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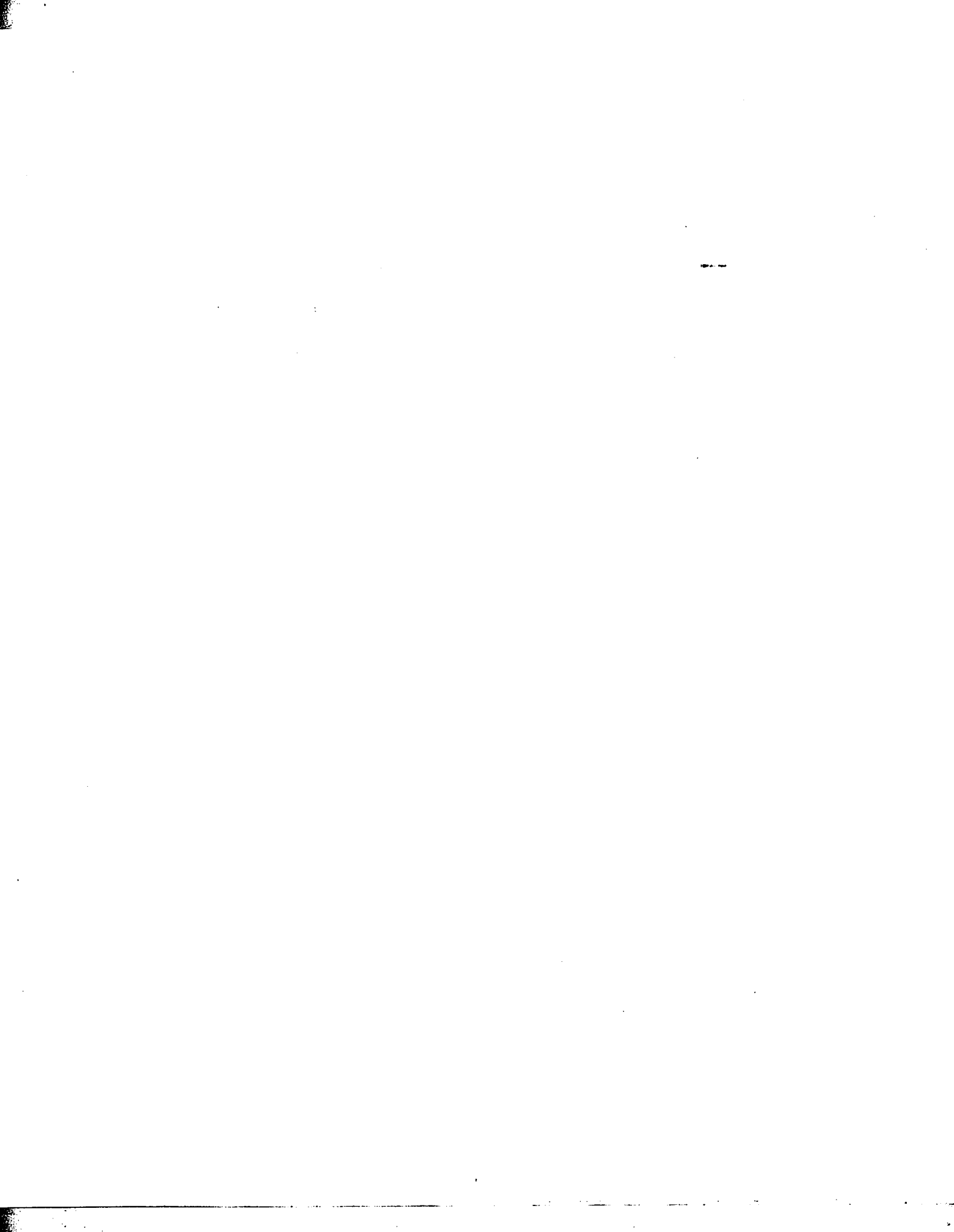
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**Central American women's organizations: Two case studies of
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The University of Arizona, 1988

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CENTRAL AMERICAN WOMEN'S ORGANIZATIONS:
TWO CASE STUDIES OF
POLITICAL PARTICIPATION

by

Elizabeth McQuerry

A Thesis Submitted to the Faculty on the
COMMITTEE ON LATIN AMERICAN STUDIES
In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of
MASTERS OF ARTS
In the Graduate College
THE UNIVERSITY OF ARIZONA

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Finally, I wish to extend my utmost personal admiration to the women of the GAM and AMNLAE for standing against the forces of repression and imperialism that seek to subjugate our lives within the confines of hypocrisy and inhumanity.

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ABSTRACT

Guatemala's Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) and the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE) in Nicaragua exemplify the resurgence of social movements arising from the turmoil in Central America. They are female collective agents pursuing the self-defined interests of their membership. Via humanitarian activism, the GAM struggles to locate the desaparecidos, while AMNLAE exercises institutional activism as a means to incorporate women and promote gender-specific interests. Women in both groups became active to protect "practical gender interests" and, as a result, women's level of consciousness is growing but the acquisition of a gender awareness does not necessarily follow political conscientization. The growing level of political participation and consciousness provides the women with training to become active and efficacious participants in the dynamics of their country.

INTRODUCTION

Contemporary Central America is more volatile than during any other period in its history. The region is alive with new definition and intensity. Political change is occurring faster than ever before and, for the first time, women are integrally involved, both privately and publicly.

Since Colonial times, women have borne the greatest degree of regional underdevelopment. The situation has worsened with time, in many instances a direct result of so-called "modernization" programs. In the 1960s, new patterns of anti-regime organization emerged to challenge the oligarchic power structures. El Salvador, Guatemala and Nicaragua were polarized by violence and ideology. While at a slower rate than most males, women, conscious of their oppression and disposed to challenge it, began to mobilize for their rights and expanded opportunity. Today, Central American women are active in a spectrum of interest groups.

This study describes and analyzes two prominent women's organizations in Central America: Guatemala's Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM), or the Mutual Support Group; and Nicaragua's Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza (AMNLAE), or the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Nicaraguan Women's Association. The GAM is an

independent human rights organization seeking an accounting of that country's desaparecidos - those who "disappeared" over the past two decades of political violence. Although men belong to the group, the GAM is mainly composed of women searching for missing husbands, siblings and/or children. AMNLAE, composed entirely of women, is a popular organization linked to Nicaragua's ruling political party, is attempting to erase traditional barriers to equality via increased participation, education and legislation.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Until very recently, the literature available on Central America was sparse and tended to describe rather than analyze the region's underdevelopment. Women were scarcely included in the studies. The 1979 upheavals in El Salvador and Nicaragua catapulted the region into international attention, and the focus of scholarly research. Since then, the quantity and quality of the literature has grown. Women now figure prominently in many studies and they also are the subject of gender-specific study.

Most research on women in Central America is performed by women, primarily North Americans. The field of study is increasingly broad, making research a

piece-meal pursuit. Country-specific literature is utilized in the respective chapters and the general research on women and political participation is reviewed here. For the purposes of this review, the literature is categorized into three important discussion points: 1) women and modernization; 2) the role of the government; and 3) consciousness-raising.

The first category, women and modernization, describes women's role in and responses to development and/or change in the economy, society or polity. The literature is extensive and well developed. Writing in the early to mid-seventies, authors agreed that social science investigations ignored the "sex perspective" by exclusively using male-oriented paradigms and developmental models. June Nash goes as far as to charge that

it is not an oversight to exclude women...but a fundamental premise of social science in which men are the measure of change (1976:5).

Strong general agreement exists on the point that modernization tends to worsen the female condition. As the developmentalist strategies of modernization introduced new consumer goods into the commercial market, women were displaced from their position as the primary producers of necessary products (Chaney, 1973:48; Nash, 1976:4-6).

Meri Knaster outlines women's devaluation vis-a-vis modernization into three areas: the social, economic and public arenas (1975:17). Elsa Chaney and Marianne Schmink's research on Latin American politicas (female political actors) concurs that modernization disadvantages women in the political sphere (1976:172). Brazilian sociologist Helen Saffioti contends that sex, under capitalist dicta, becomes

a prior and concomitant filter to the process of competition, with the objective of restructuring the number of persons who may legitimately participate (Jacquette, 1976:236).

Tessa Cubitt supports the view that "modernizing" trends disadvantage women in both the political and commercial arenas (1980:182).

Margaret Mead offers the minority position. She argues that women were no better off before modernization because men's activities were always assigned greater prestige and women's public roles are primarily a "by-product" of their relationships with men (1976:153).

Defining women's political character is problematic. It is unclear whether women's responses to macro-societal issues derive from ideological beliefs or their familial relations and responsibilities. In actual practice, Jane Jacquette's position that women

act first on "quality of life" issues such as health care and education is generally agreed upon (Jacquette, 1976:239;Chaney,1979).

Until recently, women were labelled passive and conservative actors due to their religious inclinations. More recent investigations postulate different findings. In 1972 the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women challenged earlier stereotypes:

Women are, on the whole, receptive to change for one explicable reason: They usually have more to gain...by community development than by clinging to the status quo (Nash,1976:10).

Another inhibitor to women's growth is the psychology acquired from their domestic and reproductive roles. Termed the supermadre complex, Chaney found that women's roles in the polity are most closely related to their traditional functions as mothers and wives, confirming their image as passive and conservative political beings (1973:484).

Given voting patterns, actions and attitudes, other researchers posit that women are conservative political actors. Also, although voting results are rarely tallied by sex, regardless of education and resources, women tend to vote conservatively. Studies have credited this to women's low level of education, influence from males and female "religiosity". It is

difficult to determine whether women do so out of conviction or a lack of alternatives, nevertheless, lower class women often vote against their class interests (Aviel,1981:159). This is especially perplexing in countries where voting choices are controlled by a small, self-interested elite.

The second category concerns the role of the government and its ability to alleviate women's exploitation. It is widely accepted that a strong governmental effort is essential to improve women's conditions. According to Steffen Schmidt (1976:254-57), Latin America's hierarchical power structures can serve as an excellent vehicle to incorporate women into society and positions of influence. He adds that a necessary corollary to the incorporation of women is an expansion of women's educational opportunities.

Disagreement is intense over whether women's demands (political, gender-specific, humanitarian, etc.) are best promoted within a capitalist or socialist framework. As the type and number of women's groups increases, this factor becomes critical in evaluating their effectiveness. Jean O'Barr identifies women's groups organized by modernizing agents (i.e. churches, governments, political parties) as capable of "direct influence on the community wide social system" within

the capitalistic context (1976:19). In contrast, a statement from the First Mexican-Central American Symposium on Research on Women in 1977 declared that

...women must take part in social change through an alliance with the working class which fights for socialism, because it is generally admitted that capitalism is structurally able to make only partial reforms (Navarro,1979:120).

In non-capitalist frameworks, Maxine Molyneux's research on socialist governments found that they exhibit "a unity of purpose between the goals of women's emancipation and developmental and socialist goals". In this rubric, because they link gender oppression to class oppression, "women's emancipation can be achieved only with the creation of a new, socialist society" (1986:289,295).

According to O'Barr, the type of developmental program selected determines the range of permissible roles as well as the character of the entire process (1976:45). However, the government is not an omnipotent actor. Given the region's legacy of patriarchy and corruption, Jacqueline warns against the blind promotion of increased participation because it inculcates existing values at the expense of developing an individual consciousness (1976:241). Morality cannot be legislated and neither does it follow that women's lives

will be improved by governmental action alone. For example, a 1982 Nicaraguan law recognizing domestic work as an economic contribution served to legally reinforce women's role in the home.

Consciousness-raising is the third discussion point. Consciousness-raising defines the process through which a person becomes more aware of his or her objective conditions and their causal factors. It also refers to the realization of one's own potential to restructure those conditions.

