

GENDERED REVOLUTIONARY BRIDGES:
A Feminist Theory of Revolution

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**Prepared for delivery at the 1998 meeting
of the Latin American Studies Association,
The Palmer House Hilton Hotel,
Chicago, IL, September 24-26, 1998**

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Introduction

It is September 1998, and here I am returning from El Salvador once again. With time and space to think, I reflect upon my visit, my interviews, the militant women with whom I spoke, the FMLN convention I attended, and the upcoming elections scheduled for March 1999. Currently the FMLN is bound by its' own internal by-laws to advance a mixed executive ticket, or one man and one woman candidate. I think to myself, in the United States, the land of opportunity, we don't have any viable political parties within which such by-laws exist. The moment of envy and respect is interrupted when my thoughts turn to the nagging question of the presidential pre-candidate race. Currently the only candidate is a woman as her male opponent voluntarily withdrew four days prior to the last FMLN convention. Dra. Victoria de Aviles, human rights ombudswoman, is much loved by the women's movement, not solely because she is a woman, but because she is honest and sincerely concerned about the country. Even among "average" Salvadorans her popularity is noteworthy; a poll in *La Prensa Grafica* published in late August found her the second most popular person in the country, second only to another woman, the current first lady. And though the FMLN has no alternative pre-candidate, at the last convention, they were unable to ratify her due to the fact that nearly the same amount of voting delegates boycotted the election as supported the Doctora. The FMLN thus exposed their internal splits and sexism to the press and thus the country. Some speculate they may have cost themselves the elections without even declaring a candidate.

The convention made me think of many things; was it "revolutionary feminism" that I am dealing with? Or perhaps more accurately described as "revolution-or-feminism?" Or better yet, "revolution-and-feminism?" Certainly it made the theoretical questions of how to reconcile the age old tensions of "the woman question" in the revolutionary context an urgent and concrete

task. Are revolution and feminism antithetical practices? What happens when revolutionaries postpone this question to the post-revolutionary context? Or more optimistically, what *would* or *could* happen if women and feminism were part of the conscious revolutionary agenda? In this paper I seek to explore the theoretical potential for not only more successful revolutions, but perhaps more importantly, how to achieve more egalitarian post-revolutionary societies from a feminist perspective. I will use the case of El Salvador's attempted revolution and burgeoning feminist movement to illustrate this theory. The data for this paper comes from interviews conducted in El Salvador in 1994 as well as follow-up research I completed just three weeks ago.

The problematics of revolutionary theory

Simply put, it is my position that a revolutionary movement is not fully revolutionary if the subjugated position of women is not challenged, accounted for, and altered. Though I think many would concur intellectually, unfortunately practice proves otherwise. In many cases the position of women often regresses with "successful" revolutions¹. According to Theda Skocpol, the definition of a successful revolution is "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state and class structures ... accompanied and in part carried through by class-based revolts from below" (1979:4). Indeed, state structures and class structures are to be modified if revolutionary governments are to truly emerge into positions of power. However, I am forced to question the impact of the revolutionary change if the sexist social attitudes and practices towards women are not also changed from below. In other words, I will argue that the definition of a successful revolution which the majority of us have been working from for the past eighteen years is limited as patriarchy need not be challenged for revolutions to be termed "successful." The problematics

¹ See for example Val Moghadam's discussion "Islamic Populism, Class, and Gender in Postrevolutionary Iran."

of this definition has led to shortsighted theorizing about women and revolution. We have, as is often the case in the social sciences, compartmentalized realities by adding women as an after thought (at best), rather than analyzing women as the integral variable which can both determine the outcome and measure the real success of a revolution.

My goal with this paper is to both engage with and expand theories of gender and revolution. What I have come across thus far are several themes: "The sociology of revolution" literature rarely addresses women, save a few exceptions (see Foran, 1996). If one is to move into "the woman question," then the local for the theory tends to be "gender and revolution." This can be an effective way of flagging and even elevating the fundamental importance of women to revolutionary processes, however it can also serve to put women in a category outside of the entire revolutionary process. Again, I would argue, the tendency to compartmentalize does not serve us, feminists and/or scholars of revolutions, well in this case.

Literature review

What precisely is the role of women in revolutionary movements? Does the participation of women within revolutionary movements foster feminism or stymie it? Or, is the outcome something in between? How are feminist movements organized in the aftermath of revolutionary moments? These questions are crucial in expanding the paradigms of several developing bodies of literature while simultaneously making connections that could pave the way for further research.

