With the research, outreach workers effectively organized support groups for the commercial sex workers, emphasizing self-esteem, hygiene, negotiation skills to convince clients to use condoms, and training in other jobs, especially for those who

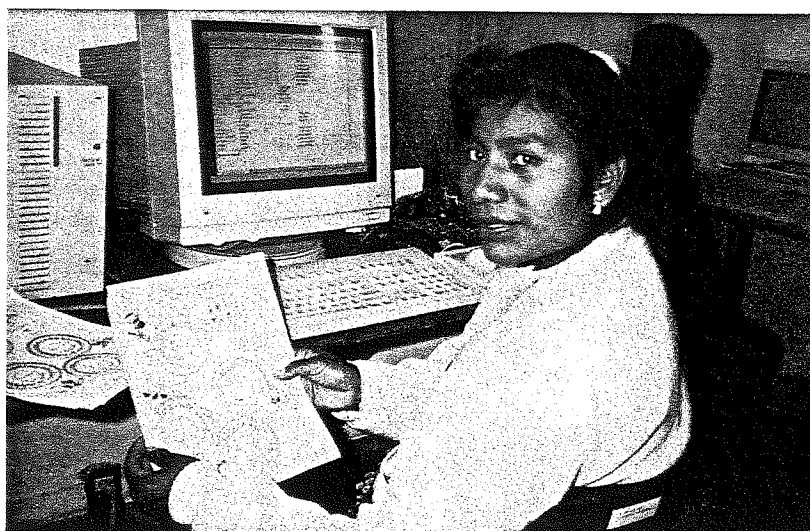
were newcomers to the trade. At the same time, the Center launched an information campaign about AIDS prevention, aimed at clients.

Namino Melissa Glantz, who first came to Chiapas to do her doctoral thesis with George Collier on multilingual communities, is now working on gender issues with Gloria Sayavedra at the Center, yet another trickle-down effect of the Harvard Chiapas Project, which sent students to work on projects there every summer for years.

Sayavedra explains how the Center is attempting to track women's health issues in two separate studies. One study in the "ladina"—mixed race—communities involves quantitative and qualitative interviews on 14 separate topics, including menstruation, adolescence, sexual relations, violence, identity, and sundry aspects of health and sickness. In the little-studied Tojolabal community, the Center is training a team of four indigenous field workers to directly observe such aspects of health during a two-year period.

The Center, which is directed by Dr. David Halperin, a Harvard School of Public Health graduate, COSSAH member, and director of the Reproductive Health Division at ECOSUR, also is helping to organize the wives of local coffee cooperative members into cooperatives of their own. This type of work is the silent revolution in Chiapas, the emergence of women's voices in a region where until a few years ago women always followed a few steps behind their husbands.

This changing world of women is observed at the Fomma theatre troupe, only a few blocks away from ECOSUR in San Cristóbal de las Casas. Petrona de la Cruz Cruz and Isabel Juárez Espinosa, Mexico's first women indigenous playwrights, founded Fomma, the Spanish acronym for the Strength of the Mayan Woman four years ago. The collective not only performs; it conducts workshops in theatre, literacy, sewing



Marta Luna Jiménez from Tenejapa, Chiapas, lists the Spanish, Latin, and Tzotzil names of plants as part of a nutrition project at ECOSUR.

and job skills for local poor women, many of them recent migrants to the city. The collective is partially supported by Harvard's Cultural Survival, founded by anthropologist David-Maybury Lewis, who has taken an active role in preserving indigenous traditions throughout the Americas.

But the Harvard connection doesn't end there. Both Cruz, who is an ethnic Tzotzil, and Juárez, who is an ethnic Tzeltal, learned to write their oral languages at Sna Jtz' ibajom, the Chiapas Writers' Collective, founded by Robert Laughlin, also one of the first students in the Harvard Chiapas Project. Both women draw creative strength from the traditional stories of their elders; Juárez collected many of these tales in a bilingual volume in Tzeltal and Spanish. Forty years ago, that wouldn't have been possible. It was Evon Vogt and his disciples in the Chiapas Project who first systematically worked with local Mayans a generation ago to figure out how to write down the spoken words of their rich traditions.

Women and Politics

The Quota System

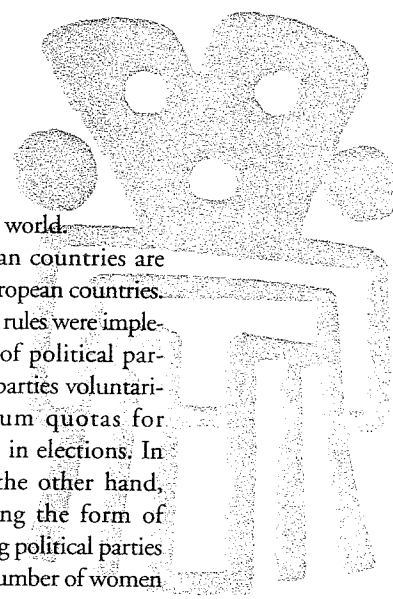
BY MALA HTUN

ONE OF THE MOST INTERESTING new trends in Latin American democracies is the creation of quota laws intended to increase women's representation in political office. The movement toward quotas is gaining momentum: to date, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador, and Peru have passed national laws requiring political parties to reserve 20 to 30 percent of candidacies for women, and similar measures are being discussed in several other countries.