Regarding the effects of economic growth and consciousness among women in modernizing societies, Schmidt writes that the relationship is inverse in the initial phases of economic growth. This theory posits that in the initial phases of economic expansion, women's understanding of the growth process is very limited, a symptom of their low educational level. Then, in the transition stage, as women's opportunities shrink and technology becomes less labor intensive, consciousness tends to accelerate (1976:258). Jacquette elaborates the effects of this argument: a "gap between ideals and reality may have a politically radicalizing effect..." if there is a movement to concretize the nascent consciousness (1976:231).

Although women have organized for various reasons

over the years, in the patriarchal and underdeveloped nations of Central America, it has been sporadic. Eleanor Leacock explains the potential for change inherent to women's groups:

...women's oppression is so deeply embedded in the entire economic, political, and social structure of capitalist society...The very totality of their oppression means that when they move to change their situation, they move against the entire structure of exploitation (1979:9).

According to Jacquette, residence (rural or urban) and class are co-dependent variables in determining women's attitudes toward participation (1976:226-28). A decade later, Francesca Gargallo, writing on war-torn El Salvador, challenges this notion. She asserts that militancy, or the degree of commitment toward participation, rather than class or residence, is the integral variable (1987:68).

Lavrin urges caution in evaluating the significance of women's organizations because of the wide range of goals and commitment displayed. She attributes the appeal of some groups to women's changing life-cycles, which, like the groups, can be ephemeral (1978:319). The goals of the two groups in this study are testimony to this diversity.

The resurgence of social movements throughout Latin America opens new vistas to the study of consciousness-

raising. Liberation Theologian Frei Betto writes that "popular organizations" are mechanisms that present new experiences and inculcate new values because they are environments "in which the people exercise an experience of democracy, of unity, of mobilization and achieve small victories in their local and regional struggles" (Moreira, 1984:83).

The consciousness-raising process in present day Central America is heavily influenced by war and strife which are creating profound changes in social and attitude patterns. The most recent studies are only beginning to evaluate the war factor. Gargallo's (1987) research on Salvadoran women is a substantive contribution to this pursuit.

The author's own field work also contributes to this study. A small sample of interviews was conducted with women from each group during July and August, 1987, in Guatemala and Nicaragua. Although they yielded great insight into the attitudes, problems, experiences, thought patterns and goals of the women, the interviews are limited both quantitatively and qualitatively. Ten women from the GAM agreed to be interviewed extensively. The participants were not chosen by any specific criteria, but rather, by their availability and willingness to be interviewed. The AMNLAE interviews,

while suffering similar disadvantages, are exemplary of the different organizational sectors and of women from leadership and rank and file positions. This selection was also limited by the women's availability. All the names of the women have been changed to protect them from recriminations arising out of the hostile political climates.

NARRATIVE OUTLINE

The remainder of the paper examines and analyzes the topic at hand: Central American women's organizations and political participation. Through an overview of the Colonial period, Independence and nation-building as a background to the contemporary environment.

The third chapter analyzes the GAM vis-a-vis its organizational foundations and characteristics, factors of influence, and the consciousness-raising effects of GAM participation on the women. The GAM's struggle is particularly influenced by governmental attitudes, the violence and religion. For many of the women, these factors catalyze changes in their ideas on society, political participation, government, religion and themselves.

AMNLAE is similarly examined in the fourth chapter. Formed during the insurrection against the Somoza tyranny, AMNLAE is today the strongest and most successful proponent of women's issues in all of Central America. The group's consciousness-raising efforts and the devastating effects of US-backed aggression combine to make Nicaraguan women more aware of their circumstances.

The conclusion contains a summary of the central points presented in three chapters on women in Central America, a discussion of the major findings in this research as relative to the literature review. Finally, the conclusion includes a series of analytical extrapolations on women's organizations.

Contemporary Central American women need to be understood within the context of past norms, institutions and events that affected women's lives. As the literature review suggested, the dearth of studies masks the historical existence of women until the twentieth century.

Most accounts of Colonial history describe the Conquest as a totally male affair. Although the number of men who came across the Atlantic was tenfold that of women, histories that exclude either Spanish, Indian or women of color provide only a partial, albeit official story. What is known about the Colonial life of women has been unveiled and pieced together, from a hodgepodge of sources and investigative studies (Burkett, 1978:101).

Colonial culture was elitist by custom and by law. Both men and women were marginalized in Spain's quest for riches. As this brief survey of Central America's historical background illustrates, three centuries of Spanish rule left the region ill-prepared for establishing democratic ideals. Moreover, women's lack of a participatory experience in politics deprived them of the political identity developed by most men. Today, this void retards female participation in the public arena.

Women were particularly bound by the austere dicta of Spanish thought. The cultural and sex roles that the Spanish brought to the New World were, by the standards of their European neighbors, patriarchal¹. The Spanish Inquisition and its search for moral superiority were in full swing when Columbus reached the New World in 1492 (Williamson,1970:177). In the New World, the possible roles for elite white women were very limited. Educational instruction was rare and when they were taught, the curriculum was limited to religion or gender-specific tasks such as sewing, cooking and child rearing. Women's travels were confined to nearby locales and even horse riding was prohibited. The norms did little for mental or physical fitness, generating a stereotype of women in the New World as corpulent and inept.

Canon law reigned over every aspect of Colonial life. The family unit was closely protected by law as was women's position within that framework. Although the male possessed total control over household goods, a woman was allowed to own land and to retain the value of her dowry. Sixteenth century documents list three white women in Guatemala and three in El Salvador as encomenderas, or large land owners (Rubio,1978:38-144).

¹Patriarchy is "a power relation existing between the sexes, exercised by men over women, and institutionalized within various social relations and practices among which can be instanced the law, the family, and education (Molyneux,1986:301).

According to Colonial legal codes, men and women were subject to the same laws. In practice, however, a marked segregation existed in the crimes charged against each sex. Men were tried for murder, stealing horses, drunkenness and robbery. Women's crimes were very different from the male offenses: infidelity, secret marriage, concubinage (Rubio,1978:143). The disparity sheds light on the attitudes held by males as law makers, husbands and neighbors: impurity and immorality were female traits and crimes.

Despite prevailing stereotypes, the vision that all women totally cloistered in the home is incorrect. Poor white women and women of color were intricately involved in the economy through food processing, home production, vending, weaving and washing. Others turned to prostitution. Women often took over their husband's businesses after his death. Race and sex became filters to prosperity and women's participation reflected their lower class status (Karasch,1986). In countries like Brasil with lots of immigrants and labor patterns requiring men to be away from the home for long periods of time - sometimes to never return - female headed households were commonplace (Ramos,1975).

Women's lives were private in nature. Neither Indian nor Spanish women were encouraged or accepted as public figures. In 1541 the popular belief that women

were neither capable nor suitable for public life was seemingly verified when Doña Beatriz de la Cueva, upon the death of her well-known conquistador husband, Pedro de Alvarado, proclaimed herself ruler of Guatemala. The very same day, a devastating earthquake destroyed the capital of Spanish rule in Central America (Maslow, 1986: 64).

The Colonial period in Central America came to a close in 1822 when the region was annexed to Mexico, recently freed from the Spanish Crown. The following year, the Mexican empire deteriorated and Costa Rica, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua formed the United Provinces of Central America. In marked contrast to contemporary regional politics, Central American independence came about more peacefully than in the rest of Latin America. This was possible because the region, relatively devoid of mineral wealth, was of little importance to Spain. The calm, however, was short lived as Liberals and Conservatives began to fight for the dominant position in the post Independence power structure. In 1838, the five provinces separated into independent republics.

Although the data is sparse, the history of Central America is not devoid of political participation by women. It is more correct to state that their

involvement, publicly and privately, was glossed over by historians who until recently, were mostly males using male-oriented paradigms. In Guatemala, women's organized political participation has been sporadic, lacking in any overall design or goals. Furthermore, it is wanting of the leadership necessary to sustain a movement. It is not, nor has it been, a feminist movement designed to promote female equality. It is better described as female action designed to secure a higher and more dignified standard of living.

In 1820, Indian women, reflecting the prevailing sentiments of discontent, took part in a revolt against Spanish taxation. More recently, women were active in the resistance to the Ubico dictatorship from 1930 to 1944. María Chinchilla, a teacher, was assassinated for her role in this movement. The Guatemalan Feminine Alliance was founded in 1944, only to be dissolved by governmental decree in 1954 when reformist President Jacobo Arbenz Guzman was overthrown in a US-backed coup. Women were also active against the coup's leading conspirator, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas.

During the turmoil of the late seventies, Mama Maquín, an Achi indian, was killed for her leadership role in 1978 land seizures staged by displaced Indians. In a related occupation of the Spanish Embassy to

protest land rights, several female participants were gunned down by government soldiers in 1980. That same year, feminist Adaide Foppa, a vocal opponent of the military rule, disappeared. Her daughter Silvía, is a leader of one of the three main rebel groups. In 1983, attorney America Yolanda Urizar disappeared, despite an amnesty decree (Morgan,1984:281). Today, Guatemalan women are active in the country's highly publicized labor disputes, especially in the teachers and Coca Cola workers unions.

The 1984 formation of the Mutual Support Group marks a turning point in the organization of women. Groups with similar agendas to the GAM are not able to operate within the country for fear of their safety but the GAM has sustained a movement in support of human rights against the wishes of the country's repressive political and military elite.

Suffrage for Guatemalan women was the subject of a prolonged dispute over constitutional interpretation. Literate women voted for the first time in 1945 when Juan José Arévalo was elected president, but it was not until 1965 that all women in Guatemala were granted the franchise (Morgan,1984:278). Arévalo's successor, Jacobo Arbénz Guzmán tried to liberate Guatemala from its position as an economic appendage of United Fruit,

the powerful transnational corporation in operation there. To achieve this goal, Arbenz hastened the pace of social reform and mobilized otherwise marginalized groups such as labor, students and Indians. Women, however, were not among the target groups.

Populist presidents such as Argentina's Juan Perón, a contemporary of Arbenz, and Chile's Salvador Allende Gossens did successfully mobilize women - both as a group and within other organizations - behind their respective national development plan. Peron and Allende considered women a vital part of their constituency (Skidmore & Smith, 1984:93) but Arbenz, on the other hand, did not share a similar enthusiasm.

Arbenz's ouster in 1954 by a US-backed coup plunged the country into three decades of brutal military dictatorships that, along with right wing death squads, instituted an anti-subversion campaign that exterminated more than 40,000 Guatemalans from 1966 to 1986 (Simon, 1988). The country's lack of a democratic tradition served to isolate women from the country's social and political culture through the machismo², repression and

²Machismo is "an expression...of the patriarchal system. It consists in elaborating a certain superiority of men over women, by which men feel themselves to be privileged beings, both in society and in the family. This serves to consolidate a certain 'specialization,' a division of functions, attitudes,

underdevelopment that characterized the regimes.

The Colonial experience in Nicaragua was very similar to Guatemala's. The Spanish settled the Pacific littoral with the intention to export over a million Indians for slave labor in the gold mines of Peru. The remainder of the native population was nearly devastated by war, disease and forced labor. The rugged and isolated Atlantic Coast was spared the brunt of the conquest because the Spanish did not settle there.

The Nicaraguan declaration of statehood in 1838 did not translate into independence or sovereignty. Spanish rule was soon supplanted by US imperialism, auspiciously designed to democratize the nascent "banana republic". Both the US and Great Britain were eager to tap Nicaragua as a cheap source of commodities and as the passage point for a transisthmus canal. In 1934, when Anastasio Somoza came to power, Nicaragua entered into a new era of internally orchestrated exploitation that benefitted national and foreign elites. Somoza had gained power by assassinating Augusto César Sandino, the leader of a popular rebellion against US imperialism in Nicaragua. Sandino's crusade for sovereignty became the

capacities and qualities which are then attributed to one sex or the other..." (Latin American & Caribbean Women's Collective, 1983:7).

ideological inspiration for the FSLN, which led a broad based revolution that ousted Somoza in 1979.