Sociology of Revolution

Revolution is as difficult a terrain to theorize as it is to negotiate. Theda Skocpol's groundbreaking book States and Social Revolutions (1979) postulates a theory of revolution which has since been greatly contested. Though most agree with her definition of social revolutions, there is little consensus regarding what causes revolutions. John Foran's edited anthology *Theorizing*

Revolutions (1997) is the most recent dialogue in the sociology of revolution, addressing questions of the state (Goodwin), structure (Wickham-Crowley), culture (Foran), agency (Selbin), race (McAuley), and gender (Moghadam.) This cross-section is the matrix of the current efforts in the sociology of revolution to discuss what *causes* revolutions.

Goodwin argues for statist analysis of revolutions (1997: 11). He offers four different statist approaches: 1) state-autonomy, 2) state-capacity, 3) political-opportunity, and 4) state-constructionist (1997: 12). State autonomy emphasizes "the variable autonomy of state officials or 'state managers' from the dominant social class [or] civil society" (1997: 12). A state-capacity approach emphasizes "the actual material and organizational capacity (or lack thereof) of state officials to implement successfully their political agendas, even in the face of opposition from powerful actors in civil society or from other states" (1997: 12-13). The third approach is political-opportunity perspective which argues that "the state must either lack the means (infrastructurally speaking) or simply be unwilling to violently suppress such groups; it also helps if these groups can find powerful allies within a divided state or polity" (1997: 13). And the fourth approach, which can be traced to Skocpol, is what Goodwin calls the state-constructionist perspective, "because it examines the ways in which states help construct or constitute various aspects of civil society that are (falsely) conceptualized as wholly exterior to states" (1997: 13). As Goodwin reiterates, and Skocpol's definition implies, successful revolutionary movements must be able to "seize" state power.

According to Wickham-Crowley, "structural analysis focuses upon the relationships between the units" (1997: 38). Units in this case are institutional entities devoid of human agency. Structural theorists have produced the following list of relationships related to revolution: "1) unifying or solidarity-making processes; 2) conflicts, a) between classes, b) between states, c)

between states and classes; 3) exploitation; 4) commercialization; 5) colonization" (1997: 39). In an attempt to be more specific Wickham-Crowley offers a list of important factors in making a revolution from the most macro to the most micro: "1) world-systemic structures; 2) interstate competition; 3) state-class relations; 4) patterns of class, ethnic, religious, and *perhaps* gender conflicts; and 5) relations of formal organizations" (1997: 39) [emphasis added]. In an attempt to juxtapose structural forces and cultural forces Wickham-Crowley sets up what I would consider a false polemic: he suggests that cultural analyses of revolutions address post-revolutionary states whereas structural approaches assess how revolutionaries come to power (1997: 43). I call this bifurcation false as there are theorists currently addressing issues of culture with regards to revolutionary causes. (See for example Foran, Selbin, and McAuley).

Foran begins his analysis of cultural studies of revolution by marking the limitations. He suggests there are a few problems: how do culture, ideology, and discourse play a role in revolutions, and what is the relationship between such factors and social structures, the state, political economy etc. (1997: 203)? Specifically, Foran asks "[w]hat are the precise mechanisms by which culture works its independent effects on the revolutionary process? And how should the new concerns with culture and agency be balanced with the previous generation's insights on structure and the political economic" (1997: 207)? The question, though ambitious, is necessary if we are to account for the plethora of factors, state, structural, and cultural, which lead to successful revolutions. Foran argues that culture plays a complex and crucial role in making revolutions. "Everything passes through our notion of political cultures of opposition² and resistance at some point in the chain, and complex two-way relations are not ruled out" (1997: 219). In a departure from the one-sidedness of Goodwin and Wickham-Crowley, he

suggests that culture must seriously be linked to social structural, political-economic, and international contextual analyses in the study of revolution (1997: 219).

Eric Selbin takes what is considered almost a marginal turn in the sociology of revolution by proposing that ideas and actors should be the center of analysis when assessing primary revolutionary processes.

The proposition here is that a crucial component of the revolutionary potential in any population is an understanding of the population's perception of the options that are available and seem plausible to them; these options constitute "repertoires of collective action" and/or a "tool-kit" of resources necessary for constructing "strategies of action" for dealing with their society (1997: 125).

According to Selbin, people's thoughts and actions are the key link between structural and social outcomes. Structural conditions do not dictate what people do but indicate limits and boundaries (1997: 126). Selbin offers two specific revolutionary positions in which people are critical: as leaders and within the grassroots populace which decides how to respond to leaders.

Interestingly, and as an indication of the thoroughness of his theory, he is clear of the dangers of homogenizing the definition of "culture" both outside and within a particular nation state. Selbin discusses popular culture versus high culture versus political culture, concluding "this conception of political culture refers to a collective memory which often resists the dominant discourse and allows itself to be spoken only in the act of narration - it charges life everyday with symbolic meaning" (1997: 130). He also suggests that most resistance movements are continuations of earlier collective memories, again elevating the significance of the actors both past and present.