The growing tendency of Latin American parliaments to pass quota laws is puzzling when seen from the U.S., where affirmative action measures are being scaled back nationwide. However, the Latin American women's movement activists who lobby for quotas do not look to the U.S. but rather to Europe as their model. Many Northern European countries have experimented with quota rules since the 1970s. As a result, the levels of women's representation in political office there

are the highest in the world.

Yet Latin American countries are going farther than European countries. In Europe most quota rules were implemented at the level of political parties; in other words, parties voluntarily adopted minimum quotas for women's candidacies in elections. In Latin America, on the other hand, quota rules are taking the form of national laws requiring political parties to field a minimum number of women candidates in order for party slates to



be considered valid.

I have been studying the quota movement as part of my Ph.D. dissertation in political science, which examines legislative reforms related to women's rights in the Latin American region. This year I have traveled around Latin America conducting interviews about the origins and the consequences of the new quota rules.

What accounts for the quota trend snowballing across the region? The major factor driving the quota trend is pressure from the organized women's movement, which gained visibility and legitimacy in the process surrounding the United Nations' Fourth World Conference on Women in Beijing. Women advocates of quota rules claim they are the most effective way to translate legal equality between men and women into *de facto* equality by guaranteeing women's presence in leadership in the immediate term. They also argue that women leaders better represent the interests of women citizens, will introduce women's perspectives into policymaking and implementation, and help expand women's opportunities in society at large.

Other factors have also been important. In Argentina and Peru, support from the Presidency has been crucial to the passage of quota laws. According to observers in Argentina, the intervention of President Menem was decisive in shifting Congressional opinion in favor of the quota bill. Quotas also counted on presidential support in Peru. There was not only one quota bill being considered by Congress earlier this year, but several, including one presented by the Executive. In June of 1997, a quota bill was passed unanimously by the Peruvian Congress, reportedly due to its strong Presidential support.

What is the likely consequence of quota rules? The outcomes of quotas are dramatically different depending on a country's particular electoral institutions. Because of the Argentine electoral system, quotas demand a real sacrifice from male politicians. In Peru and other countries such as Brazil, quotas do not demand great sacrifices.

In Argentina, national congressional elections are conducted according to a closed-list system, where voters vote for a party list, not a candidate, and parties control the placement of candidates on the list. As a result, there is a much greater chance that having more women candidates will result in getting more women elected. Moreover, the Argentine quota law requires parties to not only reserve 30% of the places on the party list for women, but to put these women in electable positions—in other words, in every third place on the list. This precludes parties from cluttering women

candidates at the bottom of a list where, in a competitive multi-party system, they have no chance of ever gaining a seat.

As a result, in Argentina the results of quotas have been spectacular. Women's representation in Congress was 5 percent before the quota law took effect, and now hovers around 30 percent.

In Peru and in Brazil, however, there is no party list. In national legislative elections, voters vote in huge, multi-member districts for individual candidates. Thus, parties may nominate women to be 25 percent of their candidates, but it is up to the voters to decide how many women get elected. While this seems reasonable in principle, but women candidates complain that sex discrimination within parties means that their campaigns receive little publicity and little support.

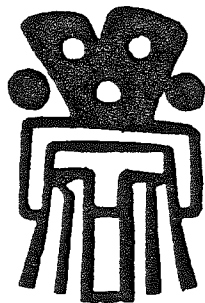
Brazil's first experiment with quotas took place in last year's municipal elections, held in October. A quota of 20 percent applied to candidates for city council positions (vereadores). Before the elections, women amounted to 8 percent of the total number of vereadores in the country. After the 1996 elections with quota rule in effect, women's representation climbed to 11 percent nationwide, hardly a spectacular result.

Brazil will be the site of a second quota experiment in 1998. A quota of 25 percent will be in effect for national legislative elections. Currently, women make up 6 percent of the Chamber of Deputies. Once again, however, Brazilian electoral rules mean that the effect of quotas will probably be minimal. Besides the open list and huge district size, Brazilian law allows parties to field more candidates than the number of seats actually being contested. In other words, the law makes it possible for parties to simply field an extra 25 percent of women candidates, rather than displacing men.

These lax rules constitute a potentially important explanation for the quota trend sweeping across the region. Because of the nature of electoral institutions in many Latin American countries, quota laws lack teeth. They do not demand real sacrifices from parties and male politicians. They do not necessarily produce improvements in women's representation. So why not pass a quota law, and appear to the world as a champion of women's rights?

This situation illustrates the challenge for women politicians and women's movement activists in the region. Quota give women a stepping-stone, but do not guarantee their access to power. For quotas to work, they must be accompanied by other measures, such as the creation of networks among women politicians and candidates and improved financing and publicity for women's campaigns. Much more work is needed to make quotas effective.

Mala Htun is a doctoral candidate in the Government department. She received a DRCLAS 1997 Summer Research Travel Grant.



Quota give
women a
stepping-stone,
but do not
guarantee their
access to power.

Black or Mulata?