The Somoza dynasty basked in wealth while campesinos lived in poverty. A vicious cycle of poverty condemned the vast majority of the population to the vicissitudes of underdevelopment and ignorance. Under the dictatorship, popular participation in public affairs was not permitted and neither education nor health care was available to the majority of the people. The underdevelopment perpetuated national traditions of patriarchy and machismo, marginalizing women from becoming integral members of public society.

One of the last countries in the hemisphere to grant suffrage, Nicaraguan women were not permitted to vote until 1955. The dictatorship never attempted to mobilize women or any other sector because US backing made popular support unnecessary for its survival. Nevertheless, Nicaraguan women have always been active economically, most as a method of survival, and were a visible and important component in the success of the insurrection. Women, largely under the direction of AMNLAE, were the backbone of the guerrilla support network as well as one-third of the FSLN fighting force.

In its 1961 plan of government, the FSLN targeted women's emancipation as one of twelve tenets necessary

to establish "a social system that wipes out the exploitation and poverty that our people have been subjected to in past history." Specifically, the document said that in power,

the Sandinista people's revolution will abolish the odious discrimination that women have been subjected to compared to men, it will establish economic, political, and cultural equality between women and man (Rosset & Vandermeer, 1983:144).

The Sandinista government, popularly elected in the national elections of 1984, is heavily influenced by the 1959 Cuban revolution. Pursuing a Marxist path of development, living conditions have improved and popular participation increased. Women in both nations are liberated from many strains of their patriarchal past, but neither have achieved the equality promised by the revolution.

The history that is being written today about women's participation in the upheavals of Central America will not mask the dearth of women's presence in past research. The patterns now being recorded will illuminate voids previously uncovered and provide an enhanced understanding of contemporary dynamics. Also, they will serve as harbingers of the evolution of women's political participation.

THE MUTUAL SUPPORT GROUP:
HUMANITARIAN ACTIVISM

28

The antecedents of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo (GAM) were laid during repeated encounters between five women - two mothers, two wives and one sister - in the morgues, police stations, military compounds, hospitals and rectories of Guatemala City. Individually, each of the five women was conducting a fruitless search for a "disappeared" family member, but came to the realization that individual action was hopeless against the military machinations of the Guatemalan dictatorship. Inspired by the example of a mothers' group in neighboring El Salvador, the five women decided to come together and issue a concerted call to locate the "disappeared," or desaparecidos. Twenty-five people attended the GAM's first public meeting, held at the home of the Archbishop of Guatemala in early June of 1984 (Americas Watch, 1985; 9-10). By mid-1987, membership had grown seventy-six fold to nineteen hundred.

This chapter analyzes the GAM via a discussion of the group's foundations and characteristics, and the factors influencing women's participation. Governmental attitudes, violence and religion are salient variables in the decision of each woman to join the GAM. The final section evaluates the women's participation in the GAM vis-a-vis its effects on their attitudes toward

FOUNDATION & CHARACTERISTICS

The *raison d'être* and the force unifying the GAM is the human imperative to locate family members that "disappeared" during the past two decades of prolific violence. In the political terminology of Latin America, a politically motivated, near genocidal campaign such as those that occurred in Argentina, El Salvador and Guatemala, is referred to as a "Dirty War." Waged against all forms of anti-status quo organization and thought, Guatemala's Dirty War began as a counter-insurgency campaign in the 1960s and is responsible for the killing of 100,000 persons and the "disappearance" of another 40,000 persons (Simon, 1988).

The Dirty War set the rules for political activism in Guatemala for the years to come. The rigid rules, although never explicitly outlined, define autonomous, popular organizations like the GAM as destabilizing or subversive. According to Guatemalan Indian activist Rigoberta Menchú, the military's counter-insurgency plan was designed "not merely to check the armed revolutionary movement, but also to crush any kind of development in the popular organisations" (Painter, 1987:ix).

Several characteristics distinguish the GAM as an

organization. While tens of thousands of Guatemalans allowed relatives to obscurely disappear, GAM members organized as a unified voice to demand an accounting of the "disappeared". The GAM's true significance lies not in its choice to organize per se - Guatemalan women are involved in unions and revolutionary activities - but that it organized to peacefully petition one of the most brutal military regimes in the Americas. As one member remarked, "No one helped us [before]. Everyone and the government rejected us. We're not alone now..."

In 1984, the GAM began a war of "humanitarian activism" against the military government. Humanitarian activism is defined as the organized, non-violent participation of a group or individual(s) toward a humanitarian goal. Although the GAM is not a political organization, this in no way ignores that the demands and actions of the group do not have political implications. Group actions do have political relevance both in the Guatemalan context and to the global state of human rights. Therefore, the GAM can correctly be referred to as an informal political actor.¹

¹This study uses Myron Weiner's definition of political participation, as cited in JoAnn Fagot Aviel's study of political participation among Latin American women: "...any voluntary action, successful or unsuccessful, organized or unorganized, episodic or continuous, employing legitimate or illegitimate methods intended to influence the choice of public policies, the

GAM membership ebbs and flows, influenced by the threat to member's personal security and their economic needs. At any given time however, at least 80% of group membership is female. The female majority results from the simple fact that the desaparecidos were overwhelmingly male. As GAM's outspoken leader Nineth Montenegro de García commented, when the man disappears, "the woman remains alone." Also, the group's leadership junta is predominately female (five women and two men). This analysis is only concerned with the group's female majority as it responds to the economic, social and political variables to which the women are exposed.

An important corollary to the male dominate pattern of disappearances is the concomitant increase in the incidence of female headed households, an accelerating force in the process of increased political awareness for both the women and their children. The impact of this trend can be seen immediately, but the long term effects, which are subject to further alteration, have the greatest significance.

Guatemalan women who organize must do so in the environment of the subjugating traditions of machismo. The GAM is not free from the constraints of a

administration of political affairs, or the choice of political leaders at any level of the government, local or national." (1981:156).

patriarchal society, but most of the women are participating without any input from "disappeared" husbands. This atmosphere make the GAM an illustration of an independent organization of women - by women and for women - in the public arena.

Ninety percent of the women in the group are indigenous, or indígena in Spanish. The indigenas experience a double denigration because they are female in a macho culture and indigenous in a country dominated by ladinos (of mixed Spanish and Indian blood), who control national wealth and power. Indians in Guatemala have the lowest standard of living and are racially and socially segregated from other groups. During the Dirty War, they were presented another challenge - survival- by General Oscar Humberto Mejía Víctores who declared that the military's objective was not only to squelch the counter-insurgency, but also "to eliminate the word 'Indian' from the Guatemalan vocabulary" (Komar,1987:3). The marginalization of the Indian population is facilitated by the fact that they are not encouraged to become functioning members of ladino society. The female indians are further subjugated by the dicta of their tribe, often ultra-conservative (Bronstein,1982: 218). These conditions give special significance to the fact that the GAM membership is overwhelmingly indigenous.

FACTORS OF INFLUENCE

The pervading desire of GAM members to locate the desaparecidos is influenced heavily by three separate but interrelated variables: governmental attitudes, both military and civilian; violence; and religion. These factors effected the individual decision by GAM members to organize and are critical variables in the process of political change occurring among the women.

Governmental Attitudes

Neither the military nor the civilian regimes in Guatemala have been responsive to the issue of the "disappeared." Governmental attitudes have ranged from indifference and criminal allegations to violence against group members. A primary impulse to form the GAM was the government's indifference toward pleas to help locate the desaparecidos. Members report being repeatedly turned away by the military who refused to help them and, in many instances, also denied the existence of "disappeared" persons in Guatemala.

When the GAM formed, Guatemala was ruled by the military dictator, General Mejía Víctores, whom the group called upon to "intervene immediately to find our loved ones". Mejía promised to look into the matter and the group placed paid advertisements in two national

newspapers voicing support for an investigation. In August, after the government failed to act, the group placed an open to Mejia letter in newspapers: (Unless otherwise noted, this section draws heavily from Jean-Marie Simon's 1985 report on the GAM for Americas Watch.)

When we had the honor of being received in a private audience on August 1, we felt optimistic as we left the President's residence, because we know that When You Promise Something, You Follow Through because of the inherent moral values you hold... Twenty-eight days have gone by since our interview... We solicit a second interview to hear the results of the exhaustive investigation offered... please put an end to our suffering and set an unforgettable historic precedent (12).

Although the GAM was cautious not to accuse the government of human rights abuses during initial contacts, its pronouncements were characterized by antagonism, mockery and inflated rhetoric. Using passages like this one published in prominent formats, GAM demanded the attention of the nation and the government. Another tactic is Friday afternoon "pots and pans" marches through Guatemala City which allow members to call attention to their plight by symbolizing their outrage and refusal to be silenced.

The plan succeeded in drawing greater exposure to the GAM, but also brought drawbacks. Within months members began to receive threatening mail and phone

calls while the government accused them of being uncooperative with its Tri-Partite Commission, set up to investigate allegations of "disappeared" persons. In a television address on March 14, 1985, Mejía Víctores stated that

...Mutual Support is a pressure group which is being used by subversion, because if they have problems, solutions are being found, and they have been given every advantage to [solve their problems]. They have spoken with me three times...we have accepted their petitions and nevertheless, they are still pressuring. They pressure the National Constituent Assembly, they take out paid ads -- I don't know where that money comes from. I imagine that it is now a pressure group managed and directed by the subversion and one which is making problems for the peaceful Guatemalan population (36).

Local press followed Mejia's initiative by printing articles suggesting that the GAM was a subversive organization, intent on destabilizing order (36). This portrayal undoubtedly influenced the formation of the group's poor domestic image. Bad press continues to have negative impact on the GAM's public relations.

Shortly after the General's televised accusations, reporters asked him what would be done if the GAM did not heed the government's warnings. Mejía replied that "People will get bored with these people because nobody likes to hear pots and pans." Pressed further, the dictator ominously answered "You'll know it when you see it" (38).

Within two weeks, the group itself became a victim of Guatemala's political cauldron. On March 30, GAM leader Héctor Gómez Calito was abducted on his way to catch a bus after a group meeting in the capital. His body was found later in the day, mutilated by beatings and burns affected with a blow torch. The government's reaction to the murder was that "political violence is natural," and that it was "symptomatic" to the upcoming visit of left-leaning Colombian President Betancourt.

Five days later, another prominent GAM member, Rosario Godoy de Cuevas, was found dead in a car wreck with her brother and her two-year old son. They had left home on an errand but the car however was not found near their destination. The condition of the car and the bodies left little doubt that they were murdered. Rosario Godoy had been molested and her son's fingernails removed (40-46).

The assassinations spoke loudly to GAM members. Many dropped out of the group, some temporarily and some permanently. While there is no evidence to directly implicate the military, Mejía's comments indicate governmental approval and/or acquiescence in the brutal assassinations.

The nation's politicians were similarly unresponsive to the GAM. In November, 1984, 284 GAM members occupied the National Assembly to protest the

lack of attention given to the human rights situation. The occupation was peaceful, used to deliver details of the disappearances of relatives. At that time, a high-ranking official of the Christian-Democrat party spoke to the group, creating false hope for GAM members. He stated that

...the problem of Guatemala is not an individual problem of each of you. [It is] much deeper than the reappearance of a loved one...If we were the government there would be not more "disappeared" people and we would be looking for your relatives" (26).

