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CARING AND COPING: HOUSEHOLDS, COMMUNITIES AND PUBLIC SERVICES IN THE MAKING OF WOMEN'S DAILY LIVES

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INTRODUCTION

Usually, the study of the social effects of the crisis has focused on the labor market: increasing unemployment, decreasing wages, shifts toward more precarious positions and growth of the informal sector. At the same time, the effects of the crisis show up in the provision of state services, especially those designed to alleviate poverty and protect the most disadvantaged groups of society. Under such conditions, how can a population survive? Who makes the daily routines of life possible? It is women/housewives who are responsible for the organization of domestic chores that assure consumption and reproduction. It is they who have to find the way to handle the crisis situation in everyday life.

A first way to handle the crisis on the part of women is to try to increase the monetary income of the household, that is, increasing their labor market participation as a mechanism to assure the continuity of reproductive/consumption activities. Specific changes in female participation and employment status (unemployment, terciarization, informalization, precarization, and so on) have been mentioned and analyzed. Hypotheses about the contribution (or cost sharing) of women to cope with the crisis, however, recognize that the economic contribution of women goes beyond their increased participation in the labor force. In fact, the heightened role of women is also the result of the decrease in male income and contribution, reflected in the feminization of poverty and in the vulnerability of female-headed households.

A second way in which women handle the crisis is through changes in the organization of their domestic tasks. As the traditional family-based organization of consumption (aided by specific social programs) becomes less viable, the private world of domesticity is threatened and in danger of disappearing. Poverty forces a collectivization of consumption and a sort of informal socialization of housewives' chores (Barrig, 1986).

The longer term effect of social spending cuts is still another matter: it could be claimed that the adult Latin American women who at the present have to find ways to cope with the crisis are better trained and prepared for this than younger women growing up in the midst of the crisis and without the benefits of social programs. Thus, the decline in the scope and depth of social programs may lead in the future to a generation of women who are less trained, both in terms of formal education and in terms of their ability to handle the urban structure of services, anyway dwindling. Unless such conditions change, they can expect a future with higher domestic burdens, less access to services and less rights of social citizenship, implying a decline in the capacity to move and act in the public world.

Long-term trends and short-term conjunctural crisis situations have to be separated. The crisis in the provision of social services, the styles of development or maldevelopment that result from the current adjustment policies, are long-term trends. They have situational manifestations, they hit specific populations at specific moments, such as the sudden closing of a plant producing unemployment, or consumption crises due to hyperinflation. It is very different to adapt gradually (over cohorts and generations) to a changing macro environment than to suffer sudden and unexpected shocks. In fact, smooth processes of change take place more often through inter-cohort shifts which, in turn, affect life cycle patterns. Abrupt shocks and uncertainty, however, may have longer-term effects in the lives of people and groups.

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SOME ANALYTICAL DIMENSIONS: DOMESTIC TASKS, COLLECTIVE GOODS AND SERVICES.

The social processes linked to daily and generational reproduction of a population constitute a complex set of mechanisms and organizations. These mechanisms and organizations act at different levels: the individual, the household, the community, the state and social policy. Over the last twenty years, intense debates have taken place with respect to the political economy of domestic labor, promoted by the feminist movements and by new analytical and critical trends within the Marxist tradition (Malos, 1980). The "discovery" of domestic labor appeared as a consequence of the crisis in the delivery of these "invisible" services, partially due to women's questioning of the "naturalness" of their responsibility for these tasks which turned the issue of the daily maintenance of the population into a matter of social and political relevance. At the same time, the crisis of the welfare state in the central Western societies and neo-liberal hegemonic ideas have acted in the opposite direction, seeking to shift the responsibility for the maintenance of non-earning individuals and groups from the state back to the family or to the marketplace.

In Latin America, the concern with such issues stems from the need to understand the linkage between processes and styles of development and the structuring of new social groups. Understanding the functioning of the informal sector necessarily implies an explicit consideration of the linkage between the processes of production, reproduction and maintenance, given the reciprocal determinations among them. In turn, at the macro level, the consideration of subordinate groups in the process of development leads to visualize the urban scene not only as the location of certain production styles (the modern factory or street vending) that generate differentiated actors (the working class, the marginals), but as interrelated levels or scenarios, productive, reproductive, material and symbolic. Besides the workplace, the organization of collective consumption (utilization of land, transport, housing, health, etc.) becomes a key factor in determining the lifestyles of the popular classes (Castells, 1986). Hence, the consideration of the organizations and social movements related to collective services as a crucial dimension of the social organization of reproduction.

A conceptual clarification is in line here. Analytically, the term "reproduction" refers to three dimensions or levels: biological reproduction, which at the family level means bearing children and at the social level alludes to the socio-demographic aspects of fertility; daily reproduction, that is, the maintenance of the existent population through domestic tasks for subsistence and through the provision of collective goods and social services; and social reproduction, that is, all the extra-productive tasks aimed at the maintenance of the social system (Edholm, Harris & Young, 1977). The **domestic domain** basically includes activities of daily production and consumption of food and other goods and services for subsistence, as well as activities related to generational replacement, namely bearing children, taking care of them and socializing them. The recognition of the importance of this domain, however, does not imply that households are isolated from the social world, nor does it identify domesticity with privacy in opposition to the public domain of power and social production. It implies rather the relevance of the **community level**, involving the basic infrastructure (water, energy, transportation, communications, and so on) that provides the setting and facilitates domestic tasks, as well as the level of **social services**, i. e., monetary and non-

monetary provisions for specific categories of non-earning people (the sick, the old, the young, and so on) and for the working population, recognized as "social citizenship" rights.

