THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN WOMEN'S NONTRADITIONAL WORK, FAMILY ORGANIZATION, AND FEMALE EMPOWERMENT IN RURAL GUATEMALA

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Rural Guatemalan women whether of Spanish (Ladino) or Mayan (Indian) culture have been largely confined to traditional work while occupying subordinate positions to their husbands. Traditional work involves domestic chores, and often chicken and pig raising, weaving for themselves and their families, and selling agricultural products in town markets or in home located mini stores. Earnings from this work are considered their property and to be disposed of as wished. However, earnings are very limited and often need to be spread over the families' impinging needs and the husbands' drinking.

Submissiveness to male partners, it should be said, is not as severe as often depicted (see for instance Maynard 1963). Indian women enjoy considerable freedom in some aspects. In addition to earning money, they have the right of inheritance, owning capital, having independent businesses, and even some sexual freedom in some towns and under some circumstances. However, Indian women are restricted in giving opinions, particularly in front of strangers; they partake of food only after the adult male members of the family have eaten, and walk behind them in the street. Ladino women more easily express their opinions and do not have an openly submissive behavior comparable to that of the Indians, but they are often more restricted in their movements and activities including those related to economics, acquaintances, and sexual behavior.

Both ethnic groups live in municipios which have characteristics of corporate social units in the regions concerning us (see Tax 1937, for the Indian and Méndez-Domínguez 1967 for Ladino municipios). These municipios have their own local governments and institutions, subcultures, and not infrequently their own languages in the case of the Indian
populations. Typically a smaller proportion of Ladinos and a greater one of Indians live in the municipio’s head town and main satellite settlements. The 1979 earthquake which destroyed most of the central and western highlands killing over 27,000 people, and the 37 year old civil war, just ended, caused massive migrations modifying the municipio bond. These new events laid upon the social reforms and the modernization of the country following the 1944 revolution had already obliged Tax to introduce the term "generalized Indian" in the sixties. The term refers to a growing population sector physically and socio-culturally uprooted from its municipio. The significant increment in communications, the massive migrations to the United States of America, the proliferation of Protestant sects, the emergence of an Indian intellectuality, and the development of a market for nontraditional products have contributed to changes in rural life in the highlands. They have made nontraditional labor more acceptable, more available, and more profitable labor for women. If these changes are making it easier for women to free themselves from traditional work, others are forcing them to take a more active role in the family economy. A 5.6 total fertility rate (APROFAM 1996) has produced densities above 2,000 inhabitants per Km2 in some agricultural regions. The average family agricultural plot of the poor has been continuously reduced making it impossible to survive by the traditional agriculture based on corn and beans. Production of vegetables, fruit, and flowers largely for exportation has developed as a complementary surviving option (Méndez-Domínguez 1993 : 147-154). In these activities, as in craftsmanship, commercially oriented weaving, and sweat shops women are finding new working opportunities and ways to contribute to their families. Thus, land scarcity, urbanization, and rising aspirations are throwing women into the national force labor.

This article presents data on the relationship between women's use of these new labor opportunities and the parallel changes that have occurred in the family organization and in the position of these women within it. Easy to make, but not exempt of naiveté, is the guess that a greater commitment to outside home labor, by increasing earnings, leads to women's empowerment. The extent and ways in which this may occur is a guess of a greater difficulty, and so is to foresee the associated changes in family organization. Furthermore, given the other changes occurring in society at large, it may be hasty to infer a deterministic relationship between these changes and women's nontraditional labor. Even a comparison within the same region between families of women who labor in traditional and nontraditional ways, as this article presents, does not eliminate the potential role of other variables (many associated with changes in society at large) not considered in the analysis. But if such a strong claim can not be made, the nature of the parallelism appears in itself suggestive and important.
THE STUDY

The results presented are based on data collected through interviews in a study conducted in the 80s which originally included 1,721 randomly sampled women of 11 central and western highland municipios. The data reprocessed and presented here correspond to the families of 393 married women of eight of the municipios; 330 working traditionally, and 63 working in nontraditional ways. Interviews were conducted with the help of questionnaires and field instruments by trained interviewers in the Spanish and Mayan languages, as needed.