The fact that the political parties divorced themselves from the GAM and its efforts to improve the country's deplorable state of human rights is indicative of the overall state of powerlessness of the puppet assembly during the dictatorship. The reaction - or lack of - illustrates the incredible polarization inherent in the desaparecido issue, leaving little speculation as to why the issue was buried in fear for so many years.

In 1985, when the Christian Democrats did attain power, their promise proved devoid of substance. The inauguration of civilian president Venicio Cerezo has not herald an improvement in the human rights situation. According to the Organization of American States, there has been a "tangible worsening" in the human rights situation: Over the first 20 months of Cerezo's term,

politically-motivated assassinations totaled 1,606 (Mesoamerica, January, 1988:3). Ironically, the election of the country's first civilian president after 16 years of military dictatorship delegitimated the need to address the human rights situation.

Even if the new civilian government had been disposed to seriously address GAM demands, its ability to do so had been hampered by the military who, before leaving office, decreed an amnesty for its past human rights abuses. Only if the incumbent president was willing to take on the military, jeopardizing the nascent civilian regime, he was left powerless to rectify the crimes committed. While Cerezo promised to uphold the amnesty, he also formed a Presidential Commission to investigate the desaparecido issue. However, the commission was more than a year getting started and was staffed solely by governmental officials. The final report, released in August, 1987, stated that no progress had been made toward locating missing persons or their bodies (Kinzer, The New York Times:8).

Shortly after the final report was issued, two separate clandestine cemeteries "appeared" when human remains surfaced after harsh summer rains (El Gráfico :7). Despite this event, the government still refuses to acknowledge the extent of the desaparecido problem. In

this context, the new democracy has not displayed even a veneer of justice. At the very least, this hypocrisy does not build confidence in the civilian government and by extension, it creates a potential for cementing opinion against Cerezo.

Capitalizing on the growing desperation of GAM members, Cerezo offered a program of financial assistance to families that declare their loved one as legally dead. For families already suffering from the loss of income of the "disappeared" person, the lure of a decreased financial burden is attractive to GAM members who are mostly lower class. The plan has been divisive to group integrity as some members opted to give up their struggle in exchange for greater economic security (Hood, 1988:9).

In analytical perspective, the hypocrisy and contradictions between governmental attitudes and actions toward the GAM are important variables in the growth of the women's political awareness. The government's perversion of human rights propels some of the women from their passivity prior to the GAM toward a new level of consciousness. Or as Jacquette discussed, the "gap between ideals and reality" can have a "politically radicalizing effect" (1976:231).

A 1968 study on Chilean women found that lower class women were disinterested in politics because they

viewed the political system as unrelated to their needs, defined as income generation. Jacquette has postulated that the current political structures of most countries have so little to offer women that they cannot justify a restructuring of their time away from economic accumulation (Jacquette,1976:232).

Yet many of the women in the GAM have restructured their time to allow for participation in group actions. Most are lower class Guatemalans who sustain themselves through vending and cottage industries. Also, many must travel up to twelve hours by bus to reach the capital for meetings, losing two day's work in transit. The women's continued willingness to participate, and to accrue an economic loss in doing so, suggests that informal politics does not carry the same baggage as formal politics.

The formation of the GAM outside the formal channels of politics, first to petition the government and later as an undeclared enemy of the state, challenges Lavrin's belief that the political opportunities of women are proportionate to the options open to them at a given time (1978:310). Because the formal political actors refused to help, the GAM's only alternative was to organize outside the confines of formal political constructs. Although the low level of experience in formal politics among the women searching

for their desaparecidos contributed to this formation, the GAM forged a new path of political action instead of giving up its search.

Violence

Over the past two decades, Guatemala has become a virtual morgue. At least 40% of the "disappeared" in all of Latin America occurred there (Simon, 1988). Although the civil war is largely contained in the remote highlands and jungle, people continue to be abducted and slain throughout the country.

Guatemala's reign of terror began in the 1960s when the military organized an anti-communist campaign to fight the incipient civil war. Death squads also began to appear. With names like "An Eye for an Eye" and the "National Anti-Communist Organization," the death squads operated freely, often with direct governmental involvement. A state of seige terrorized the nation as unidentified men appeared and assassinated persons suspected of opposing the state. Most bodies were mutilated and left behind as examples. The death squads were most active during the regime of General Romeo Lucas Garcia when, from mid-1978 through 1981, 6000 persons were killed (Black, 1984:50).

Guatemala's violent past is not over. In an investigation of regional compliance with the Central American Peace Accords, the US-based Latin American

Studies Association reported that

Guatemala's human rights performance before and after the accord remains deeply flawed. While most observers agree that the overall number of politically motivated killings and abductions of Guatemalans since the end of 1985 has remained well below the levels observed from 1979 through 1985, they also affirm that no meaningful alteration in the infrastructure of state terror and insurgent terror has occurred. Thus the official security forces and paramilitary organizations responsible for most such state-sponsored terror persist, as do leftist armed groups; and both continue to abduct and murder perceived political opponents at varying rates from month to month (1988:9).

Although political violence has abated since the military left power, it began to rise during the last three months of 1987, prompting the government to finally recognize "political violence" as a cause of the country's extraordinarily high homicide rate (Central America Report, 5 May 1987:122). This recognition indicates an opening in the government's unwillingness to deal with the violence but has not yet translated into a more mature treatment of the desaparecido issue.

The continued violence is a double-edged sword for the GAM, with both positive and negative effects. As the politically motivated terror continues to plague the nation, the number of "disappeared" persons increases. According to Americas Watch, during October and November of 1987, the number of killings reported to the press averaged one hundred and thirteen. Over half the

victims had been shot and ten percent showed signs of physical torture. As with the 1985 murders of two GAM leaders, members - worrying about the possibility of leaving their children completely parentless - are frightened away by the threat to their personal safety.

While the persistent violence is an obvious and cruel indication that the GAM has not achieved its goals, it also reinforces the group's *raison d'être* - organization. Entering their fourth year, GAM members are experiencing the effects, both positive and negative, of sustained political participation.

Because of this ongoing terror, many of the women turn to the GAM for emotional support. When asked why they continue to participate in the GAM, many responded that it provides a source of strength and comfort. Eva, a ladina with one year of schooling and six children remarked, "We comfort each other." Carmén, 47, a trained nurse and founding member of the GAM, said that

In the GAM, we're more conscious with more strength to struggle, more indignation for their jokes...Before the authorities did whatever they wanted and no one said anything out of fear. Now our pain is enough to confront them.

Recently, the dichotomy between the government and the GAM has been escalating. The GAM charges that the government is "censoring" it, and complains publicly that it continues to report assassinations to no avail

by the government. Furthermore, in January, 1988, the GAM marched with some 30,000 demonstrators in protest of recent rate hikes of government utilities (Reed, The Guardian:1). It also accused government officials of complicity in the desaparecido question in a 26 January, 1988 press conference ("Guatemala," Americas Watch, No. 21). The government's continued intransigence is seen in the comments of its new Human Rights Procurator who boldly declared that he "knows nothing" about new violence.

Although the GAM has always used heated rhetoric in its relations with the government, only recently has it resorted to direct accusations of censorship and complicity in the abuses. Frustrated by governmental attitudes and continued violence, the GAM is moving toward a new stage. As President Cerezo's celebrated foreign policy of "active neutrality" detracts attention away from Guatemala's domestic strife and desperate living conditions, the GAM is attempting to bring the focus back to the violence in order to promote its cause. This strategy, although no more fruitful, suggests that the women's level of dedication to the GAM is sufficient to sustain participation, despite its obvious failure to attain the objective over the past four years.

The dedication factor is explored by Gargallo in

her research on women in war-torn El Salvador. The degree of commitment, or militancy as she terms it, is the integral variable in determining women's level of participation. In a study of a broad spectrum of women's organizations (women's groups, mothers' groups, clandestine, guerrilla), she found that militancy was the dominate variable in their involvement. The emphasis on militancy shifts the focus of investigation away from previously promoted variables such as social class (although militancy does not deny its influence), and rural or urban residence, toward the psychological characteristics of women as individuals. Through their humanitarian activism to locate the desaparecidos, the women of the GAM strengthen this theory.

Religion

Religion defines the third factor of influence. Religious tranquility in Guatemala is as elusive as racial and political calm. Christianized by the Spaniards, Guatemala is Roman Catholic by tradition but in recent years Protestant sects have proliferated, attracting both ladino and Indian followers. The church and state in Guatemala were not separated until 1871, relatively late in Latin America, allowing the religion to become an engrained part of national culture. Catholicism was anti-reformistic, largely used to keep

the indigenous population in subservience. It also subjugated women via its powerful patriarchy, as discussed in Chapter Two. When General Efraín Ríos Montt ousted General Lucas García in March of 1982, the state and religion were reunified by the former's "visionary Christianity".

Both the level of violence and the confusing state of religion in Guatemala became more acute during Ríos Montt's dictatorship. In the "final battle" against the insurgency, religious leaders suspected of sympathizing with the guerrillas were exiled, jailed, kidnapped and assassinated (Barry & Lang, 1988:15). Liberation theologians, a split in the Catholic faith that has been active in encouraging social participation and self-empowerment throughout Latin America, were specially targeted. However, only a handful of the GAM women are involved in this movement. Most are traditional Catholics or Evangelicals. Liberation theology has not spread through Guatemala because many of its original leaders were silenced by the Dirty War and the women of the GAM do not appear to be influenced by it. The continued level of violence and the threat of association undoubtedly deters from its appeal.

Protestantism is a conservative social movement that reinforces elitist structures (Hoffnagel, 1980:111). Although its converts are from all classes, its greatest

appeal is with poor people in conflict-ridden areas:

The harvest of the "born-again" is bountiful wherever there is death, disruption and despair...There are no complex rites or doctrines to learn. In sharp contrast to the Roman Catholic church, there are few institutional or education barriers to advancement...[It] is a spiritual rock to which the poor can cling in times of class warfare and economic crisis...Generally, the evangelical churches and sects fight revolutionary ideas by instilling a profound fear of Communism and telling believers they should await the Kingdom of God while leaving civil matters to rulers ordained by God...they encourage a strict separation between the spiritual and the political, steering their followers away from community organizations, trade unions and movements of protest (Barry & Lang, 1988:13-16).

In Guatemala, these tenets are amplified by the Catholic tradition and the exigencies of the Dirty War which reinforce established norms that state that women must be passive, subservient to men and apolitical. Nevertheless, the GAM women are not adhering to those rules. The experience of Eva, a weaver from the municipality of Guatemala illustrates this polarity. Eva was told by her pastor to stop associating with the group because the "disappearance" of her husband was God's will. Although she refuses to give up her search with the GAM, Eva also believes that Evangelicism has show her the "truth", and that her participation adds "to the strength of God".

The unwillingness to conform indicates a changing pattern. Most women in the GAM express profound

religious convictions and mesh their religious beliefs with the pervading desire to locate relatives. Many feel more religious now than ever before. Although the GAM has poor relations with the Catholic hierarchy, masses and prayers are visible components of its internal organization.

An interesting relationship is being derived from the women's religious beliefs vis-a-vis their GAM activities. The indigenas tend to equate politics with subversion, undoubtedly a by-product of the military's counter-insurgency campaign that sought to instill similar thought patterns. Even more curiously, they interpret subversion as a campaign against religion. The comments of María Marta, an indigenous, twenty-seven year old domestic worker from Progreso, illustrates this tendency. Asked if her participation in the GAM affected her religion, she replied negatively, because the group is "not doing anything wrong." Politics and religion are differentiated by Eva, who distinguishes her actions in each arena: "Before God, I'm not political, but here [with the GAM] I am."