Traditionally, the distinction between these domains coincides with gender differentiations --men in charge of public tasks, women confined to the private and domestic world-- as if this was a universal and constant feature in social organization. Recent comparative anthropological research shows that the model based on the opposition between the domestic-private-female-powerless domain and the public-male-powerful one is fundamentally cultural and ideological (Rapp, 1979).

In fact, the family, the household, and gender-related division of labor are shaped by the public world of social and political institutions: definitions of social services, legislation and mechanisms of social control, changing images of health, of medicine, and of the family, educational ideologies and institutions, the place of philanthropy and public charity (Donzelot, 1979; Aries, 1962). Throughout history, the family domain has been shaped by the transformations in the system of institutions and ideas. If the eighties is a time of crisis and of the re-shaping of world-wide economic policies, these will necessarily impinge upon the organization of daily life, upon households, families and gender roles.

Household activities reveal the material linkages that connect them with the larger social processes of production and reproduction. A significant part of the reproductive activities of the household are concrete consumption tasks. Consumption of the goods and services produced by the economic system requires time and work. As Galbraith notes, in the modern Western world these tasks are carried out fundamentally by the family and especially by women. The work performed by the latter has no monetary compensation, but is rather justified in terms of "social virtue" (Galbraith, 1973).[1]

Consumption and reproduction at the household level are not limited to the tasks of transforming market produced and commercialized goods. The provision of collective goods and services is a very important input for the household. Actually, the provision of services by the State --which, for whom, when, and at what cost-- has historically constituted a battlefront for the incorporation of social sectors to the benefits and rights that define social citizenship, defining the model of the state in different historical settings: the liberal model proclaims a minimum presence of collective services and gives priority to the competitive marketplace; different versions of the welfare state, where the scope of services defined as governmental obligations is considerably wider; socialist states, in which these services are the keystone of public action. In the historical transformation of the social role of the state, class conflict shows up in the struggle for the extension of citizenship rights and for the application of redistributive policies (Marshall, 1964; Bendix, 1969; van Gunsteren, 1978). Differential access (and the differential need to accede) to these services has turned into a defining feature of social classes. At any time, the social context in which the daily

1. "The convenient social virtue ascribes merits to any pattern of behavior, however uncomfortable or unnatural for the individual involved, that serves the comfort or well-being of, or is otherwise advantageous for, the more powerful members of the community" (Galbraith, 1973:30). Galbraith identifies the role of women in consumption as that of a "crypto-servant role of administrator" (p.37).

reproductive tasks of a given social class take place results from the outcome of these struggles in the past.

Collective goods and services are not a homogeneous set. On the one hand, some collective or public services are geared to the maintenance of the population as a whole (transportation, drainage, electricity and gas, sanitation, etc.). Even though these may be organized as profit-making enterprises, they require coordination and centralized regulation of the social space. Historical experience shows that the extension of these services is related to the State's direct action, since often they do not render sufficient profit so as to attract private investment (Castells, 1976).

On the other hand, some social welfare services establish a minimum level of welfare for the population (in terms of health, education, and so on) to be ensured by the State. The justification of these services is found in the scope and coverage of specific rights and benefits, defined as the rights of social citizenship. In a sense, social welfare policies are aimed at defining who is responsible for the maintenance of the people who are not self-sufficient, that is to say, those whose income is either nonexistent or insufficient to cover their basic survival needs. The issue at stake is the delineation of the legitimate social mechanisms of transfers of income and consumption goods. In the Welfare state model, the costs of these transfers are taken on collectively; in the liberal model of the competitive market, such maintenance costs are to be covered individually, or more specifically, by the households of which such people (children, elderly or sick persons, housewives, students, the unemployed) are members.

Even within a given society and within a given social class or sector, households vary in terms of the way their members participate in the productive process. Thus, for the urban popular classes in Latin America today, three types of households can be characterized: households depending on wage-work; family-based productive units (be they in farming, crafts, commerce or services); and the social organization of the destitute poor.

The economic base of the worker's family, that which allows its persistence and reproduction, is the wage work of its members. There is a clear separation between the workplace and the home. How many members of the household work varies.[2] Workers' households contain inherently some elements of tension and contradiction: as a matter of fact, the basic production relationship is established in the labor market among individuals who offer their labor force in exchange for wages and social benefits, whilst the household bases its existence on the collectivization and solidarity of its members. Due to the individuality of the wage-worker's participation in the labor force and of his/her income, as well as to the individuation of consumption styles, the bonds within the domestic unit must be very strong to oppose the centrifugal and individualizing trends of the market. The

2. "How much labor-power a working class household needs to send out is determined by many things: the cost of reproducing (or maintaining) the household, the work careers and earning trajectories of individual members, and the domestic cycle (that is, the relations between the gender and the generations, which specify when and if wives and adolescent children are available to work outside the home)" (Rapp, 1978:283).

ideology of the family based on love and the ideal of the nuclear family are the key elements of these bonds.

A second source of contradictions arises from the gap between ideals and reality. Ideally, the worker's household should be a nuclear family, autonomous and self-sufficient with regards to the necessary resources for its maintenance and reproduction. However, this autonomy ideal is constantly contradicted by the reality of unsatisfied needs, by the need to share and loan. "It is women who bridge the gap between what a household's resources really are, and what a family's position is supposed to be" (Rapp, 1978:288). The insertion of women in kinship and neighborhood networks is the mechanism that helps to attain some degree of stability in workers' households.