Family structure and organization

The nuclear family, composed of parents and single children, is the dominant type in rural Guatemala (Hunt and Nash 1967:254-5 for the Indian families and Méndez-Dominguez 1983: 251-252 for the Ladino and Indian Families). This dominance has often not been well defined, sometimes meaning a greater frequency and other times an ideological preference (Gross 1975). Whichever may be the case, the fact remains that generational, collateral, and affinal extensions are frequent. Probably the situation should be described by saying that the people prefer and organize themselves around the nuclear family, extending it in one or another way to accommodate for circumstances that make survival or greater comfort possible for nuclear members and other selected relatives. The extensions have often been analyzed in terms of land possession, inheritance, and culture patterns (Gross and Kendall 1983, Méndez-Dominguez 1967), but rarely, if ever, in terms of women's labor.

Since these extensions are not structural features (neither in an ideological nor statistical way), but rather circumstantial modifications to an ideologically manifested structure, they do not occur in a readily visible and regular pattern nor is their normality easily elicited by community members. These may be reasons why their study has posed some difficulties. To be able to detect and describe a large number of patterns as they may occur, it would be necessary to work with a great quantity of cases. Handling a large number of families and types becomes extremely cumbersome and often unrewarding if conventional analyses are used.

The analysis and description of kinship systems have relied on the postulation of universally structural principles, such as sex, age and generation. The tendency has been toward a more configurational or type approach in the case of families (see for instance Laslett 1972). In the first case, analysis involves very precise definitions of each unit in terms of the principles, identifying how these principles are interpreted in a particular society, how they are interlocked to create a system of socially interdependent positions, and a total system of cognitive and social interrelations. In the second case attention is placed on which kinds of social
units, very extensively defined, are represented in a family or household group. In describing a kinship system, “uncle”, for instance is defined as a consanguineous, male, collateral, first ascending generation ego's relative from which formal and behavioral issues ensued in a particular society in accordance with the interpretation of these principles and its relation to the other positions these principles create. In a family description, the presence or absence of members of the general kind belonging to the ascending generation or to the affinity set may be enough to define a family type. Similarly, extensions from male of female consanguineal or affinal relatives may be lumped together. This tendency is to a great extent a practical necessity since it would become extremely cumbersome to identify dozens of types in a single society resulting from adopting very precise definitions.

Several years ago (Méndez-Domínguez 1983), the author saw in the use of kinship structural principles an opportunity to gain the sufficient detail to record important family changes that otherwise may go undetected when more conventional analyses are used. By quantifying the variations in the family components born out from these structural principles, he found it possible to handle a large number of cases at the same time as avoiding the problems inherent in the type approach. Using similar methods and a sub-sample of the same data, families in which women work in traditional and nontraditional ways are compared here.

The kinship principles used are consanguinity and affinity, lineality and collaterality and generations in ascending and descending directions to ego's own generation. Descriptions are made on the basis of rates. For instance, the extent of the affinity component in a family is related to the degree of consanguinity component in it. All measures are made with reference to the female respondents. In a typical nuclear family with five unmarried children there will be five consanguineous relatives and an affinal one. For the purpose of standardizing the rates, the women themselves were added in this and other rates making it possible to proceed with the calculations, to avoid the denominator value of a family to be 0 with a resulting infinite quotient. In our example the consanguinity-affinity rate will be:

\[
\frac{(5 + 1)}{(5 + 1 + 1)} = 0.86.
\]

Since a family's rate is modified by changes either in the consanguinity or affinity components, the rates do not describe conventional family types such as nuclear family or affinal extended families. It rather gives an exact and numerical expression of the family composition in structural components making it possible to discriminate even between societies with the same family type. Similarly, knowing the average number of children in society, or a segment of it, the average nuclear family rate can be calculated for comparisons as desired. In this study such a characterization is not reached, the purpose being to establish only the organizational differences between the two sets of families, with and without working women. This has been done by averaging the individual rates of
each of the families and then testing for statistical significance using the t-test with an error margin of alpha equal to .05.

The consanguinity and affinity components

Families in which the women work have a greater consanguinity component and a smaller affinity component than those in which the women do not work. The Rate A difference between .77 and .88 of consanguinity is statistically significant. Reasons for greater consanguinity in families in which women work could be due to:
- More children in nuclear or nonnuclear families;
- Fewer affinal extensions;
- a combination of both.