This distinction is also made by Juana, a seventy year old Indian woman with no education. When questioned about the political implications of the GAM, she replied that the group did not have any: "We only think about God and bringing our children back alive.

Changing the government is for them to do."

Analysis of the women's religious beliefs provides insight into changes in their political attitudes and actions. The evidence is inconclusive as to whether the women, the Indians in particular, regard political participation as antithetical to religion. However, juxtaposing the women's continued participation in the GAM with their statements shows clear evidence of a psychological dilemma. The need felt by the women to have religion, to feel support and belonging, is offset by the hypocrisy of the government's dual role as eradicator of subversion and perpetrator of violence. A dominate factor here is that the women each have personally experienced the violence. The need for religion and the community acceptance derived from it is apparently not as dominate as the need to locate family members.

The evidence on religious opinions given here make more difficult the task of defining women's political character. Researchers are moving away from the belief that women are inherently conservative actors, restrained by religious beliefs and social norms. The deep religious convictions expressed by GAM members provides further refutation that women's religiosity does not inhibit them from participating in the political arena.

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING EFFECTS

For the women of the Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo, participation becomes a catalyst in the growth of consciousness. The changes are primarily attributable to the politicization of their search for the desaparecidos, which has thrown them into domestic and international focus, where they are unable to escape exposure to new ideas and actions.

The act of participation with the group is a new experience for the majority of the women. According to GAM leaders, almost all of the women had never been involved in any "political activity" prior to joining the group. Of the ten women interviewed, eight confirmed this and two responded that they were members of a student group while attending the university. Both are ladina - one is searching for her husband who was a union leader and the other for her sister. Considering the GAM's inability to bring about governmental accountability or locate the missing, the women's continued participation suggests that the group meets other needs of the women.

Their need for strength and comfort was discussed earlier in the section on religion. The attainment of an increased level of awareness or consciousness is also attractive. During interviews, the women frequently commented that the President "lied" to the group, and

some mentioned that they "unfortunately" voted for him. One such woman is Dora, a thirty-eight year old ladina secretary and mother of two in Guatemala City:

I think that being with the GAM is a proof that they keep violating human rights. Venicio says that everything has changed. If we don't keep this up, we'll be doing Venicio a favor. To retire myself is to accept what he says and he wants the people to be silent.

Before her husband's "disappearance", Dora never voted because all the candidates seemed equally unpleasing. Recalling that period, she commented that she felt "ignorant and didn't know what to do."

Dora joined the GAM shortly after its formation, exposing her to many previously unknown experiences. She now feels more comfortable with her understanding of what is going on around her. Dora's comments expose an increasing level of political awareness:

I integrated into politics after [my husband] "disappeared". Before I didn't even know what the M.L.N. or the U.N.R.G. meant [the two main guerrilla fronts]. The situation is the same, they've only given it a facelift...Things have changed for Venicio Cerezo but not for us.

The tendency among the women to become informed about national or international political affairs is greater for ladinas than indigenas because Indian women have limited access to education and little time to spend away from income generating activities. For cultural and safety reasons, they prefer to distance themselves from the public arena. Many of them do not

understand political issues that intimately effect their lives such as the violence in Guatemala.

The women - regardless of race - obviously did not join the GAM for the purpose of increasing their level of awareness. Even after participating in the group, many do not realize, or refuse to recognize, that they are changing or that the GAM has been a component of national and international dialogue. The increase in the number of female-headed households is a significant factor in formulating the women's attitudes toward political participation. Forced to emotionally and economically cope with the loss of a loved one, the women inherit greater financial burdens and the stress of single parenting in a country where women rarely live alone. However, at the same time, they become more independent and are no longer subjected to the attitudes and prejudices of mates. Forced to make their own decisions, they are also freer to form personal opinions about issues effecting their lives. The impact of these changes on the women's children are worthy of further study.

Although 80% of group membership is female, its concerns are not gender-specific. A better term would be gender-related. The return of the desaparecidos is not a gendered issue such as equal pay, abortion or paid maternity leave. And even though the GAM is not a

women's organization, its focus on human rights issues supports Jacquette's theory that women in Latin American tend to organize around "quality of life issues" related to their maternal and female roles (1976:339). The GAM's humanitarian activism is helpful in analyzing motivating factors in women's political participation:

When governments fail to provide...basic needs women withdraw their support; when the livelihood of their families, especially their children, is threatened, it is women who form the phalanxes of bread rioters, demonstrators, and petitioners. It is clear...however, that gender and class are closely intertwined; it is, for obvious reasons, usually poor women who are so readily mobilized by economic necessity. Practical interests, therefore, cannot be assumed to be innocent of class effects. Moreover, these practical interests do not in themselves challenge the prevailing forms of gender subordination, even though they arise directly out of them (Molyneux, 1986:284).

Past studies have concluded that sex is an insufficient variable to form social unity and situations of revolutionary upheaval or rapid change such as contemporary Guatemala compound the effect: women's issues "disappear...in the context of class polarization" (Molyneux, 1986:285). The minimal degree of gender-specific consciousness acquired by the GAM women is, therefore, similar to the experience of other women in a like environment.

However, the changes occurring within and around the women cannot be ignored. Their effect on the

women's public and private lives is accumulating as the GAM's humanitarian activism continues to be a active part of the national agenda. According to Molyneux, the future of women as a politically active and conscious group depends heavily on interests similar to those of the GAM:

...it is the politicization of these practical interests and their transformation into strategic interests that women can identify with and support which constitute a central aspect of the feminist political practice (1986:285).

While it is not possible to foretell what the women who participate in the GAM will do when the group dissolves, it is certain that they will carry forth a variety of new experiences that will continue to effect and shape their lives and attitudes.

At the onset of the popular movement against the dictator Somoza, the Luisa Amanda Espinoza Nicaraguan Women's Association (AMNLAE) grew "out of the historic need for Nicaraguan women to take full and active participation in the revolutionary process of national liberation which the Frente Sandinista de Liberación Nacional [FSLN] was furthering" (AMNLAE, 1983:323). More than a decade later, AMNLAE is the largest women's organization in Nicaragua and the primary vehicle for women's political participation.

Formed in September of 1977, AMNLAE organized the participation of thousands of women in the movement to oust Somoza. This position inside the popular movement, allowed the group to reach women of all social classes and to educate them about class and gender-specific oppression - issues that are unmistakably intertwined in the battle for women's emancipation, especially in underdeveloped countries.

Although AMNLAE has achieved important hallmarks toward women's "full and active participation" via its ties to the FSLN, many obstacles remain. The counterrevolution has forced the group to reevaluate its priorities and as a result, women's energies are now channelled away from gender-specific issues towards

survival strategies against the US-backed aggression. The sharp increase of women's participation, both in activities to decrease sexual discrimination and in the affairs of the nation, portends a more positive and peaceful future for the country. Through involvement in political concerns, women are acquiring a "political education", a greater understanding of their condition - a requisite precondition for participatory democracy.

This chapter examines AMNLAE as a basis for analyzing women's political participation in Nicaragua. The first section is concerned with the group's formation, highlighting the dynamics that set the stage for women's involvement in the political arena to dramatically increase. The next section describes and analyzes the two salient factors influencing women's participation: governmental ties and the counterrevolutionary aggression - factors that determine the permissible range of AMNLAE action toward its goals, and at the same time, its success. The final section is an analytical discussion of the effects that participation in AMNLAE has had on the women.

FOUNDATIONS OF THE ORGANIZATION

AMNLAE's history divides into three chronological periods. The first period encompasses the insurrection, spanning from the organization's formation in September,

1977 to the revolutionary victory on July 19, 1979. National reconstruction, from July 1979 through 1984, defines the second period, and the ongoing campaign for survival against the aggression constitutes the third.

AMNLAE began in September, 1979 as a work committee of approximately 60 middle class women who were discontent with the female condition in Somoza's Nicaragua. Then known as the Association of Nicaraguan Women Before the National Problematic (AMPRONAC), the group was sympathetic to the guerrilla struggle but only two or three members were involved. Despite two previous failures, the creation of a women's group within the FSLN was a possibility (Randall,1981:2).

Under the direction of AMPRONAC, women became an integral component in the national insurrection. However, the group's initial agenda, while conscious of the national crisis, was feminist and humanitarian, not revolutionary. Its three main objectives were: 1)women's participation in studying and seeking a national solution; 2)defense of the social, economic and political rights of Nicaraguan women; and 3)defense of human rights in general (AMNLAE,1983:323).

As the insurrection gained momentum, AMPRONAC rapidly acquired a more overt political character and its influence spread from the cities to the countryside.

The group was a voice against "disappearances", human rights violations and the high cost of living. Its activities featured the occupation of churches, hunger strikes and a campaign to inform Nicaraguans of their rights. AMPRONAC also was active in the denunciation of the January 1978 assassination of journalist Pedro Joaquín Chamorro, an event that propelled the resistance to Somoza into a full scale national insurrection.

The organization's agenda mirrored the changing national dynamic and by March, 1978 its goals were: an end to the repression; freedom of association; freedom for political prisoners; justice for human rights offenders; an end to the rising cost of living; repeal of all laws that discriminate against women; equal pay for equal work; and an end to the commercialization of women in the media. One year prior to the Sandinista victory, AMPRONAC officially joined the FSLN coalition in a national vote of its 3000 members (Deighton, 1983: 41-42).

According to Lea Guido, a founder of AMNLAE and member of the FSLN Assembly, the intimate link between women's emancipation and national liberation allowed women to integrate into the national dynamic while not ignoring gender-specific questions:

We were successful because we learned how to involve women in the national struggle while

at the same time organizing around problems specific to women (Deighton,1983:43).

Gloria Carrión, FSLN militant and co-coordinator of AMNLAE after the triumph, explains the merger of social and feminist consciousness-raising during the uprising:

[AMPRONAC] took place within the context of an entire people readying themselves for battle. At the same time, however, Nicaraguan women developed a consciousness of themselves as women and of the important role they could play in the fight against Somoza. And from this more conscious position, women began to organize themselves and to take a position in the struggle against Somoza in favour of the Revolution (Randall,1981:10).

Instead of organizing an overtly feminist campaign for women's rights, AMPRONAC moved against the tyranny and the mechanisms of underdevelopment as a tactic to attack the factors that historically have disadvantaged women. Sylvia McEwan, AMNLAE Secretary of International Relations, describes the group's ideology as "revolutionary feminism...feminism in harmony with men."

The significance of this type formation cannot be overlooked. Incorporation as active, female components of the national dynamic is important because women avoided being perceived as making only feminist/gender-specific demands, a traditional source of friction. This is especially true in a country like Nicaragua where patriarchal and macho attitudes remain strong. Had the group attempted a purely feminist campaign in

the environment of the civil war, it would likely have remained isolated and ineffective.

During the final months of the insurrection, women comprised an impressive 30% of the military campaign. They held support, leadership and combat positions. Female commanders led several decisive battles with Somoza's National Guard. The high percentage is significant because female participation in Latin American guerrilla movements is low, becoming perceptible only in recent years.⁴

After the victory in July, 1979, AMPRONAC changed its name to AMNLAE because of the need to reflect the new challenge: active female participation in a revolutionary society. The new name honors Luisa Amanda Espinoza, a young seamstress who fought in the guerrilla campaign against the tyranny. The first female to fall in combat, she was killed in 1970 during the early stages of the armed struggle. The name change marks the beginning of the second period in the organization's history.

⁴Even in the Cuban Revolution, famous for championing women's rights, women did not play an important role in the guerrilla stage of the revolution. One exception to this was the Tupamaro movement in Uruguay, a highly developed and literate nation, where women's participation reached over 25 percent. The only other country where female participation in guerrilla movements is comparable to Nicaragua is neighboring El Salvador (Reif, 1986:154-58).