In opposition to the relative stability of the worker's family, a second type of urban domestic organization --into which the worker's family may fall temporarily or definitively-- is that with an unstable insertion in the labor market. In this case, the monetary income related to the sale of labor power does not exist or is insufficient for the maintenance and reproduction of the unit. The household then loses its autonomy and self-sufficiency. This often implies high instability in the composition of the household and in family bonds, as well as a constant appeal to the networks of informal relationships, to the mechanisms of social welfare, should these exist, and to public charity (Ramos, 1981; Lomnitz, 1975). This instability may be temporary and transient, related to migratory processes or periods of transition. But the urban reality, especially in times of crisis, has chronic instability as one of its constant features, varying in magnitude and social significance according to the economic situation of the country (especially the unemployment rate) and to welfare policies.

A third type of household in the popular classes is the one based on the family economy, at the same time being a productive and reproductive unit. Domestic and market oriented tasks cannot be clearly distinguished; there is no separation between workplace and domestic domain; nor is there a clear sexual or generational division of labor, although there is a distinct hierarchy of power and authority. The woman-mother carries the responsibility of domestic work; however, she --as well as the children-- may have a relevant participation in the family enterprise. In this case, the intra-family bonds are reinforced by the unification of the productive and reproductive tasks, always within a framework of internal differentiation in power and authority. Insofar as the reproductive logic of the unit is based on the participation of the members in family work with no pay, the process of individuation and autonomy of the subordinate members --wife and children-- may result more difficult and conflictive. Households where the members tend to work in informal employment can be found in the second and in the third type.

In each of these types, women have specific tasks and expected responsibilities. The underlying hypothesis that guides much of the concern with the role of women in the crisis is actually a two sided one: first, that crisis situations lead to an increase in the second type (that of the unstable or poor household); second, that in this type, the burden is greater for women.

CARING AND COPING

The tasks of women in social reproduction have, by now, abandoned the hidden and invisible position they held for centuries in Western thought and social consciousness. Feminist scholarship over the last twenty years has uncovered the caring dimension of women's lives, first and foremost in the family environment, based on affection. Also in the labor market, occupying positions considered as a "natural" and expected extension to others of the feminine nature of love and care (Waerness, 1984).

Coping is another matter. It has to do with the "sacrifice" women have to make, the ingenuity with which they have to act, the inventiveness and resourcefulness they express when their caring is endangered by the absence or scarcity of material resources or support of others. Under conditions of chronic poverty, of sudden impoverishment, of short or long term crisis, be they micro (an illness in the family) or macro (foreign debt crisis or economic recession), women COPE, that is, they somehow manage to have their children fed, clothed, sheltered, even under the hardest conditions. How do they accomplish this? That is where usually the notion of "survival strategies" emerges: women develop coping strategies for the daily maintenance and reproduction of their immediate family.

Numerous studies have been carried out showing the way this is done: Lomnitz in her pioneer study of marginality (1975), Raczinski and Serrano (1986 and 1989), Valdés (1988), Jelin (1984), for the Latin American urban scene. As the eighties progressed and the world crisis developed, the feeling emerged that unquestionably it was to be women who would have to cope and carry the main burden of accommodating and adjusting the chores of everyday life to the effects of macro adjustment policies.

The view on women goes further, seeing them as intelligent, imaginative and resourceful; thus, capable of developing new "strategies" and coping mechanisms. Praising observers are detecting and analyzing at least two new developments: protests and public demands on the government; self-help and self-managed collective means to handle daily reproductive activities. Women seem to have become the protagonists and heroines (??) of a new adventure, the adventure of surviving and living...

THE CONTEXT: THE LATIN AMERICAN REALITY IN THE EIGHTIES

Aggregate figures for the performance of the Latin American economies during the period 1950-1980 show major structural transformations in the region: growth and diversification of productive activities, widespread industrialization, development of infrastructure (energy, communications, transportation), growth of modern enterprises, increasing state intervention in regulatory economic policies and in the expansion of social services. Social structures transformed themselves accordingly: urbanization and growth of cities, major shifts in occupational structures implying upward mobility, demographic

transition and expansion of education (CEPAL, 1989).[3] Yet these trends cannot hide the major drawbacks of this period of economic growth: an extremely unequal income distribution, large sectors of the population living under conditions of extreme poverty, widespread unemployment and underemployment.

CEPAL aggregate data indicate that from 1960 to 1975, the richest 10% of the Latin American population increased its average family income in almost 4.700 dollars, reaching 15.800 dollars per household; the poorest 20% increased its income in 60 dollars, reaching an average of less than 400 dollars of yearly income per household. The proportion of the population living under the poverty line did not show signs of being affected by the rhythm and magnitude of economic growth. The decline in the proportion of the poor was extremely small, and the absolute number of the poor kept increasing continuously. Finally, although employment in the modern sector of the economy grew faster than the population, it was only a minor force in labor creation; with urbanization, the basic trend has been a transference of rural to urban underemployment and informality (CEPAL, 1989).

Since 1981, economic indicators show the impact of the world crisis. For the region as a whole, income per capita was 14% lower in 1986 than in 1980. The labor market reflected the crisis: the rate of growth of modern employment diminished, unemployment and underemployment grew, wages and earnings declined. CEPAL surveys carried out in several countries in 1982 and 1985 show some unanticipated results: leaving aside the peasant population, underemployment and poverty grew both in the informal sector and among wage-workers, among the latter due to open unemployment and wage contraction. Actually, the number of poor families is higher among formal than among informal workers. Also, real income in typically urban middle class occupations (professionals, technical and clerical workers) declined considerably during the crisis.