Whichever may be the reason, the affinity component has diminished, giving to the family of the working woman a more consanguineous profile. Were we interested in further defining the changes, it would be possible to eliminate one or more of the above possibilities, by other rates. Option 1, for instance, is not viable since there are no statistical differences in the children's generational component between the two family groups.

Affinity of consanguinity vs. consanguinity of affinity

Not only do the two groups of families differ in their degree of affinal component, but also in their affinal component preferences.

Rate B was used to calculate the weight that the woman's affinal extensions through their own consanguineous relatives have in the average family as opposed to the weight that their husband's consanguineous relatives have.

Rate B: \[
\frac{1 + (\text{affinal relatives of consanguineous ones}) + (\text{consanguineous relatives of affinal relatives of consanguineous ones})}{1 + (\text{affinal relatives}) + (\text{consanguineous relatives of affinal ones}) + (\text{affinal relative of consanguineous relative of affinal relatives})}.
\]

Families in which the female does not work were found to have an average of .599 of affinity through women's consanguineous relatives, while those in which women work have .547, the difference being statistically significant. This contradicts all expectations since it is by her husband's (and other relatives of her affinal relatives') consanguineous extensions (common children excluded) that the nuclear family extends with women's labor rather than through the affinity of her own consanguineous relatives. There is no certainty as to how to interpret socially this finding. One possibility is that women relatives on the husband's side take over the household chores as a sort of pay-off for acceptance in the household. In such case, the wife is released from these chores, making it possible for her to engage in nontraditional labor. Acceptance of the husband's consanguineous women
into the household may actually be conditioned by the need for somebody to take care of some of the domestic functions.

Lineality vs. collaterality

Families with working women are less lineally organized than those without working women.

Rate C: \( \frac{1 + \text{lineal relatives}}{1 + \text{lineal} + \text{collateral relatives}} \)

The values of .839 and .788 were found for the first and second groups of families, respectively, the difference being statistically significant. Traditional families adapt to life "horizontally" by collateral extensions, while the families with working women phase life more vertically through lineal extensions.

The generational composition

The previous difference may lead one to believe that there is a greater generational depth in the families of the working women. This is only partially true since the proportion of members in ego's generation remains relatively constant in relation to the number of members of the ascending and descending generations. Thus, no statistically significant differences were found between the two sets of families when applying for the ascending generations rate D and D1, where G0 stands for ego's generation, G1 and G2 for the members of ego's parents and grand-parental generations, and G-1 and G-2 for members of the children and great-children generations.

Rate D: \( \frac{1 + G0}{1 + G0 + G1 + G2} \), for the ascending generations,

Rate D1: \( \frac{1 + G0}{1 + G0 + G-1 + G-2} \), for the descending generations and when the ascending and descending generations were combined in one single formula.

This suggests that there is some sort of range of stress in extending lineally beyond which families are not able to operate efficiently. The basic role that ego's generation plays in the family economic activities forces families to keeping within close margins of variation in the proportion between this and the other generations. Limitations may also derive from unnecessary position and function duplication with extensions of the ascending generations. Simpler issues, such as the size of the dwellings, may also be a factor. However, there is evidence that although moderately (and without the support of a test of statistical significance), women's labor makes it possible for families to have a smaller ego's generation core. With this comparatively smaller component they are able to integrate a comparatively larger component of other generations. Thus, in the traditional family, ego's generational component in relation to the ascending generations is 2.01 while in the families in which women work it is 1.78. The values are .92 and .46 with respect to the descending generations.
Ascending and descending generations

The small differences mentioned hide a statistically significant one in the proportion that ascending and descending generation relatives are incorporated into the two sets of families. While the families of the nonworking women favor the descending generations, the ones of the working women favor the ascending ones.

Rate E: \( \frac{1 + G2 + G1}{1 + G-1 + G-2} \)

The difference is between the averages of .392 and 1.100 for the families of the nonworking and the working women, respectively. This makes sense since households with a large proportion of members of the children's and grand-children's generations would demand more in-home activity, the more tilted the proportion of the ascending and descending generations is, the less feasible it may be for women to work outside the house. On the other hand, women of families with a larger proportion of ascending extensions not only have greater opportunities for work, but because of the limited contributions that these members can make to the family there is an urgent need to increase income to be able to carry the additional burden.