FACTORS OF INFLUENCE

The premise that women's concerns are influenced by political, economic and cultural issues is perhaps no better illustrated by the case of AMNLAE. Two factors are key to the implementation of the group's agenda: ties to the Sandinista government and the impact of the United States aggression.

Governmental Ties

The links established during the insurrection between the FSLN and AMNLAE were institutionalized as the Sandinistas evolved from their position as the vanguard of the popular movement to their current stature as Nicaragua's political leadership. Both parties recognize that their individual agendas are best pursued through cooperation with the other. However, this also means that a problem for one partner becomes a problem for the other. The relationship has brought about a variety of legal improvements in the civil and labor codes. It is also the mechanism through which women have increased their participation in society and the FSLN has mobilized women in support of the Revolution. Consequently women are becoming integral and consciousness actors in the national scene.

The FSLN's interest in women's emancipation dates to its 1969 programme which declared that:

The Sandinista Popular Revolution will abolish the discrimination that women have suffered with respect to men; it will establish economic, political and cultural equality between women and men (FSLN,1987:12).

Women's integration into the political arena has been promoted by the Revolution's emphasis on grassroots organizing and consciousness-raising. This process is exemplified by the neighborhood support network that AMPRONAC set up during the insurrection. By providing supplies, shelter and intelligence information, the network facilitated the active participation of thousands of women. For many, it was their first experience in a political or community activity. After 1979 the network, now institutionalized as the Sandinista Defense Committee (CDS), retained its vital function by organizing neighborhood improvement campaigns. By 1982, women were 50% of CDS membership, climbing to 67% in 1987. The leadership, however, remained predominately male until the number of males conscripted by the war became so overwhelming that women were left to run the communities (Deighton,1983:29).

Once in power, the Sandinistas began to fulfill some of their promises. The first legal advance for women, Article 30 of Decree 48, prohibited the

exploitation of women in the media. The banning of sexual exploitation in advertising had been an AMNLAE demand and is an accomplishment unique to the region, one that most western nations have yet to achieve. Although commercial exploitation of women was not one of the more urgent needs of Nicaraguan women, its prohibition signifies that the FSLN was willing to seriously work toward its promise to end discrimination by attacking the manifestations of the problem, not just creating egalitarian legislation.

Another essential contribution to the FSLN commitment to women is Decree 52, guaranteeing full equality between the sexes. The statute requires the government "to remove the obstacles that impede the equality of its citizens and their participation in the political, economic and social life of the country" (CIERA, 1984:12). Decree 52 was codified in the new Constitution, signed into effect in January, 1987.

The Constitution, widely discussed and debated by Nicaraguan citizens, also guarantees divorce from marriage or "stable unions" by individual or mutual consent. Previously, a woman had to have her husband's permission to divorce, even though he was free to leave the marriage without her consent. Article 73 of the Constitution establishes equality within the home:

"family relations are based in respect, solidarity and absolute equality of rights and responsibilities between men and women." Other articles guarantee equal pay, job protection during pregnancy and paid maternity leave.

The Constitution's omission of updated legislation on patrimony and abortion illustrates the volatility of these issues and the government's unwillingness to confront the catholic church on explosive social issues. However, the FSLN commitment to establishing sexual equality will remain unfulfilled until the issues are addressed.

The economy is another sector where women's opportunities and legal rights have been significantly enhanced through AMNLAE's relationship with the FSLN. Women are now more economically active than ever, comprising a historic 80% of the work force. In 1950, they were 14% of wage earners, 22% in 1970 and 29% in 1977 - high figures for Latin American economies (Randall,1981:vi). Nicaragua's historically high level of female economic activity is indicative of the nation's underdevelopment - a condition demanding economic contributions from all members of the family, not just the males.

The institutional participation of women, via AMNLAE and the FSLN, is plainly illustrated by their

interaction in the economy. AMNLAE encourages female participation in unions - which are mostly government sponsored - to ensure better wages and working conditions for female workers. In turn, the Ministry of Labor introduces innovations into the work place. For example, programs to protect the health and safety of pregnant workers have been established in the tobacco industry, a traditionally large employer of females (Deighton, 1983:68).

However, the percentage of women in leadership positions in the unions remains disproportionate to their participation in the work force. In 1987, according to statistics released by the government, women were 40% of the membership of the main rural workers union but only 15% of its local leadership.

Legal advances also have been promulgated for women working in rural areas. The law now requires that all workers - male and female, temporary and permanent- receive equal wages without discrimination based on sex and also that they receive their compensation in person. The legislation greatly enhanced women's legal status because past laws allowed the wages of women and minors to be paid to the male head of the household, effectively prohibiting them from receiving remuneration. Another law stipulates that women be

encouraged into "the productive tasks of the cooperative...as members under the same conditions as men" (CIERA,1984:13).

AMNLAE's ties to the government also have helped women expand into the political life of the nation. A focal point of women's increased participation is the national literacy campaign. Beginning in the first months of the new government, literacy brigades were dispatched across the country to attack the nation's abhorrent 53% illiteracy rate. Under Somoza, governmental spending on education was extremely low. According to AMNLAE, women were 70% of Nicaraguans mobilized to teach basic reading and writing skills. The literacy brigades, which decreased illiteracy to 12%, earned an award from the United Nations. Another national campaign to raise health standards was 75% staffed by women.

In analytical perspective, women's involvement in the successful programs undoubtedly provided them with a profound sense of identity and attachment to the new government.

Another important achievement is women's presence in the national government. Under Somoza, only well educated women, most benefiting from political patronage, were politically involved in the public

arena. Numbering around a dozen, the women were either members of Somoza's Liberal Party or heads of charities (Deighton, 1983:20-22). The situation is changing, although the general lack of specialized training and education limits its scope. According to a governmental report issued in 1987, women now constitute 31% of leadership posts in the government and 25% of the national membership in the Sandinista political party (McArthur, The Militant:5).

Among the high level governmental positions that women currently hold and have held are the Minister of Health, member of the ruling Junta (prior to the 1984 elections), members of the National Legislative Assembly, National Chief of Police, Ambassador to the United Nations, Minister of Social Welfare, Member of the Supreme Electoral Council, Vice-President of the Supreme Court of Justice and the Vice-Minister of Foreign Affairs. Additionally, women number 13 of the 96 delegates elected to the National Assembly.

The government also established two offices to increase the level of research available on women and to provide assistance on legal problems. The Presidential Office on Women and the Women's Legal Office, both directed by women, are state mechanisms toward fully incorporating women into Nicaraguan life.

Women's increased involvement in the Revolution introduces new dynamics into social equations and attitudes about both sexes. An example of the new dynamics is the creation of female role models as a result of the proliferation of women in public life. The appearance of women, famous for their leadership and military exploits, will undoubtedly influence the youth of Nicaragua. Girls now have female personalities to aspire to and boys are provided with living and breathing refutations of the machismo myth. The fact that the female role models are identified with the FSLN is not inconsequential because it creates another link between women's advancement and the Sandinistas.

Despite the gains made, discriminatory notions have not been erased. Attitudes of male superiority, based on machismo, are changing somewhat but are still found among both sexes. AMNLAE leaders, who refer to machismo as "cultural backwardness" and an "obstacle to the Revolution," feel that necessary moves are being taken but that the battle is not yet over. Maintaining that its fight is not against men but against machismo, only a strong consciousness-raising campaign can defeat discrimination. They practice the philosophy that equality must be earned, it cannot be decreed - necessitating increased levels of participation on the

part of women.

AMNLAE's ties to the FSLN have brought charges that the government is exploiting women for its own political benefit. These critics argue that AMNLAE is more of an arm of the government than a true women's movement which would be viewed as a threat, rather than an element of national unity (Deighton, 1983:159). Accusations of governmental manipulation of women's involvement is not a charge unique to the FSLN, other governments also have been criticized for their attempts to mobilize women as a part of their "constituency." A comparative examination of the experience of Nicaraguan women and the experiences of other countries is useful as an evaluation of the Nicaraguan situation.

Critics of AMNLAE's role draw fuel from comments like this by Nicaragua's Minister of the Interior Tomás Borge, a vocal proponent of women's involvement:

The central task of AMNLAE should be the integration of all women into the revolution ...that mobilizes women from the various social sectors, so as to provide a channel for their political, social, economic and cultural demands and to integrate them as a support force in the tasks of the Sandinistas People's Revolution (Borge, 1983:333).

The forces that successfully squelched the presidency of Salvador Allende in Chile mobilized women as "pot bangers" against inflation and the high cost of living in a group called Women's Power.

Bolivia's National Revolutionary Movement (MNR), a reformist group that came to power in the fifties, is another example of governmental manipulation of women. The MNR formed the National Female Command as a means to incorporate women into its ranks but it was never allowed to put forth its own initiatives or to push for social change (Ardaya, 1986:320-34).

The Cuban Revolution also illustrates the vicissitudes of organized women's support for a government. Although a hand full of well educated women held important positions in Castro's movement, as a group, women were not actively involved in the insurrection. The social improvements of the Revolution have greatly improved the female condition in areas such as health, education, work opportunity and the home. Recent studies indicate that a "profound restructuring of values" has occurred among the population because of the new roles and attitudes. However, women are still underrepresented in decision-making positions and the global economic repression has placed women's gains at risk, especially female employment which is prejudiced by the higher costs of their labor due to the need to provide day care and maternity leave (Nazzari, 1983:260).

The participation of Nicaraguan women differs from the examples in several ways. The most fundamental of

these is women's integration into all facets of society, including top level posts in the government and military. Also, the Nicaraguan example is different because of the demands placed on it by the counterrevolution. Women are heavily involved in activities necessary to community and national survival like the military reserves and health campaigns. Moreover, Nicaraguan women helped formulate the national agenda now in place and are veteran participants of its programs. This does not mean that their involvement does not present drawbacks or that it is without critique. At the very least, Nicaraguan women have the advantage of using the successes and failures of the other models as hindsight.

US-backed Aggression

This sub-section describes and analyzes the effects of the US-backed aggression on women's political participation. The aggression, the third and current period in AMNLAE's history, has forced a shift in AMNLAE's agenda from gender specific issues like legal equality to national issues such as conservation and defense that offset the effect of the multi-billion dollar damage caused by the counterrevolution. Consequently, women's participation is now defined

within the context of national survival. The economy is used to draw an example of how women's opportunities and roles are effected by the aggression.

Even before the aggression began to shift women's energies, a dichotomy existed between AMNLAE's interests and those of the state. A clash between women's and national issues occurred in the first months of the new regime when AMNLAE formed a Union of Domestics, demanding the elimination of paid domestic service. While the Union did attain a guaranteed minimum wage, double pay for working holidays and a ten hour work day, the government declared that it was impossible to eliminate domestic service because of insufficient alternative employment (Deighton, 1983:83). The clash, although it never escalated into a fissure, illustrated the supremacy of the state in the AMNLAE-FSLN partnership. Within the context of an external aggressor, national dynamics presided over women's concerns. This dichotomy ran below the surface until the fight against the aggression becomes the operative dynamic, making national demands clearly paramount to gender specific issues.

The organization maintains that the shift in its agenda does not signify that it is dominated by the Sandinistas but rather, that the women in AMNLAE are

committed to the Revolution. The following statement from an AMNLAE pamphlet illustrates the group's view of the relationship that has evolved:

The war has setback our possibilities and plans for development. Given this context, the struggle of the Nicaraguan people has acquired a specific dynamic where survival is the principal objective. As Nicaraguan women, we have continued to fight for our emancipation within this difficult situation. We continue to defend our gains and to work to strengthen and advance our participation and our struggle for a dignified existence (1987:1).