Such conditions could not but have effects upon health and nutrition. Government spending in health declined. Infant mortality, the most dramatic indicator of well-being, did not react in the same way everywhere: some countries experienced a reversal of the long-term declining trend, while in others only specific programs targeted directed to the poorest could halt the reversal (sometimes at the expense of the not-so-poor population). Indicators of nutrition had a very complex evolution. Balance of payment crisis implied a declining capacity to import foodstuff in several countries. Even with increases in internal production, in 13 out of 17 countries available food per capita declined. In six countries there is not enough food available to satisfy minimum needs, and in those countries where food supply is sufficient to cover basic needs, large sectors of the population are undernourished (CEPAL, 1989).[4]

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[3]. The aggregate data presented in this part is based on reports by CEPAL, the World Bank and UNICEF, summarized in CEPAL, 1989. Also Hirschman, 1986, who presents an extremely insightful view of the "disjunction between economic and social indicators" (p. 7).

[4]. On the eve of Christmas, 1989, Argentine newspapers present the basic data of the CEPAL report for the year about to end: for the first time in its history, Latin America surpassed the 1.000% inflation mark, gross national product grew only 1.1% and foreign dept reached 416.000 million dollars. Per capita product was in 1989 8% lower than in 1980. La Nación, Dec. 24, 1989, p. 17.

The question here is not to discuss further the crisis, but rather how does the experience of the crisis vary according to gender. Does it affect differently men and women? Statistical evidence about how the crisis affects women is, by now, relatively abundant: female participation in the labor force (especially in the most precarious and less stable positions) has increased, female-headed households multiply and are the most vulnerable economically, family violence is on the rise, prostitution and other social ills are taking their toll.

Data from different studies in various countries show a consistent pattern. In Brazil in 1985, 30% of the urban and 12% of the rural households classified as poor are headed by women. Additionally, in 27% of the poor households the male head is out of work due to illness. Thus, it is women and children (in a third of the poor households the only income available is supplied by minors) who act as main providers. According to Barroso and Amado (1989, p.87), "these women thus face the emotional stress of resorting to their children. They seem to be accumulating a 'double guilt': as breadwinners --the traditional male role they play here-- because they don't earn enough; and as mothers, for not being able to provide the care they would like". Labor force participation of women has increased from 1977 to 1984, especially among urban women in the age-bracket of 18 to 29. As expected, these new entrants to the labor force come into the informal sector and have low earnings and high unemployment rates. However, as Spindel (1986, p. 32) shows, "As estatísticas indicam que nesta conjuntura cíclica do início dos anos 80, as mulheres nao parecem ser as primeiras a serem demitidas, e nem as últimas a serem incorporadas no mercado de trabalho".

It is in longitudinal studies where the specific effects of the crisis on groups of a population can be studied in depth, and the mechanisms of adaptation and change at the micro level of the household detected. A longitudinal study of households in a poor neighborhood in Guayaquil carried out in the period 1978-1988 (Moser, 1988) shows the way the increase in income-earning activities of women takes place: women who worked before do longer hours now, more women with small children go out looking for jobs, young girls take over domestic chores and decrease their school attendance, hindering their future occupational prospects. Regarding intra-household patterns, the study shows that women have now less time for their domestic activities, with several significant consequences: less attention devoted to small children (children are left alone, older children roam the streets while their mothers work or are under the care of neighbors); new nutritional problems show up in children who are not fed by their mothers; young girls take over domestic chores and this increases mother-daughter conflicts; there is less parental control and father's presence for boys; declining consumption is directly linked to intra-family violence, with most incidents reported at the time when women ask for more money. At the same time, the need to earn a living has produced an increase in the use of contraceptives and sterilization (to assure a better life for their already born children).

Data from the study of households in Guadalajara in 1982 and 1985 (González de la Rocha, 1986, and González de la Rocha and Escobar Latapí, 1988) indicate that the decline in real income due to the economic recession in Mexico has been handled by the interviewed Guadalajara families through an increase in labor force participation. It is women above age 15, and to a lesser extent boys of less that 15, who became the new laborers.

Young girls took over domestic chores, while older males were already in the labor force at the beginning of the study. The authors also detected some shifts in domestic help, with the increase of the participation of males, other relatives and neighbors. Given the short time-span of the study, it is not possible to detect other effects of these changes, although some can be expected: the declining labor absorption capacity of the Guadalajara labor market will make it harder to compensate declining incomes through the increase in the number of income-earners. Domestic violence was already bad in 1982 and changes could not be detected in the study; other studies indicate a deterioration in the physical condition of children, reflecting a deterioration of nutrition and an increase in child abuse and abandoning of infants (Tapia Curiel, 1984, cited by González and Escobar, 1988, p. 21). Also, at least in the households under study, there was no indications of sacrificing education in order to increase earnings, but again, the time-span was not large enough to grasp this.[5] (For a summary on Mexico, Beneria, 1989).

Data on trends in other countries in Latin America point in the same direction, showing similar and convergent patterns regarding the situation of women (UNICEF, 1989; Commonwealth Secretariat, 1989; De Barbieri and Oliveira, 1987). In summary, economic recession and crisis impinge in a dramatic fashion upon the poor; women develop strategies to cope and by doing this, diminish the impact or offset the worse effects. This is not a two-stage process in time, it is a simultaneous, complex and multidimensional process: the statistical evidence combines the effects of the crisis and the result of the strategies of coping. Empirically, what is perhaps new for the eighties is the fact that the very core of social organization of everyday life for the poor, namely household activities for maintenance, have been affected, with a significant impact on nutrition and hunger, and the need to find new ways to organize the daily tasks of feeding and eating.

THE FOOD EMERGENCY: INDIVIDUAL AND COLLECTIVE RESPONSES.