Reading Woman in Contemporary Cuban Culture

BY FLORA MARÍA GONZÁLEZ

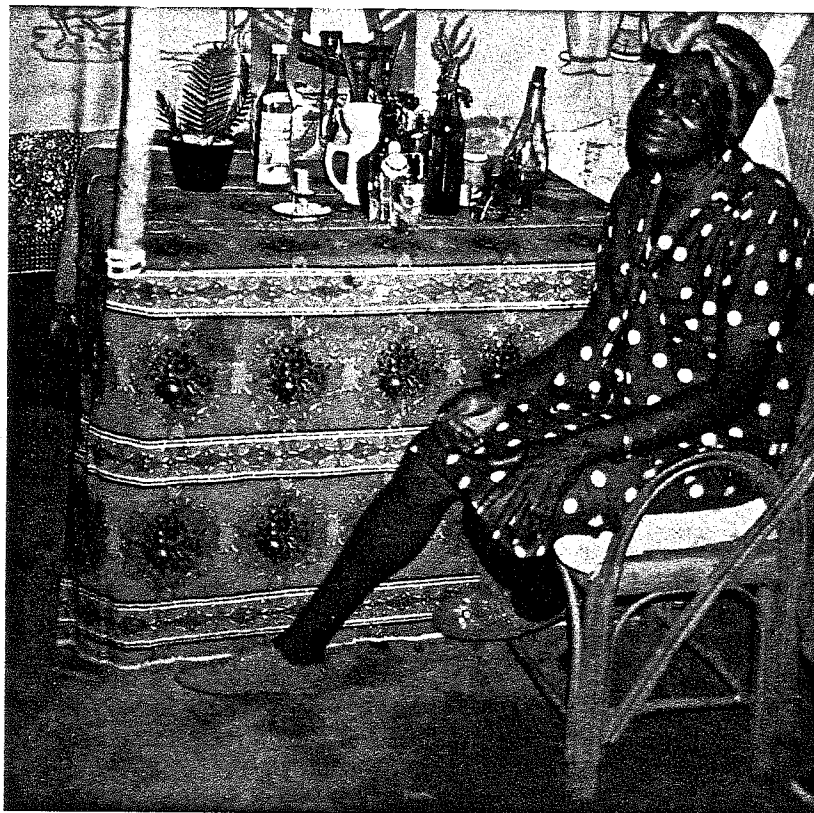
AFTER MY GRADUATION FROM YALE IN THE EARLY eighties, I spent several years of research and writing on the novels by Latin American authors. These investigations resulted in my book, José Donoso's *House of Fiction* (1995).

But I found myself drawn to the culture of my native Cuba, and in summer, 1995, I attended a theoretical workshop led by Cuban novelist and critic Antonio Benítez Rojo at the Caribbean Writers Summer Institute at the University of Miami. That summer was very formative in the formulation of my current research, "Mulata/Black Woman? Reading Woman in Contemporary Cuban Culture," which I am developing this academic year as a book-length project at the W.E.B. Du Bois Institute for Afro-American Research at Harvard. This extremely supportive environment is allowing me to dedicate myself to research and writing, to examine the changing images of women in Cuban cultural imagination and to relate it to my own experience as a Cuban woman.

I am exploring the ways in which Cuban writers and filmmakers since the 1960s have revised the stereotypical image of the mulata to transform her into a woman with a voice, capable of reconstituting her unrecorded historical involvement and her presence in the nation's actual political and cultural realities. The literary figures of mulata and black woman encompass a wide-ranging array of issues involving authority, race, gender, and genre. These issues have always characterized cultural discourse in Cuba and other Caribbean countries, but appear to intensify in these literary and film interpretations, as I first discovered in the 1995 Miami workshop.

The theoretical framework provided by this workshop came alive in cultural and experiential terms for me in the summer of 1996 when I traveled to Cuba to participate in a two-week study program called "African Heritage in the Americas." Headed by Professor Julyanne Dodson of the University of Colorado, the program aimed to give academics an in-depth introduction to African and Afro-Caribbean belief systems and cultures. Traveling through most of the island and meeting with Cubans of Afro-Cuban descent was an extraordinary experience. I got to talk with prominent women in the Cuban-Haitian community near Bayamo, to appreciate folk art developing out of the santería religion, and to listen to the voices of the old and young.

My work with Afro-Cuban literature goes back to my interest in poetry and children's literature. I became



Santería: one of the many voices of black Cuban women

intrigued by the poetry of Excilia Saldaña, whose works are little known and rarely recognized in the United States. I recently published an article about her work in *Afro-Hispanic Review* and have given many papers on several of her major poems and stories. In addition, I have collaborated with the American poet Rosamond Rosenmeier on the translation of two of Saldaña's extended poems, *My Name (A Family Anti-Elegy)* and *The Wife's Monologue*, as well as a series of erotic letters. I'm now in the process of finding a publishing house for a bilingual anthology of her work in the United States.

The process of examining and translating Saldaña's poetry and stories made me sensitive to the figure of the mulata in the Cuban cultural imagination. The image of the mulata—neither black nor white, but a unique blend—has been linked closely to the island's national identity since the 19th century with Cirilo Villaverde's

novel *Cecilia Valdés* (1882), which characterized the mulata as perversely sexual and inherently disloyal and treacherous. If the literary figure of the mulata originated with Villaverde's novel, that of the black woman became well-

Transforming the
stereotypical
image of the
mulata into
a woman with
a voice.



Flora María González

known through Nancy Morejón's mythic poem, *Mujer Negra* (1979).

Reading the novels of Reinaldo Arenas and Jesús Díaz, and the poetry of Nancy Morejón and Excilia Saldaña, watching films by directors Sergio Giral and Sara Gómez, and exploring the work of artist Magdalena Campos-Pons, I begin to understand the tensions produced by the emergence of the figure of the black woman in contemporary

Cuban culture. It is a new way of looking at African heritage, Cuban history, and at women as active participants in history and the future.

Flora María González, an assistant professor at Emerson College in the Division of Humanities and Social Sciences, is a 1997-98 W.E.B. Du Bois Institute Resident Fellow at Harvard.