Gender components

A priori one is inclined to think that a redundancy of female roles, resulting from an excess of women, would favor labor outside the household. However, this is not the case. In effect, the average number of women per man is smaller in the families with working women than in the rest although the difference is not a statistically significant one. As in the case of the generation components, it may be useful to hypothesize a generic range within which families are able to function efficiently.

Women's empowerment

Women were asked how much they commanded in their families in relation to their husbands. Command referred to the power they have to make their volition carried out by family members above their husbands' wishes. A larger proportion of working women (37%) than the rest (29%) see their commanding situation as one that is equal to their husband's. When they were asked if in taking important decisions they consulted their husbands, working women were found to be more prone (97%) to always consult them than the nonworking ones (92%).

It would be naive to take these answers as an expression of a behavioral reality. However, they show differential attitudes.

There are indications of a move toward a more egalitarian and communicative relationship between couples in families in which women work.
CONCLUSIONS

The data show nontraditional labor on the part of adult women relates to differences in family organization and self-perception of their power position in relation to their husbands.

Families in which women work in nontraditional ways show, from the perspective of these women, greater consanguinity and lineality components than families in which women work in a traditional way; a preference for extensions through the husband's consanguineous and affinal relatives, rather than through their own relatives as in the rest of the families; a greater incorporation of members of the ascending generations rather than of the descending ones, and a greater male than female component. The quantitative differences in each of the components result in families of a very different total composition.

The significance of the differences in each of these components and in their combination is yet unclear. The principles on which the quantitative component differences are based have been extensively proven throughout human societies to bear on the distribution of rights and duties and to condition behavior. Consequently, these differences are likely to represent more than formal features, and the method employed more than another way to count heads. However, at this point of the research, it is only possible to put forward some alternative explanations for their occurrence, and to guess at their consequences.

The greater consanguinity support that nontraditionally working women have in their families may facilitate work outside the home. Alternatively or in a complementary way, her work outside the home may allow her to be more independent from affinal relatives. Living with them may have economic advantages but they may also cause stress and cohesion. In reducing the affinal component, the consanguineal one becomes comparatively stronger.

Women's power increase may be reflected in the relative increase in the number of consanguineous relatives of her husband rather than in her own affinal relatives linked to her through her own consanguineal relatives. Those relatives may be under her direction relieving her from many family chores while she works.

The increase in lineality as opposed to collaterality may be bound to the elimination of role duplication. Male collateral relatives generally duplicate or supplement the husband's functions, and women collateral the wife's by household chores. Women's labor may be either the outcome of failure to get this additional support, or the reason why this help becomes superfluous when additional money is earned by the family.
The increase in the ascending generations component may be a luxury in poverty, that is, the care of the aged, or a compelling issue: the need for children’s care while working.

The detection of these differences was made possible by the use of a somewhat innovative methodology. Structural principles are used to determine the amount of structural components present in the family from an ego’s point of view, for instance size of the lineal component. In conventional methods the presence or absence of kinds of positions rather than the quantity are important, for instance, is there a "husband of female household head" or are there "afinal relatives of the male and female household heads." If quantification is used, it is to measure the number of families within a type.

Thus conventional approaches, although they do not start from structural principles, aim at detecting structural family types. Paradoxically, the approach used here, while departing from structural principles, is probably better suited for detecting changes that have not reached (or will never reach) the normativity and stability usually associated with the conception of social structure. Here we have referred to them as social organizational variations.

While in conventional approaches the recurrence of individuals in the same positions does not change the type, the rates used here are not only susceptible to these changes but made to detect demographic variations which may eventually lead to structural changes. These variations create a different social environment for the individuals which is likely to have important effects on their behavior, as seems to be the case with women engaged in nontraditional work.

This approach is seen as complementary to rather than conflicting with the conventional ones. The application should be determined by interest, subject and practicality. In the present case, the application of conventional methods would have probably failed to detect family changes associated with women's work simply because there is nuclear family normativity and most likely no set pattern of recurrent family extensions. But the changes occurring at the organizational level not only are likely to be important by themselves, but throw light on the process of change.

Much work is still ahead to confirm with more recent data the process described here and to clarify the meaning through additional field research. At this point it is also important to call attention to the fact that the rates presented here are only a few of the possible ones. Women were used as referential points in them, but children and other members (or combinations of them) could also be used in a similar way, which no doubt could provide additional insights into the ways families adjust to new circumstances and create opportunities for their members.
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