When the household/family cannot cope with the daily maintenance of its members, who can take over? Either the household tends to dissolve into its individual members, each of them trying to solve his/her feeding needs by itself; or supra-household units may take over and try to cope with the situation through the collectivization of consumption. There may also be responses that strengthen the household's ability to cope, especially in the form of food distribution programs. Given the traditional gender-based division of domestic labor, whatever the way the issue is handled, women will be the main performers of the story -- even if the design of the solution is not in their hands.

Undoubtedly, the increase in the number of children roaming the streets of large Latin American cities, as well as the increase in the number of beggars in general, is a sign of a high degree of individuation of consumption and dissolution of the household. Also, the

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5. In a study of inter-generational relations in popular sector households in Buenos Aires, Vila (1987) found that the education of daughters was more easily "sacrificed" than for sons. Girls were pushed to leave school and find jobs as domestics even when their school performance and their motivation to study were considerably higher than their brothers'. Parents justified their behavior mentioning the availability of jobs for girls but not for boys.

increase in female-headed households has been linked to male unemployment and inability to earn an income that would allow the males to fulfill their breadwinners' expected role. Actually, the phenomenon of the children in the streets --which has taken on dramatic proportions, especially in urban Brazil-- can be either a direct manifestation of the fading of the poor household or part of a combined family strategy to increase the income-earning potential of its members. In the latter case, usually the children contribute whatever they can get to the subsistence of their mothers and siblings.

The experience of the eighties in the cities of the region shows also the other side: the emergence and growth of collective strategies to cope with hunger and with uncertainty in food supplies. Soup kitchens, comedores populares, consumption cooperatives and community gardens develop in a variety of settings. At times, they are part of governmental programs, at other times they emerge as part of grassroots organizations or with the promotion of non-governmental agencies. Usually, they combine various inputs and organizational forms. In all cases, women play the active role in such initiatives.

The analytical questions involved are impossible to answer: if women did not develop the coping strategies, how much worse (and for whom?) could social indicators be? Does women's effort make any difference? Are the costs (in terms of burden for the women, in terms of their own deterioration) balanced by the benefits? For whom are the benefits? Probably, much of the individual and household-level strategies do not have much of an aggregate difference (increased participation in the informal market, for instance, may imply spreading and sharing poverty. How many stalls of fruit can a poor neighborhood support?). On the other hand, collective activities of women, be they protest and demands on the government or socialization of reproductive activities, may imply a net gain. This is something that would be worth exploring, even if only with indirect evidences.

PERU: Comedores populares and El Vaso de leche

The crisis of the eighties hit the urban popular classes of Peru in a very hard way. It also came after the period of high popular mobilization and organization of the late seventies. Actually, popular urban organizations had emerged during the early urban settlements of the fifties and sixties (Blondet, 1987; Blondet, DeGregori and Linch, 1987); they were then stimulated by the military government of Velazco through SINAMOS, and gained some independence and autonomous action during the period of mass protests and political mobilization of the late seventies (Tovar, 1986a; Ballón, 1986a).[6] The eighties brings two novelties: on the one hand, the deepening of the economic crisis, implying uncertainty in the satisfaction of the most elemental needs such as food; on the other, the important, visible and significant presence of women in new organizations to cope with these needs.

6. The internationally acclaimed case of Villa El Salvador is the best known and most successful case of local level organization, but not a total exception of what goes on in other Pueblos jóvenes in Lima (Tovar, 1986a; Tovar, 1986b; Zapata, 1989).

If during the second half of the seventies, neighborhood-based popular demands could tie in with wage protests and with political demands for democratization, during the early eighties demands related to the economic crisis gained salience and became independent of organized labor and political demands. The pressing issues are now more basic: hunger, the individual and collective need of assuring food supplies. At the individual and family level, this leads to an increase in informal activities, especially of women: "Cuando uno no tiene plata y tiene niños, la desesperación que tiene es trabajar" (Tovar, 1986b, p. 80; Paredes and Tello, 1988), and a growing estrangement between daily life and political institutions, given the absence of social policies to help facing basic needs. Individual and family level tasks to cope absorb more and more effort and time, leading to a growing tension between individual and collective action (Tovar, 1986b). Yet, considerable energy is channelled to collective means to solve daily needs. Comedores comunales and other forms of collective food-provision (such as the program Vaso de leche) emerge and involve large sectors of the urban poor.

In 1984 there were about 300 Comedores and Cocinas populares, in which about 10.000 women were organized to feed 60.000 people (Tovar, 1986a). In 1986, there were 800 Comedores (700 emerged in the previous three years). The Vaso de leche,[7] created in Lima in 1983, organized 100.000 women in 7.500 committees to distribute daily rations of milk to one million children in 1986 (Barrig, 1986, p. 167). Both programs are totally handled by women (Tovar, 1986b). In 1989, the estimate is that about 400.000 women are involved in the Vaso de leche, and there are 1.000-1.200 Comedores populares in Lima (Blondet, 1989).[8] How is all this taking place? What are the effects of such collective efforts on the daily life of families and especially of women?

Communal kitchens started in 1978-79, mostly at the initiative of local churches with the support of CARITAS. Others were initiated by local community leaders or professionals (priests, health promoters, base communities, and so on), or at the initiative of groups of women in need. These women usually had some previous experience in collective organization (for instance, in community work programs in exchange for food). The Comedores are an extension of two traditional forms of collective eating, the soup kitchen and rural communal kitchens. The soup kitchen was the mechanism usually utilized by striking workers, while the communal kitchen was the way to feed participants in community projects. The Comedor popular is a longer lasting organization, geared to handle permanently the food necessities of full families. Usually, although called comedores, housewives cook collectively but take the prepared food to be eaten in each household. Typically they receive the dry foods from international aid agencies; the community only has

7. The Vaso de leche was established in 1985 through a law that gives each child under 13 the right to receive a cup of milk each day. Municipalities are in charge of handling the program, through neighborhood committees that receive, distribute and account for the milk. Besides the tasks related to milk distribution, the committees also handle other activities related to preventive health, urban development and recreation.