Ana María Amar Sánchez: A Profile

Transforming Literature, Transforming Life

BY JUNE CAROLYN ERLICK

MY FIRST IMAGE OF ANA MARÍA Amar Sánchez is of a bundle of joyous intellectual energy wrapped up in an incredibly soft blue-and-green Uruguayan shawl.

Amar Sánchez, a Harvard Associate Professor of Romance Languages and Literatures and a native of Buenos Aires, Argentina, entered my office for an interview, and almost immediately began to teach and delight and somehow gossip, almost all at the same time. She tells me about her ongoing work on popular culture, the kind of culture often associated with women, the romance novels, the soap operas, melodrama, pornography, various types of kitsch.

She talks about the ideological function and validity of popular culture, and I immediately assume she's talking about a polarization of popular culture—often targeted at women—and high literature, read and written by both sexes but generally associated with an elite and perhaps masculine culture. It's nothing as simple as that: she is seeking to establish the networks with which popular and high literature interact, in a kind of interactive dance she frankly calls "strategies of seduction and betrayal."

In her forthcoming book, *Games*



of seduction and betrayal: the relationship between literature and mass culture, (Editorial Beatriz Viterbo, Rosario, Argentina), she intends to demonstrate the way high literature

uses the genres of popular culture and manages to twist its codes and subvert its elements. This process of mutual contact between 'high' literature and popular forms is a constant in the history of Latin American literature, according to Amar Sánchez.

Living in Argentina during the dictatorship was a double burden for women.

Her forthcoming book looks at topics ranging from the genre of detective fiction for the past 30 years to the correlation between kitsch and vanguard, "bad taste" and canon; she's

looking at the works of José Donoso, Mario Vargas Llosa, and Alberto Fuguet writing in the genres of romance novels, melodrama, and pornography. I imagine her academic life in the typical pattern of many women scholars, 20 or 25 years of constant studying, research, publishing, conferences, teaching, maybe a little slowdown for childrearing, maybe not.

I ask her how she became interested in this interplay between popular culture and high literature. The answer was somewhat unexpected. She did her doctoral thesis at the University of Buenos Aires on the disappeared Argentine journalist Rodolfo Walsh, a prolific author of detective stories.

"I was interested not only in his politics, but in his literature," she recounts. "His books had disappeared from the libraries and the bookstores. I thought it was impossible. Then a friend said she had one book and brought it to me all wrapped up and hidden inside another book as if you couldn't carry a book by Rodolfo Walsh. It's how you live in a concentration camp that doesn't appear to be a concentration camp."

Living in Argentina during the dictatorship was a double burden for women. It was easier for men to leave the country, because women had to get permission from their husbands "patria potestad" to take children. "We women suffered doubly because the regime didn't favor women's libera-

tion," she recounts. "We suffered the political situation, and the impossibility of options. We couldn't go to the university if we didn't want to collaborate with the regime. We couldn't divorce because we couldn't support ourselves and because divorce didn't exist. And we often couldn't leave because of *patria potestad*. And I had a little boy."

During those dark years, she began to attend a parallel university, a series of study groups, many of them run by women, that moved from place to place to escape notice. This was a uni-

versity without any degrees, preparing her, as she says, "for a future I didn't know if it would happen."

The future did happen. With the end of the dictatorship and the opening of the universities, she resumed her formal studies. In 1985, Ana María Amar Sánchez received her doctorate.

"The world opened up doubly for women. When the dictatorship was over, my CV was non-existent. The only thing I could put on there was 10 years under a dictatorship. In 10 years, I accomplished in my career what most do in 20," she declares. "I

am not alone. All my generation did their doctorates 10 years late. We are a generation of women who did it alone and with a great deal of strength.

The women of Argentina survived and many emerged from the dictatorship healthier than many men, because they engaged in "an unconscious system of resistance," says Amar Sánchez. Suddenly, her work and experience seem to come together for me. Who can understand parallel codes and tacit subversion in literature better than one who has experienced them in life?

For information on Latin American events around Harvard and Boston, check the DRCLAS website at <http://www.harvard.edu/~drclas>.

You can also fill out a subscription form on-line to receive this newsletter or DRCLAS DATES, our monthly calendar.

Disobedient Autobiographies of Las Desobedientes

Mujeres de Nuestra America

REVIEW BY KEJA VALENS

FROM THE QUASI MYTHICAL CONQUISTA-AGE MALINCHE to contemporary women such as Rigoberta Menchú and Rosario Castellanos, *Las Desobedientes* restitutes the women of Latin American history, recognizing their importance in the construction and in the questioning of the political and cultural institutions in which they live(d). Accepting a very wide definition of disobedience, *Las Desobedientes* is a celebration of the diversity of women and of women's work in Latin America, rather than an exhortation to or prescription for any particular type of revolutionary action.

Currently well-known women such as Frieda Kahlo and Rigoberta Menchú receive attention alongside those who have been and are still most often forgotten: Mexican revolutionaries and arms manufacturers, the Narváez Bautista sisters, and the quilters of Puente Alto who did not want their last names mentioned for fear of repercussions, to name a few. Women from a wide variety of class, ethnic and educational backgrounds are included, although bisexuals and lesbians are notably absent, even from those essays where sexual disobedience is mentioned.