The supremacy of the state mirrored the growing intensity of the external threat. In the summer of 1981, facing a faltering economy and the incipient aggression, AMNLAE underwent an internal reorganization to encourage greater participation in mass organizations and more active female leadership in the work place. By late 1982, the human and material costs of the war were plainly evident. AMNLAE's programs echoed the national call for frugality and conservation by asking women to collect glass bottles for recycling and to plant home gardens to supplant the family diet and budget. The measures were not meant to exploit women and were not discriminatory - males were also urged to conserve. However, they did nothing to alleviate women's socioeconomic burdens. Nor did they alter the popular

misconception of women as passive and conservative, a fundamental restraint on women's advancement (Deighton, 1983:11,47,159). By 1984, all of AMNLAE's activities were centered around combating the aggression.

Women's participation in the economy provides an excellent example of the aggression's effects on women's political participation. The government has a variety of training programs for workers that, given the lack of technical knowledge, general economic underdevelopment and overall low level of education in Nicaragua, are essential to economic development. The aggression has severely cut plans to diversify the economy and also destroyed many existing facilities. Although no precise statistics exist, the war-related economic losses alone from 1980 through mid-1986 were calculated between \$2 and \$4 billion dollars (Burns,1987:62). Constrained by the structural limitations of the Nicaraguan economy, the training programs often reinforce the sexual division of labor by concentrating on improving existing skills rather than developing new ones. An exception to this pattern is the government-sponsored medical training for women that provides technical skills in a field where women are greatly outnumbered by men.

Child care is another problem complicated by the aggression. AMNLAE has pushed the Sandinistas to

provide sufficient day care facilities as a necessary pre-condition to greater female participation in all sectors of society. In mid-1984, there were 43 centers in operation that served some 4,000 children.

By early 1988, however, many existing centers were destroyed by the contras and the economic and security demands of the aggression have postponed all plans for further construction (Molyneux, 1986:290). Against the faltering economy, the government also asked women to use their creativity in finding solutions to child care needs. While family networks meet some of the demand, the assumption that "creativity" is a uniquely feminine trait to be exploited when the situation demands was insulting on the part of the government, whose promise of day care facilities goes unfulfilled.

Nicaraguan women now comprise 80% of the work force. This exceptionally high rate of participation is not because women are now the core of the country's trained professionals, but because the aggression precipitated an exodus of males from their communities into the obligatory military service. Thousands of the men have been killed, leaving women to expand their economic profile by moving into new positions and acquiring new skills. A situation is similar to the US during World War II, women's increased importance in a

vital sector such as the economy has not liberated them from their double burden of home and work. Rather, the deteriorating economy exacerbates their burden as women are mother, worker and father to the family. Domestic responsibilities are still firmly placed on women, instead of socializing them as the Revolution had proclaimed.

Sociologist Maxine Molyneux, an analyst of women's issues in developing societies contends that poor states moving toward socialism often use resource scarcity as an explanation for the lack of progress on women's needs. This explanation is conveniently offered in situations like Nicaragua's where the country is under attack by hostile, well-financed forces. Molyneux writes that the FSLN conceives of women's emancipation as a "by-product" of its own priorities (1986:288).

The new opportunities have generated a debate over whether they accrue positive effects for the women. According to author Margaret Randall, who has studied Nicaraguan women since 1979, having been "thrust" into the work place does not present exclusively negative repercussions:

The extensive involvement of women in the revolutionary process was in part the result of their integration into the national economy. They have been continually pushed beyond the narrow domestic scene. While the Spanish Catholic tradition preached of women

in the home, passive, dependent and "ornamental", the world around them demanded something else. History forced them to assume positions and make decisions which, along with their economic activity, increased their social and political involvement (1981:vi).

The aggression also effects the evolution of demographic and socioeconomic trends. Although the increase is closely linked to social practices, the incidence of female headed households is rising sharply as a result of the war. The last available figures calculated that women headed 34% of all households in 1981, 13% more than the figure for 1950 (Molyneux,1986:296). Since that time, the number has undoubtedly risen as over 40,000 Nicaraguans, mostly male soldiers, have been killed in the war (Dallas Morning News,1 January, 1988).

The aggression has worsened the socioeconomic situation in Nicaragua, especially for women. Always underdeveloped, the national currency today is virtually worthless because of run-away inflation. In 1981, the government calculated that women were 60% of the nation's poor, meaning that for ever 100 poor men, there were 354 poor women (Molyneux,1986:298). A study on the poor in Managua, the capital city, found that poor women often were antagonistic to the government as it cracked down on the black market and speculation. Although the employment opportunities for poor women are concentrated

in these areas, the study also found that they tend to focus their anger on low and middle level officials, not the FSLN leadership whom they view as protecting the interests of the majority of Nicaraguans.

Another interesting effect is that low income households surviving on the combined salaries of several members and are supporters of the Revolution, display a greater degree of male-female equality than other types of households. This effect indicates that the women in these households are viewed as contributors to the family, rather than passive by-standers in a male-dominated environment. Moreover, the link between women's advancement in Nicaragua and the FSLN is recognized by the lower class women who tend to support the government (Envio,5:66:43-53).

The majority of AMNLAE members are in the low income bracket and many are also single mothers. The aggression presents them with a dual challenge of survival on an economic and human level. As discussed in the last chapter, the politicization of the daily condition, accompanied by an ideological agent to concretize anger, is key in raising women's consciousness (Molyneux,1986:285).

According to Linda Reif, working class women are a well of activist potential. Although many barriers

inhibit their participation, they also have the most to gain. Among poor women, female heads of working class households are most likely to develop a class consciousness because they are committed to preserving their job. At the same time, however, they are the most vulnerable to repercussions like discrimination, lay-offs, threats, etc. (1986:151). If the FSLN is to capitalize on this potential, it must guarantee greater economic stability while raising the level of consciousness among men and women alike.

The Nicaraguan government admits that the aggression, rather than its efforts, is the major force leading women to replace men in traditionally male dominated positions outside the home. Nevertheless, it also contends that the shift is beneficial to women and society because it has precipitated "an accelerated abandonment of some prejudices... producing deep ideological and social changes" (McArthur, The Militant :5).

The aggression does not discriminate, except in its crudest manifestations when women suffer the physical and emotional brutality of rape, making it difficult to discern which elements of women's increased political participation are directly attributable to AMNLAE's efforts and which are a consequence of the US-backed

aggression. On an institutional level, the distinction, if any, is blurred by the imperative of survival.

In conclusion, the US-backed aggression has hastened and broadened women's social, economic and political participation. The reduction of available resources has checked the broadening of those opportunities by cutting back on day care facilities and ensuring that women remain in low paying jobs. The aggression also has important psychological effects that, especially among lower class women, promote their political identification with the Sandinistas. The number of women who continue to participate in AMNLAE activities defending the Revolution indicates that Nicaraguan women are satisfied with the level of progress made within the current environment. As AMNLAE official Emigdia Fenufuco explained,

The people, and especially women, never had anything before. But now we have the possibility, albeit limited by the aggression.

CONSCIOUSNESS-RAISING EFFECTS

Among the women interviewed, the increase in their political participation has led to a new sense of personal understanding of their lives. This

understanding is key to the maturing of the women's consciousness on issues affecting them. An important corollary to their participation is the propensity to support the FSLN, whom they credit with expanding their opportunities and social conditions. This section discusses and examines those changes and the final subsection contains the chapter's concluding remarks.

During interviews, when asked if they were involved in any type of political activity prior to AMNLAE, most members responded negatively. Previous participation occurred primarily among the women who are now the group's middle and upper level leadership, many of whom are educated and had joined the FSLN before dedicating themselves to women's concerns.

Representative of the women with no prior involvement is Frida, a 30 year old mother of two who completed the sixth grade and currently is enrolled in adult education. She feels that one of the Revolution's most important gains is women's participation:

[Before] we were closed up in our houses and didn't do anything except run the house on the little money our companions gave us.

Monica, 52, with two children (one died in the war) and no formal schooling, said that before AMNLAE began promoting women's issues, women never raised their voices over anything. Monica cannot read and can only

write her name, but does not hesitate to submit the value of her participation, or as she terms it, her "political education". Maura, a woman in her fifties with seven children and no education, said that before AMNLAE she had no exposure to public life. She is now able to speak out at meetings and participate in the debate on issues affecting her.

Nearly all the women interviewed felt that participation has given them a sense of self-esteem and dignity. Emigdia, a 30 year old AMNLAE official with two children and a university degree in biology, continues to work with the group because it reinforces and fulfills her need for solidarity, respect and human dignity. She first participated in the Revolution in 1975 as a student because the "exploiting spirit" of Somoza's people deeply disturbed her sense of "the value of human relations in daily life". Similarly, a vender interviewed said that before AMNLAE began to help the market women organize, she was not respected:

Before, in the market, we weren't humans.
People looked at us as animals.

Interviews conducted with a group of women in the market associations of Leon exemplify the changes taking place on a larger scale. The average woman in this group is in her forties, has ten children, and two to three years of formal education. Although Leon has been

scarcely touched by the physical destruction of the aggression, it has been deeply involved in the revolution since the 1960s. Like all parts of the country, Leon sends its draft age men to the war, suffers the effects of the devastated economy, forms military reserves, harvest brigades and educational campaigns.

The vendors credit AMNLAE and the FSLN for "revolutionizing" their lives. They gained a new understanding about their lives and also acquired a sense of empowerment through the group's assistance on professional and personal needs. The power of this self discovery is seen in these comments:

This [association] in itself is an achievement because, organized, we're able to confront our problems. We work side by side with AMNLAE. A little bit to the Revolution, a little bit to our work. We are conscious...now we have solidarity. We have fiestas together as well as work. We also do cotton brigades on Sundays during harvest time to get money for the group. We're thinking of buying a megaphone so we don't have to yell at meetings ...Now we're capable of talking with our husbands and they help some with cleaning and washing. In the beginning, they didn't like that the wives went to meetings. Some of us were hit for coming home late...Before we were underdeveloped and backward. Now with our participation it is different.

A salient effect of women's participation in AMNLAE is the propensity to support the FSLN. Researcher Linda Reif lists three reasons for their initial success in

attracting women. First, women's concerns were specifically identified as distinct from the general repression under the dictatorship. Second, women's concerns were related to social programs and finally, that the revolutionary situation was "conducive to female participation" (1986:159).

Molyneux agrees with Reif. Furthermore, she posits that revolutionary states like Nicaragua, the Soviet Union and Mozambique "share an approach that links gender opportunity to class opportunity and believes women's emancipation can be achieved only with the creation of a new, socialist society and with the further development of the productive capacity of the economy (1986:289).

The continued ability of the FSLN to attract women to its ranks is intimately linked to AMNLAE's integration of women into all facets of national life. Women's support of the Sandinistas is key to their continued political participation and the state's promotion of gender-specific issues.

Via its varied membership and interests, AMNLAE has positioned women in all sectors of the Sandinista Revolution. They are so thoroughly and strategically integrated that their demands, properly and forcefully articulated, could not be easily ignored. However, if AMNLAE is to return to an agenda of gender-specific

concerns, it must await the achievement of two essential conditions: a cessation of the aggression and an increase in the general level of consciousness. If Nicaraguan women allow their concerns to continue to come about as "by-products" of the Revolution, they will occur much more slowly.

This chapter has shown that the political participation of women in Nicaragua is intimately linked to changing national dynamics. For the first time in the history of the country, women are now active in all sectors of society. For the first time in the history of the country, women's participation became perceptible when the four decades of Somoza dictatorship reached insurmountable proportions. Largely through the direction of AMNLAE, women integrated into many facets of the popular uprising and in 1979, into the tasks of national reconstruction.