8. There are no precise quantitative information about the number of comedores. Córdoba and Gorriti (1989) report the existence of 1.500, with about 50 members each.

to buy the fresh supplies.[9] Government intervention in soup kitchens and comedores varies. Since 1983, a new type emerged, in which the government supplied the basic equipment to establish the comedor (the piece of land, stoves, kitchen utensils, and so on), and offers subsidized staples (Córdoba and Gorriti, 1989).

Being administered by an agency or self-administered by the recipients themselves makes a crucial difference in the way the comedores operate and whom they serve (Sara-Lafosse, 1984; Flora Tristán, 1988). Administered ones are basically asistenciales, operating like subsidized restaurants for poor people. Their function seems to be more related to relieve women of some of their domestic chores, freeing time for labor force participation, than to improve the nutritional level of the population or assure food supplies. The independent ones, in general, accomplish more: nutritional levels improve, and they imply a change in the women who participate and in the meaning of the family. For the women involved, the transition from an craft to an industrial food preparation process implies considerable saving in time devoted to food preparation. Participation involves a learning experience in organization and in democratic management and rationalization. Breaking isolation is also significant.

Additionally, there is room for a significant cultural change in the meaning of the family. In a patriarchal society, it is the role of the wife to feed husbands and children. To accept eating food prepared by others implies a change in mentality, forced by need. Of course, difficulties and distortions of goals are numerous, such as not reaching the poorest because of the form of payment, not relieving the women from their domestic chores when they do not offer food for all members of the household, and so on (Sara-Lafosse, 1984).

The massive participation of Peruvian women in these two basic food programs brought about considerable optimism among Peruvian feminists, who saw in this experience of collective organization and participation the seeds of a gradual change in the subordination of women. Actually, women could redefine their role and take an active part in facing the crisis, not in the traditional role of private housekeeper/mother/spouse, but in a form of public participation that could increase the consciousness of their own rights and identities while politicizing the personal experience. Early appraisals of the new trends stressed the numbers of women involved, the learning of solidarity and sharing, the experience of democratic practices and of participation and voice, the critical resistance with which popular women confront verticalism and manipulation of public organizations, the public exposure of private dramas, the potential for a growing consciousness of traditional oppression (Tovar, 1986a and 1986b; Vargas, 1988).

A critical analysis of the experience of women in popular organizations in Peru during almost a decade show at the present a different picture, stressing the limitations and hindrances in the process (Barrig, 1986; Blondet, 1989).

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9. Peru has been the recipient of international food aid for a long time. Traditionally food was distributed through school lunches and through religious organizations (CARITAS and others). In some instances, women were involved in the preparation and in distribution of food, as a condition to receive rations for themselves or their children.

In the first place, gender oppression is class specific. It is hard to denounce the private domestic role of women when poverty leads to collectivize consumption and to an informal socialization of the tasks of housewives (Barrig, 1986, p. 163). In Peru at the present, the search for collective solutions to basic food needs is, to a certain extent, the result of macro processes that are not in the hands of popular women themselves. United States international food aid aimed at "friendly countries" is channeled, since the late seventies, via CARITAS (a Catholic charity organization), OFASA (an adventist group) and a government agency (ONAA, Oficina Nacional de Apoyo Alimentario). At the height of the crisis, the Belaunde administration (1980-1985) cut drastically the provision of public and social services, while growing poverty led to an inability of the poor households to provide for basic necessities. Under the sign of the emergency and the crisis, popular organizations such as mothers clubs and neighborhood health committees multiplied. They displayed the traditional mark of encouraging self-help and the intention of promoting and "educating" the recipients, in this case the women, to better accomplish their traditional role in reproductive activities. Numerous organizations, governmental and non-governmental, political and confessional, national and international, invaded the poor neighborhoods (the title of a research project, De invasores a invadidos, is quite eloquent). Women traditionally played the major role in coping with the hunger of their families in the absence of social services; while doing this under conditions of crisis and emergency, they become part of a move to promote new ways of organizing local communities.

In fact, social services and women's reproductive tasks are closely related. When food provision shifts from being a basic necessity covered in the domestic economy to a service, new public organizational spaces are created for women. These new spaces are complex, with mixed and contradictory effects on the women participants and on their well-being. On the one hand, they undoubtedly help in alleviating critical situations of hunger and poverty, at least in the short run. For many households, there are no alternative forms of handling their daily needs. For many women, their labor contribution to these community endeavors are their key economic activity. Several studies point out the benefits of such organizations for the women themselves: they provide an experience in sharing and breaking isolation, in getting away from silence and in gaining voice, they offer a ground for learning administration and management skills, of practicing democracy and solidarity. In that sense, they foster the development of new social actors, who could come to recognize themselves as part of the "marginalized" from the social structure and, in that line, learn, know, and demand for their own rights (Blondet, 1989).

However, there are good reasons not to become over-enthusiastic about the positive effects of the experience. Limitations and drawbacks are significant. Insofar as the provision of such services is not conceived as a right of citizenship, a good part of the distribution of food donations through non-governmental organizations is done in the form of charity, rather than as a right. Non-governmental organizations may further appear in a mediating, tutorial and promotional role, weakening the links between the recipients of the services and other local organizations and autonomous bodies.