The book, edited by María Mercedes Jaramillo of Fitchburg State College and Betty Osorio of the Universidad de los Andes in Bogotá (Panamericana Editorial Ltda., Bogotá, Colombia, 1997, ISBN 958-30-0290-9, 576 pages), is described as a collection of "biographies". How-

ever, this word is taken in its loosest sense to create a marvelous variety of subjects and focuses, from cultural history to literary criticism. The text's willingness to extend the category of "biography" to works which have had to invent as much as to record the lives of their subjects shows *Las Desobedientes* to be not only a celebration but also a performance of disobedience.

Few comparisons are made to European or North American women or women's movements, attesting to the truly Latin American figurations of these women who have effectively been disobedient on their own terms throughout the history of Latin America, not simply the example or extension of their Northern cousins.

While all of the essays are excellent, the detailed mention of a few can give a feel for the extent of the book. *Las Desobedientes* begins in Mexico with Sandra Messinger Cypress's article on La Malinche. Cypress brings together the many different versions of the Malinche story,

from Cortez's own journals to Rosario Castellanos, with a focus on the "real live" woman at the base of the stories and the difficulty of the contradictions she had to negotiate in her life and in her mythologization. This is one of the few essays which includes extensive reference to Chicana authors as participants in the tradition of disobedient Latin American women.

The chapter on Argentine author and politician Juana

Harvard's Mary G. Berg writes, "in a beautifully crafted style" on Latin American women.

Manuela Gorriti by Mary G. Berg, who teaches translation and Hispanic Studies at the Harvard Extension School, stands out for its own beautifully crafted style and images. It follows, as Berg so eloquently puts it, Gorriti's literal and metaphoric path. While the body of this chapter features a celebration of Gorriti's marital disobedience and her intellectual and political accomplishments, the brief remarks on her writings tease us with a brilliant suggestion of an interpretation of the disobedience of Gorriti's style as well as of the content of her writings. (Berg also has an interesting article on 19th century Argentine journalist and critic Clorinda Matto de Turner in the same volume.)

Sor Juana Inés de la Cruz's biography written by Nina Scott follows closely after La Malinche's. A historical and literary biography of Sor Juana as an intellectual in a time and place when women were not allowed that identity, Scott's chapter contains a wonderfully selected sampling of Sor Juana's most important writings. However, Scott's commentary on those selections seems a little lacking in that same audacity with which she so wonderfully characterizes and describes Sor Juana's life.

One of the few pieces consisting primarily of literary criticism, Ofélia Ferrán gives an outstanding interpretation of Costa Rican author Yolanda Oreamuno's revolutionary role in the authorization of disobedient female sexuality, while at the same time situating her in a tradition

which both precedes and follows her. Ferrán demonstrates the balance of creation and criticism in Oreamuno's work. Showing her conception of female sexuality and politics to be situated in a desiring, creating body, Ferrán looks at how Oreamuno both incarnates Hélène Cixous's concept of feminine writing and makes it distinctly her own and distinctly Latin American.

An insightful treatment of the accomplishments of Ana María Condori, Willy Muñoz's article situates the role of the woman who captures in words the story of another less comfortable with the written word in an indigenous and completely positive context. This is a wonderful light to turn on it, but in Muñoz's article is absent any significant questioning of the editing of the "listener".

Las Desobedientes ends with two biographies of groups of women, the quilters of Puente Alto and the Mothers of the Plaza de Mayo. In doing so, it shows the progress of disobedient women form an isolated few to growing numbers spreading across boundaries and borders, and ends in disobedience with the conventions of traditional biography.

Keja Valens is a second year graduate student in the department of Comparative Literature. Her passion, and therefore her area of focus, is contemporary Latin American, Francophone African and Caribbean, and American lesbian erotic and pornographic works.

Women and Business

Taking Action

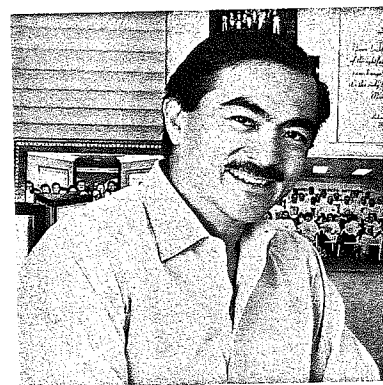
IN MANY WAYS, CRISTINA LÓPEZ HAS always straddled two worlds. Her father, who comes from Ecuador, arrived in the heartland of the United States, Minneapolis, in a student exchange program and stayed; her mother is from the United States. Now working on a joint degree from the Harvard Business School and the Kennedy School of Government, 27-year-old López moves easily between HBS, which is about 25 percent women, and the Kennedy School, which she describes as more oriented toward a "culture of women."

As a woman of Latin American heritage, but with her roots in the Midwest, as someone who loved business, but also yearned to figure out how to mobilize profit to bring about social change, putting it together has not always been easy. After graduating



Left: Cristina López; right: Michael Chu

from Brown University with a degree in international relations, commerce, and Latin America, she worked for a consulting firm. She met a woman at a conference, and that casual acquaintance resulted in an internship at the Somerville-headquartered ACCION International, a U.S. non-profit microlending institution, before



beginning her studies at Harvard.

"There was kind of a lightbulb that went off in my head that said, 'This is really neat stuff,'" she said. "Helping women and helping Latin American women, and thinking about that in different and innovative ways, to be involved with that is very powerful. You might say it spoke to my Latin soul."

Women make up 60 percent of the clients served by ACCION. The organization has developed lending techniques to ensure the participation and empowerment of women, and in the past five years has loaned \$1.3 billion in loans averaging \$575. It has also conducted a major research project in Latin America to determine how best to support female microentrepreneurs, the owners of the tiny informal sector businesses of the poor. But López, who once spent seven months in Quito living with her grandparents and studying at the Catholic University, said it was the moving simplicity of these female microentrepreneurs' stories that moved her, rather than the statistics.