Through institutionalized ties to the FSLN, women achieved a series of important improvements in their legal rights which precipitated the recognition of women as an integral component in the national dynamic. The US-backed aggression and the barriers inherent to an underdeveloped nation serve as a powerful check on the limits of feminism permissible in contemporary Nicaragua.

Through their participation, women's perceptions about themselves and their place in the national dialogue are evolving. Social attitudes and stereotypes of women are slowly changing as well. The level of consciousness on social, economic and political issues is rising and consequently, Nicaraguan women no longer perceive their own reality as divorced from national dynamics. The ramifications of this shift are important factors in the state's formulation of national priorities and programs today and will assume even greater significance in the coming years.

CONCLUSION

Guatemala's Grupo de Apoyo Mutuo and the Asociación de Mujeres Nicaraguenses Luisa Amanda Espinoza in Nicaragua are very different organizations. Each group is working toward very divergent goals, promoting its agenda through equally varied means. And on an organizational level, they also share very little common ground. Nevertheless, the groups share certain integral characteristics pertaining to collective action, social mobilization and women as political actors.

This chapter reviews the four previous chapters and their findings, emphasizing points of convergence and divergence between the two groups. A discussion of the research's major findings from the literature review in Chapter One follows. Finally, the chapter includes a series of analytical extrapolations on women as promoters of social change and the role of women's organizations in society.

SUMMARY

Chapter Two contained a historical discussion of women in Central America. Elitist by custom and by law, Colonial culture left the region ill-prepared for establishing democratic ideals. Society's marginalization of women deprived them of the political

identity developed by most men. Women's lives were dictated by European behavioral norms, limiting their potential roles to marriage, motherhood or religion.

Except in the economic arena, neither Guatemalan nor Nicaraguan history is characterized by active female involvement in national issues. The introduction of women into historical accounts is due largely to advancements in social science investigation. However, women's presence on the national level is promoted by the deteriorating economy and political crisis in each country.

Chapter Three's examination of the GAM traced the group from its beginnings as a handful of women in Guatemala City's morgues, hospitals and police stations, to the foremost human rights organization in Central America. The GAM is not a women's organization per se, but rather an organization largely comprised (80%) of women searching to locate their loved ones which, in part, comprise the country's staggering number of "disappeared" (currently estimated at 40,000). Group membership is 90% indigenous because the Indian population was a primary target in the military's counter-insurgency campaign.

Governmental indifference and hostility to the desaparecido issue played an important role in the

group's evolution. Since the GAM formed in June of 1984, it has undergone tactical shifts to achieve its goal, the return of the "disappeared". Initially, the group used public forums to request governmental assistance in its search, but as this approach proved unsuccessful, the emphasis moved toward direct accusations of government complicity in the country's political violence.

Guatemala's ongoing violence is a double-edged sword for the GAM. On one hand, the violence serves as a legitimizing force for the group's existence and on the other, it frightens away people who might otherwise join forces with the GAM.

Religion also plays an important role in the women's lives. For many women, religion fills the emotional void left by their "disappeared" husband or child. As a result, many feel more religious compulsion now than before joining the GAM. Most are Catholic but a growing number, especially highland indigenas, are converting to evangelical sects. The converts often face a moral and/or social dilemma in justifying their activities in the GAM. In general, the women differentiate religion from politics as a mechanism of personal reconciliation.

Through their association with the GAM, the

majority of the women experienced their first participatory political activity. As a focus of national and international attention, the GAM exposes the women to dynamics that accompany events of international significance such as political pressures, public scrutiny of personal lives and harsh allegations. As a result, the level of political consciousness among the women is growing. The fastest acceleration occurs among the ladina minority because of its higher educational level. However, none of the women seek to branch out to other struggles such as Guatemala's polemical unions or land rights associations. Instead, they focus their energies on the desaparecido issue, deliberately avoiding political linkages.

The women in GAM display very little awareness of gender concerns. Like women in similarly turbulent environments, they relate their burden to the general level of socioeconomic oppression and to the immediacy of the deplorable human rights situation in Guatemala. The single-issue concentration on the desaparecidos, a "practical gender interest", works to retard the development of a feminist consciousness.

AMNLAE in Nicaragua, in contrast to the GAM, is a women's organization seeking to promote a spectrum of women's interests through its links to the ruling

political party. Formed in 1977 during the national uprising against Somoza, AMNLAE integrated women into many facets of the national dynamic, a function that it continued to perform after the Sandinista victory in 1979. This incorporation facilitated an increase in the political participation of women, which is currently at historic levels, relative both to the Nicaraguan context and to other countries.

Initially, AMNLAE's agenda was primarily feminist but as women became more involved in the national uprising against Somoza, the group shifted emphasis more toward national issues. The shift caused women's disadvantaged position to be analyzed within the dynamics of national underdevelopment. By institutionalizing its ties to the government, AMNLAE has lobbied for and achieved a variety of legal advancements for women such as equality between the sexes, individual or mutual consent divorce, equality in the home and the banning of sexual exploitation in the media.

The rapid advancement of women's rights in Nicaragua is directly linked to AMNLAE's close relationship with the state. However, the ties are not without liability. The ties oblige AMNLAE to support national dynamics through its programs. The most

salient implication of this factor is the effect of the US-backed contras. Both the government and AMNLAE are forced to orient their resources toward national defense and survival against the aggression. This tactic de-emphasizes women's concerns and also reduces available resources to alleviate gender-specific oppression through the establishment of child care facilities and vocational training.

The resultant situation finds the female work force moving into jobs left vacant by conscripted males. The aggression consumes almost all the national budget, leaving few funds to provide working women with day care facilities or vocational training.

Like the women in the GAM, most AMNLAE members first experienced political participation via association with the group. In contrast to the women in Guatemala, however, AMNLAE members, through their participation, acquire a class consciousness as well as a gender awareness. Nicaraguan feminism differs from US and European feminism because it is formulated along class lines, focusing more on socioeconomic issues. The politization of the daily condition (food and employment availability, repression, governmental directives to conserve) has promoted the acquisition of a new understanding about women's particular oppression and

needs.

In both groups, political participation became a stimulus in acquiring a sense of personal empowerment. But in Nicaragua, the government's active support of women's rights facilitates the consciousness-raising process, which is recognized in the women's support for the FSLN.

MAJOR FINDINGS

The experiences of the women in the GAM and AMNLAE provides some important additions to the literature. In the discussion on women and modernization, the research was still unclear as to whether women's responses to macro-societal issues such as governmental policy were most closely derived from ideological beliefs or their familial responsibilities. Clearly, the GAM women are acting out a sense, or loss thereof, of family ties. The case of AMNLAE members is more difficult to discern because the women are active on a variety of class and developmental issues which are influenced by the

ideological underpinnings of the FSLN, but also are attached to familial needs and responsibilities. Women in both organizations, as Jane Jacquette postulated, tend to act first on "quality of life" issues such as health care, education and human rights. The women identify these concerns with their particular oppression.

Past social science investigations have postulated that women's religiosity inhibits political participation. In the GAM and AMNLAE, however, this no longer holds true. Although women in each group are subject to constraints particular to their environment (violence, patriarchy, political ideology), religion does not prevent political activities. In Guatemala, some women participate in spite of the dilemmas inherent to evangelicism and politics. In both groups, women mentioned that their political participation strengthens their religion on a personal level.

The GAM and AMNLAE confirm Jean O'Barr and Stephen Schmidt's contention that the role of the government is key to determining the character of the developmental process which, in practice, determines the type and range of permissible roles for women. The willingness of the Nicaraguan government to identify and address women's concerns makes AMNLAE an accessible rallying

point for women as well as a catalyst for the growth in women's class and gender consciousness. However, the opposite situation occurs in Guatemala and although the GAM is not concerned with gender-specific issues, governmental indifference and hostility to the desaparecido issue also became a gathering point for women because they were forced to come together in a group in order to support their cause.

Molyneux's position that socialist governments promote women's emancipation only so long as it does not conflict with national dynamics is evidenced by the Sandinista-AMNLAE relationship. Until the US-backed contra aggression dominated national policy, women's gender-specific concerns were actively addressed. At that point, resources were consumed by the war and divisive issues lost their position on the national agenda. However, Molyneux's position must be viewed on a macro-societal level. When faced with external aggression, societies of all ideological leanings do not entertain divisive issues like women's rights.

The literature on consciousness-raising is the least extensive category. Although research is still in the early stages, war-torn Central America is a classroom to study conscientization. Jacquette's assertion rings true in the Nicaraguan context: a "gap

between ideals and reality may have a politically radicalizing effect on lower class women if there [is] a suitable political movement to crystalize those feelings." For women in AMNLAE, the Sandinista's Marxian analysis and mass popularity serves as the "political movement" and in Guatemala, despite the absence of a political agent, the gap between reality and the expectation of basic human rights also has served as a "radicalizing" force among the women, albeit to a more limited degree.

Betto's observation that popular organizations become "schools of participatory democracy," is also sustained by the GAM and AMNLAE where women are exposed to new ideas, organizational structures and, as well, to the dynamics of group participation. The case of the GAM is a salient example of Gargallo's theory that militancy, rather than class or residence, determines women's attitudes toward political participation.

ANALYTICAL EXTRAPOLATIONS

Two threads of thought arise from the praxis of this research that are not yet fully integrated into the literature. First, the function of women as promoters of social change and second, the role of women's organizations in society are topics meriting further

investigation. In general, this new research will have significance to all of society and, in particular, for the future political participation of women.

The issues that women in the GAM and AMNLAE address, despite the varying character of each group, gravitate toward what Maxine Molyneux defines as "practical gender interests." According to Molyneux, women's gender interests "develop by virtue of their social positioning through gender interests". Practical gender interests are those "formulated by the women themselves who are in these positions rather than through external interventions" (1986:234). In general, the issues are grounded in both class and gender oppression such as inflation, the lack of day care facilities or "disappeared" persons. In this context, gender and class become "closely intertwined," promoting conscientization among poor women on political and women's issues.

When governments fail to provide these basic needs, women withdraw their support; when the livelihood of their families, especially the children, is threatened, it is the women who form the phalanxes of bread rioters, demonstrators and petitioners....Practical gender interests, therefore, cannot be assumed to be innocent of class effects. Moreover, these practical interests do not in themselves challenge the prevailing forms of gender subordination, even though they arise directly out of them (1986:284).

Provided an appropriate political agent, demands of

a socioeconomic nature are those that most quickly promote the consciousness-raising process. Women's concentration on "practical gender interests" strengthens collective action and social movements, a seed bed of participatory/consensus politics. That poor women are willing to organize for the attainment of their needs, around gendered or non-gendered interests, portends well for the future of participatory democracy in developing nations.

The second extrapolation concerns the role of women's organizations in society. On one hand, organizations comprised of women are like any other social movement. They rally behind a certain shared objective and promote it via the mechanisms available to them. On the other hand, however, the uniqueness of women's organizations is that they forge open public space for women, a previously unincorporated actor, to participate in any area - charitable groups, unions, the military, political parties, etc.

On a daily basis, the experience and interaction of women's organizations train women to become more active and efficacious participants in various sectors of society in male/female and all female groups. It also accelerates the broadening of socially sanctioned activities available to women, which in turn, facilitates the expansion of legal rights.

In developing countries like Guatemala and Nicaragua, the contribution of women's organizations to social change is their concentration on the daily socioeconomic burden. In particular, when groups are mainly comprised of lower class women such as the GAM and AMNLAE, the politization of the daily condition forces governments to examine the distribution of goods and services that reproduce consent for their rule. Also, the politization of the daily condition demands a new look at women's gender-specific oppression on the part of governments and the women themselves. In this environment, women's organization become viable vehicles to promote social change for both universal and gender-specific needs.

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