Second, there is no coordination of popular organizations. Nobody knows for sure how many people get their food in the comedores or how many rations are distributed. Often,

such lack of coordination leads to overlapping and waste of efforts. Some areas have no help; in others it is possible to find several comedores of different agencies serving the same population.

In the third place, the learning experience of women is limited to their acting in the in-group with other women; they are ill prepared when required to interact with other agents, actors and organizations. Inter-organizational links are very scarce, hindered by rivalry of the base groups and of the various promotion agencies among themselves (Barrig, 1986). Furthermore, given the fact that the popular organizations are centered around basic subsistence needs, they reinforce the traditional gender division of labor, and weaken any potential of women's organizations as spaces for the development of gender subordination consciousness and identities.

Furthermore, given the fact that the organizations are based and geared to solve the basic necessities of families, women may become extremely "opportunistic" or instrumental in their approach, participating and being ready to pay whatever is needed to receive supplies. For most women in need, their contact with the organization is highly specific, limited to the good or service they can obtain. They do not care very much about the nature of the organization itself, thus leaving leaders to make decisions without consultation and debate. The grassroots will accept whatever is decided, insofar as they are able to receive the promised good. The tendency for a strengthened asistencialismo and for clientelistic practices is easily seen by now (Blondet, 1989). Political parties and religious organizations may very easily utilize the situation of need not to improve self-organization and self-reliance of popular women in need, but rather to gain clients and captive audiences for their messages.

Barrig sums up the situation in the following way:

> Such urgencies (food, health) do not summon the whole neighborhood; specifically they call on women. Assistentialist approaches focus on the maternal role as the most important role of women, including also economic activities, ... emphasizing poverty and its resolution through female training in income generating activities. ... They hardly can accomplish any improvement in the living conditions of the population and even less in the condition of gender subordination. (Barrig, 1986, p. 172, my translation).

CHILE: POPULAR ECONOMIC ORGANIZATIONS

Chile has a rich experience in self-managed popular organizations to face the satisfaction of basic needs. Since the military coup of 1973, the urban subordinate classes had to face economic hardship, political repression and vital restrictions in their conception of social citizenship rights. The ingenuity with which they faced such conditions and the variety of experiences that evolved are by now well known and are not to be reiterated here (Campero, 1987, and the references cited in that book). Two strands run in the popular forces of this long period: the need to cope with economic hardship and the opposition to

dictatorship and the quest for democracy. Although the first is more in line with the goal of this paper, they are not totally independent from each other. In a sense, the Chilean case was the experimental ground in the region for the development of alternative ways to handle economic hardship and crisis; it was also the fertile ground for thinking about these phenomena. From the early formulations of the notion of "survival strategy" (Duque and Pastrana, 1972) and the analysis of coping strategies of individual women in their domestic role (Valdés, 1988; Raczynski and Serrano, 1986), through the promotion and study of community initiatives and the "popular economy of solidarity" (Razeto, 1986; Hardy, 1986; Jansana, 1989), the time has come now, with the new democratic regime soon to be installed, to develop governmental programs and policies to answer the unsatisfied needs of the population --needs that combine material benefits with human rights.

In 1986, 673 popular organizations were reported in Santiago (Salinas, 1989). The number of beneficiaries was beyond 60 thousand. There are different types of organizations:

a) **Ollas comunes** (200 reported in 1986, 4.200 members covering 24.000 persons) are relatively small: approximately twenty families share the cooking, eating takes place mostly at home (at times, in churches, schools or community halls). There is a high degree of organization: meetings of all participating households take place each week, to decide everything related to the functioning of the kitchen (the distribution of shifts and responsibilities, menus, resources, other activities). The ollas are then organized by area of the city, with a central coordinating committee that handles the distribution of resources. Resources originate from three sources: food supplied by the **Vicaría de la solidaridad**, a weekly payment made by each family, other funds supplied by donations and the income generated by some collective "solidarity activities" undertaken by the same organization (such as garage sales, sale of special foods, and others). Members of the **olla**, then, have three basic responsibilities: to participate in the meetings, to cook at least once a week, and to pay the dues.

b) **Comedores** (for 1986, the report lists 20, covering 2.250 persons) are usually run by a support organization, feeding the children of a community. Local participation is very limited, although in many cases they are the first step toward the establishment of an **olla**.

c) **Comprando juntos** (the report gives a figure of 223 with 4.700 members --28.300 persons): organizations that aim at decreasing costs of basic household subsistence goods through buying wholesale. The organizational structure is similar to that of the **ollas**.

d) **Huertos familiares** (67, 1.750 members, 4.400 individuals) consist of a group of families that share in cultivating a vegetable garden for house consumption. There are also some communal bread ovens.

These organizations emerged as a response to the decline in the living conditions of the population, and were fostered by the concern of international agencies and by the history of organizational experience of the Chilean population. A recent study of organizations of women in **poblaciones** indicates that between 10 and 15% of the urban population is organized (Valdés and Weinstein, 1989). According to the authors, for the women involved, participation in such organizations has several meanings and functions: first, the instrumental

role of satisfying basic needs collectively is central in the success of the organization. Second, it creates a space for expressive behavior and personal development. For many women, it turns into the only legitimate way to get out of the private world, insofar as their participation is seen as an extension of the traditional female role of caring and nurturing the family (Campero, 1989).[10] Third, at times the organization with specific aims (such as the ollas) engage in wider activities, involving community social action and development. The degree of commitment of the women increases accordingly. Finally, there is a learning process in democratic participation: elections, meetings and assemblies, imply learning to participate in decision making in a public space.