"It was hearing about this woman who is in the market and needs something to display her fruit on. She might just need a \$100, but then to hear her say, 'This has really made a difference in my life,' that made me realize how important it is for me to have a strong connection to Latin America in my everyday life," she observed. "It confirmed some things for me and made me hungry to do more. In some ways, it was a consolidation of all my experiences."

ACCION began microlending as an experiment 24 years ago in Recife, Brazil, making capital available to small-scale informal businesses. Although both men and women benefit from these loans, a 1995 ACCION study entitled *Balancing the Double Day: Women as Managers of Microenterprises* found that the greater freedom to manage home and business schedules and to combine productive activity with family obligations have meant that the informal sector in Latin America is increasingly dominated by women. In Bolivia, for example, women represented 61 percent of the sector in 1991.

The close contact with women being empowered in this small-scale context has led López to search for a way to effectively utilize business tools to alleviate poverty in Latin America after she graduates; for now, she's studying for her dual degree and working with teenage immigrant

women in Boston as a board member of Women Express, Inc., a nonprofit volunteer organization.

While she emphasizes her experiences learning about women microentrepreneurs, she also recounts the influence of Harvard Business School 1976 graduate Michael Chu, president and chief executive officer of ACCION International. Like López, Chu, who was born in China and grew up in Montevideo, Uruguay, found his life transformed by contact with the stories of the microentrepreneurs. For several years prior to joining the staff, Chu had worked in the private sector as an executive and limited partner in the New York office of the Kohlberg Kravis Roberts & Co. investment firm, as well as in senior management positions with Corn Products Company in Uruguay, Boston Consulting Group, and other firms.

He terms his move from the private to nonprofit sector four years ago the result of "a great coincidence between what I knew — my specific business experience — and ACCION's 'particular crossroads'." Microlending is the only thing I know that has social impact but is done in such a way that what it does can be economically viable. There's the structural paradox of humanitarian efforts: the more people you reach, the more you are closer to the limits of your reach. In successful microfinance, the more people you reach, the more sustainable it is," he explains.

Although he had always been interested in the "whole issue of social change" while growing up in Latin America, the disheartening economic experience of Chile's Allende government run by what he describes as "very well-intentioned and bright kids" convinced him that eliminating poverty would take more than just an enlightened government. Now a member of the advisory board of the

Harvard Business School's Initiative on Social Enterprise, he is convinced through his experience at ACCION that the way to eliminate poverty is to enable people to create new wealth fueled by access to capital.

As his social viewpoint has evolved and been reinforced by his experiences at the nonprofit agency, his respect for the strength of Latin American women has also been confirmed. Any stereotypes about dainty and helpless women were already smashed early on in his life in Uruguay while observing female classmates play a tough game

of field hockey; he entered Dartmouth when freshmen were still wearing beanies, and graduated when the "whole world was falling apart and women's roles were changing accordingly."

"I think working at ACCION has heightened my awareness of something which was always a fact that I knew," commented Chu. "In Latin America, particularly in the fragile sectors of society, women are called upon to really shoulder a lot of the burden, sometimes alone, more often than in more affluent circles. Working in microfinance, you become faced with that a lot more. You see women in the most difficult circumstances, raising a family and running a business. And these women of the urban shantytowns very clearly manage their enterprises and hold together their families at the same time."

Perhaps for Michael Chu, a light bulb did not go off, as it did for Cristina López; perhaps it's a question of stronger and stronger illumination, one that casts a light on his committed marriage of business tactics and social change, on the power of a nonprofit to change the lives of women and on the stories of those women to have the power to transform those willing to listen.

—JCE

That made me
realize how
important it
is for me to
have a strong
connection to
Latin America in
my everyday life.

"HOLY GROUND:

MYSTICAL

VISIONS OF

MESOAMERICA"

DRCLAS is

exhibiting the

drawings of J.

Michael Walker

from February 18

to April 15.

Twenty-four years

ago, chance, luck,

and fate combined

to drop artist

Michael J. Walker

into a tiny rural

village in the Sierra

Tarahumara.

Marrying into that

world, learning its

languages and

rhythms,

intoxicated by its

light and beauty,

both his life and his

art were

transformed.

Undergraduate Certificate

The Seminars

THE QUESTIONS CAME FAST and furious, as the students continued to munch discreetly on their falafel and grilled vegetable sandwiches.

"What is your feeling about Central America seeking foreign exchange through its banana crops? Does that create a negative impact?" "Hasn't Cuba been successful in making a transition towards organic farming? Couldn't it serve as a model?" "Obviously, some of this sustainable land use required enormous amount of technology transfer. How should that take place?"

Otto Solbrig, Harvard's Bussey Professor of Biology and a leading theorist in sustainable development issues, answered the questions in detail, adding new facts, elaborating on the talk he had just given on "Environmental Problems and Policy Changes in Latin America" to this group of inquisitive students.

Post-docs? No, the students were all Harvard undergraduates in the first-ever David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies seminar series linked to the Certificate in Latin American Studies. Other Fall Semester speakers included Jorge Domínguez, Clarence Dillon Professor of International Affairs, on "Between Cunning and Catastrophe: The Values of Power and Profits in a Children's Story" and William Fash, Bowditch Professor of Mesoamerican Anthropology and Ethnology, on his work with Mayan ruins.

Spring semester speakers include John Coatsworth, Monroe Gutman Professor of Latin American Affairs, on "Why Worry About Poverty in Latin America?" and Professor Doris Sommer, Department of Romance Languages and Literatures, on "Las

Americas: A Field of Ethnicities".

The Committee on Latin American and Iberian Studies (CLAIS) awards a Certificate in Latin American Studies to Harvard/Radcliffe College students completing an approved course of study as a part of their work toward the A.B. degree. Students must spend about one-quarter of their curricular time at Harvard on courses related to Latin America and write a thesis on the region.

"Faculty and students do not often have an opportunity to chat informally about serious issues in small groups," commented Domínguez to students. "That is what this noncurricular seminar hopes to accomplish. We hope as well that these meetings might allow you to contact some of these faculty on your own at other times."

Undergraduates attending the Solbrig seminar said that the series provided them with an interdisciplinary approach and unusual access for undergraduates.

"I think it's an excellent opportunity. I'm very interested in sustainable development issues, modernization and industrialization. But it's difficult to take classes that cover cultural, political, and scientific aspects all at once. After all, you only have four years," said Alex Gourevitch, a sophomore with a concentration in social studies, who is planning to get his Certificate in Latin American Studies.

Said Kathleen Pegg, '98, an economics major and Certificate candidate, "I think the seminars are really interesting. It's great to talk to faculty who have interests we all share. We can get into conversations more easily because it's a more intimate environment."

"It's a really good opportunity to get to know everyone else who's interested in Latin American Studies. You see them in classes, but you

don't know if they're just there for some other reason. Here you really get to converse with other students and with faculty," added Erica Simmons, a junior with a major in social studies.

"The seminars give us an academic sense of belonging. Undergraduates don't get that very often," said Tim Griffiths, senior with a major in social studies. "I would feel much more comfortable about going to Professor Sol-

brig and asking a question now."

And what about the professor?

"I really enjoy it," said Solbrig. "It's a challenge. The main problem is I'm a scientist and these people are social scientists. It's difficult, because you can't talk down or people will turn off, and you have to avoid technical language. Their questions are great and their interest is enormous. It's very refreshing."

—JCE

Latino Cultures Chapter II

Harvard's Latino Cultures Seminar, to be held for the second year, has "a new, coordinated design," according to its organizers, Professor Marcelo Suárez-Orozco from the Graduate School of Education and Professor Doris Sommer from Romance Languages and Literatures.

Speakers at the Thursday afternoon seminar to be held at the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies will be clustered in three general subject areas: Education and Sociology; Humanities; Political Science, Law and Government.

The interdisciplinary course seeks to present a broad range of issues and disciplines that the organizers hope that students will later develop in future and more specialized courses, or through independent reading with expert mentors.

"The double promise here is that colleagues and students from traditional disciplines (history, literature, anthropology, politics, music) will be able to learn about particular developments in Latino Studies at the same time that a committed group of students (graduate and undergraduate) attends the whole series in the context of a course," the organizers explained in a letter of invitation to potential speakers.

Speakers range from Diego Vigil, UCLA, who will speak on gangs in Latino communities, to Juan Flores, CUNY Visiting Professor at Harvard, who will address the subject of Nuyorican popular culture, to Gary Orfield, from the Kennedy School of Government, who will discuss civil rights.

Other speakers include Catherine Snow, Harvard Graduate School of Education; Roberto G. Fernandez, Cuban-American novelist from Florida State University; Alejandro Portes and Patricia Fernandez-Kelly, sociologists from Princeton; Jorge Domínguez, Government; Jorge Esquirol, Northeastern University Law School; and George Sánchez, University of Southern California, History.

Health at the Margins

MARILYN NATIONS, A RESEARCHER IN THE poorest reaches of Northeast Brazil, came to Harvard recently to tell the story of how romantic advisors and Afro-Brazilian Umbanda healers had become effective warriors against AIDS. Community trust in them, as well as intensive investigations of local values and sex practices, are resulting in an effective AIDS prevention campaign.

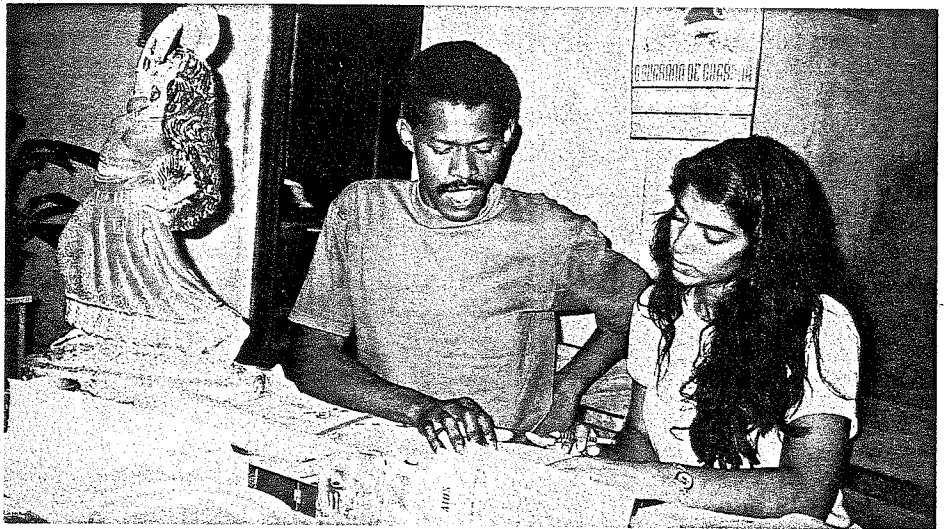
Roberto Lewis-Fernandez, a psychiatrist from the Puerto Rican Mental Health Research Center, had a similarly absorbing tale, of how both Puerto Ricans on the island and migrant workers in Hartford, Connecticut, suffer breakdowns precisely because their identity is so closely tied to self-control.