Various authors evaluate differently the effects of such organizations. Razeto (1986) mentions basically three:

a) Minimal or economicist hypothesis. Popular economic organizations are seen as a conjunctural strategy to survive in a difficult time. As a response to the economic crisis due to the military regime, such organizations have helped in reducing the social costs of the crisis. Once the crisis is over, it is expected that such organizations will tend to disappear.

b) Intermediate or politicist hypothesis. According to this approach, the economic dimension is only a means to motivate the consolidation of the organizations. What really matters is the learning experience of democratic participation and popular mobilization, experiences that may lead to the emergence of a new social movement.

c) Maximalist or culturalist hypothesis. According to this view, such popular organizations are the carriers of a new form of social organization, the seeds of a major social transformation, that of the "economy of solidarity". Their importance lies not so much in that they are a means to solve immediate problems, but rather in the alternative forms of human and social relations they carry, based on solidarity and community. In the long run, their emergence is a response to a crisis of our civilization, based on individualistic and capitalist values.

According to Campero (1987) popular organizations are a defensive form to confront the crisis through the creation of a social fabric that compensates for the disintegrative effects of the existing social system.

As in the case of Perú, to develop and maintain this type of experiences is a hard task. The very condition of instability and deprivation of the population involved is in itself the root of many of its problems. Internal conflicts in management of monetary resources, struggles for power and personal misunderstandings lead often to the disruption and even disappearance of organizations. The daily wear and tear of the active participants trying to

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10. For Sao Paulo, Caldeira (1987) analyzes in depth the functioning of this mechanism of legitimation, showing how it may enlarge and expand the public role of women.

secure funds is extremely high. Again the question remains, how to evaluate costs and benefits? Is it worthed?[11]

ARGENTINA: SOCIAL POLICIES FOR A NEW REALITY

The supply of consumption goods in Argentina has always been a familial affaire. The state and other agencies have traditionally taken care (through philanthropic initiatives) of the destitute, but these have not been a major social issue or problem until recently. Historically, within Latin America, Argentina has been the country with no feeding problem. In qualitative and quantitative terms, nutrition was quite adequate (Hintze, 1989). On the other hand, the issue of food consumption was a private one, handled by the public agencies as part of the wage policies. During the Radical Party government (1983-1989), the PAN (Plan alimentario nacional) was a social policy designed to "complement the food intake of the needy families through a program of food distribution that represent 30% of the monthly caloric intake of a typical family" (Del Franco, 1989). A box with non-perishable food was distributed to the needy family by special governmental agents.

The daily food situation deteriorated considerably during the first few months of 1989 (Aguirre, 1989). As a reaction to hyperinflation, the upsurge of unemployment and widespread uncertainty, in late May, 1989, riots and looting took place in several Argentine major cities. The initial actions were assaults to supermarkets and other grocery stores. Women and children were active participants in these events. Soup kitchens and other emergency measures --both governmental and non-governmental-- were carried out in the aftermath of the riots. Since July, 1989, the new government announced several programs to face the deepening crisis and widespread hunger. A Bono solidario (a voucher to be exchanged for food in any grocery store) was established first. Its coverage and distribution were highly inefficient; accusations of corruption and misuse of the bonos are plentiful. Other announced policies involve a job-creation program a program of community social policies, neither of which has been implemented.[12]

In a sense, the Argentine situation is sad and paradoxical. Because of the history of relative well-being, food has never been a social issue to be handled through public policy. Furthermore, although there have been occasional crises that were handled through soup kitchens and other emergency community action, there is no strong tradition of communal organization and solidarity for satisfying basic needs. The impact of the crisis is, therefore,

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11. At the present, the triple function of the collective organizations, namely the actual service, the space for popualr organization, and the space for learning and personal development, seem to enter a phase of crisis. Women approach the organization instrumentally, maximizing the resources they can obtain. Rather than interpreting this as lack of social consciousness, this attitude should be interpreted as a reaction to the extreme conditions they face. There is not much energy left for other activities when the needs of subsistence are pressing. Time devoted to organization could, potentially be productive time.

12. School lunches have been extremely important in Argentina during the last several years of increased poverty. Not only do they assure a minimum food intake for the children; they also act as a significant stimulus for school attendance (Hintze, 1989).

incredibly disruptive of everyday practices and organizations. The long lines of women with children waiting to receive some government help, coupled with the weakness of non-governmental support agencies and the difficulties in grassroots organization, are evidence of the strength of cultural patterns that have stressed during decades the potential of social mobility through individual-family strategies on the one hand, and the rights of social citizenship on the other.

SOME PRELIMINARY CONCLUDING REMARKS

Both the discussion of the household as the basic unit for daily reproductive activities and of the alternative forms of organization that emerge to cope with the uncertainty and lack of resources in times of crisis are based on an underlying cultural assumption: the gender-based division of labor that puts women in charge of handling reproductive tasks. The deepening of the crisis leads to breaking the isolation of the private household, in different ways. Lack of family-based resources leads to public visibility and to the emergence in the public space of the crisis of the household economy: as an individualized response, the increase in beggars, children of the street, and even of street crime and violence. Collective responses are also public: food riots, organized protests and marches, long lines of people waiting for some handouts (governmental or non-governmental), but also the collectivization of reproductive tasks in popular grassroots organizations and community action. Both womens' and mens' roles are altered in the process. Whether this "publicization" of the household tasks is a transient phenomenon of the critical conjuncture, to have the traditional household restored as soon as (and if) economic conditions change, or it implies in itself a major shift in social definitions of gender roles and of private and public domains, is still to be seen.

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