David Halperin, a surgeon who went back to the Harvard School of Public Health at age 48 to enable himself to work in the remote hills of Chiapas in southernmost Mexico, described how social forces and cultural notions, rather than knowledge of contraceptive methods, determine birth control use.

Nations, Lewis-Fernandez, and Halperin were three of the Consortium for Social Science and Health (COSSAH) researchers from Brazil, Haiti, Mexico, Peru, Puerto Rico, and the United States who journeyed to Harvard with a common goal: to exchange information and share experiences about such health issues as infectious diseases, culture and poverty, reproductive health, and mental health, violence and identity.

"We need to examine together a series of health problems faced by marginalized populations in those parts of Latin America in which we currently work," said Kristian Heggenhougen, who spearheaded the two-day conference "Promoting Health at the Margins in Latin America" November 17 and 18. Heggenhougen, Associate Professor of Medical Anthropology, Harvard Medical School, and Associate Professor of Population Sciences, Harvard School of Public Health, added, "It is now widely agreed that social forces—including cultural, political, and economic factors—shape the distribution and course of most sickness and suffering."

The conference was cosponsored by the David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies and the Program in Social Analysis for Health in the Americas (PROSANHA), as well as COSSAH.



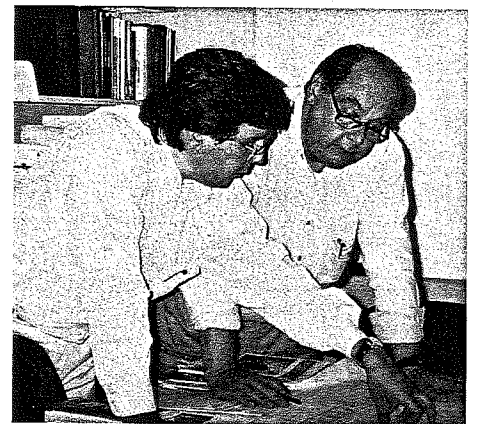
Above: Renu Edpuganti, then a first-year student at Harvard Medical School, worked one summer in Northeast Brazil in a COSSAH project; right: ECOSUR director and COSSAH member Pablo Farias discusses plans for ECOSUR with David Halperin at their headquarters in Chiapas.

In March, 1997, the Department of Social Medicine at the Harvard Medical School officially established PRO-SANHA. The new program is closely linked to COSSAH and composed of members in affiliated research, teaching and service institutions in Latin America and the United States, who are also Lecturers in the Department of Social Medicine.

Arthur Kleinman, head of the Department of Social Medicine at the Harvard Medical School and the Maude and Lillian Presley Professor of Medical Anthropology, explained that the Department of Social Medicine is a social-science-based department, drawing on such fields as medical anthropology and the history of medicine.

"One of the things the Department has tried to do is work with departments and centers around the University," said Kleinman. "This is not just a one-shot engagement, but part of a continual effort to bring together strengths across the university."

He pointed out that the PROSANHA/COSSAH researchers are all either faculty or former fellows at the Department of Social Medicine, but embrace different disciplines such as anthropology, medicine, and mental health.



Interdisciplinary research in the health field is becoming more frequent, but usually just combines standard social science concerns with health research. PROSANHA-COSSAH researchers, gathering at Harvard for the conference, took that one step further in an approach they dub "ecological." This new approach to understanding why people in poor communities get sick encompasses such factors as norms of sexual behavior, land tenure, access to credit and technology, migration, kinship structures, environment, mass media, and transculturation.

"Modernization comes with such an onslaught that it leaves the marginalized even more marginalized and has a negative impact on health," said Marilyn Nations, who described Northeast Brazil, where she has worked for 17 years, as "the largest expanse of poverty in the Western Hemisphere."

—JCE

What's Inside



Women

Women in Latin America (Introductory Essay) <i>By Susan Eckstein</i>	1
Interviewing Military Officers: A Woman Researcher's Perspective <i>By Jennifer Schirmer</i>	3
Women and Immigration <i>By Carola Suárez-Orozco</i>	6
Women and Human Rights <i>By Cecilia Medina</i>	8
Women Refugees and Human Rights <i>By Deborah Anker</i>	10
Gender, Poverty, and Art <i>By Lois Wasserspring</i>	12
Women and Spirituality <i>By Monica Maher with Terri Ruth Unger</i>	14
Mexican Women: Historical Perspectives <i>By Silvia Marina Arrom</i>	16
The Women of Chiapas: The Harvard Connection	18
Women and Politics: The Quota System <i>By Mala Htun</i>	19
Black or Mulata: Women in Contemporary Cuban Culture <i>By Flora María González</i>	21
Ana María Amar Sánchez: A Profile <i>By June Carolyn Erlick</i>	22
Women in Literature: Book Review	23
Women in Business	24

Comings & Goings

Undergraduate Certificate: The Seminars	26
Health at the Margins	27

Updates

Latino Cultures	26
------------------------	-----------



Harvard University
David Rockefeller Center for Latin American Studies
61 Kirkland Street
Cambridge, MA 02138