Goodwin's attention to the state is both logical and limited. Revolutions are indeed closely linked to states; however, they are inextricably linked to people as well. In other words,

² See Foran (1992) for a detailed discussion of *political cultures of opposition*.

Goodwin's emphasis on the state comes at the theoretical expense of revolutionary agents. We could detect political opportunities within a state, for example, but this begs the question of the significance of the opposition: is it fragmented or nonexistent, for example? As we have seen, Goodwin's work could cross-pollinate other theories such as those with a cultural bent; however, it is hard to envision the holistic explanatory power he suggests is imbedded in his theory.

Similarly, I am hard pressed to speculate what a gendered statist analysis might look like and what it might tell us about feminism and revolution. Wickham-Crowley, though astute and articulate in his method of questioning, is too insistent on dichotomous thinking (culture versus structure). It would be shortsighted to assume that we could analyze a revolution, particularly its causes, without thorough attention to structural relationships. However, it is equally misguided to think such an assessment would be complete without attention to culture and agency. These are not afterthoughts, as Wickham-Crowley suggests, for if they were, again, we see the likelihood of a simply gendered let alone feminist analysis surfacing too late. Perhaps Foran's vision is too ambitious and thus too unruly. However, one of the strengths of his theoretical template is the willingness to acknowledge the limitations. Though feminism is not specified, a cultural analysis of revolution through a gendered lens will inevitably uncover the hidden and strategic agency of women revolutionaries. Selbin is similar to Foran in his respect for the theories which he is refuting. His work, though intuitive on many fronts is quite "counter-academic" to a mainstream sociology of revolution. Attention to historical memory and the role of actors, above and beyond vulgar vanguard theory certainly opens the analysis up for a gendered assessment of revolution, and thus, the strategic roles of women revolutionaries.

Gender and Revolution

Gender and revolution theory is useful in advancing an understanding of revolutionary feminism. This field, though as yet underdeveloped, has some extraordinary contributions³. Here I will look at the work of Linda Lobao (1990), Valentine M. Moghadam (1997) and Karen Kampwirth (1997).

Valentine M. Moghadam's piece "Gender and Revolutions" (in Foran, 1997) attempts to insert gender into the sociology of revolution rather than compartmentalizing gender as a distinct variable outside of revolutionary theory. She argues that there are two types of revolutions, "the 'woman-in-the-family' or patriarchal model of revolution, and the 'women's emancipation' or modernizing model" (Moghadam, 1997: 137). The woman-in-the-family model of revolution

excludes or marginalizes women from definitions and constructions of independence, liberation, and liberty. It frequently constructs an ideological linkage between patriarchal values, nationalism, and the religious order. It assigns women the role of wife and mother, and associates women not only with family but with tradition, culture, and religion (Moghadam, 1997: 143).

This model equates revolutionary ideology with a patriarchal paradigm. That is, within the goals of the revolutionary movement there is no explicit call for the eradication (or even modification) of a male-dominated family unit, for example, but rather quite the opposite. This model, according to Moghadam, extols the role of woman as wife and mother both in the revolutionary experience and in the post-revolutionary society. During the revolution, for example, women would be expected to reproduce and raise children that will eventually become revolutionaries. Child birth and child rearing thus become compatible with female revolutionary tasks. This reality

³ Not discussed here are Randall (1992), Kruks et al (1989), Afshar (1996), Foran (1996), and Tetreault (1994).

clearly is anything but an intervention into a family dynamic which is generally the first site of female subjugation.

The contrasting women's emancipation model of revolution hypothesizes

that the emancipation of women is an essential part of the revolution or project of social transformation. It constructs Woman as part of the productive forces and citizenry, to be mobilized for economic and political purposes; she is to be liberated from patriarchal controls expressly for that purpose (Moghadam, 1997: 152).

This model, as Moghadam points out, is one which emphasizes gender equality rather than difference, as the woman-in-the-family model does. The central theme of this model is that the emancipation of women is a fundamental part of a socialist revolution. This goal, in the eyes of some of the earlier socialists, was to be realized through the socialization of domestic labor and the insertion of woman into productive-paid labor. This model both theoretically and practically challenges the patriarchal family unit, thus further distinguishing it from the woman-in-the-family model. One could argue that the women's emancipation model is one concerned with revolutionary as well as post-revolutionary periods whereas the woman-in-the-family is more attentive to what will lead to a successful seizure of power, at the expense of the post-revolutionary structural placement of women. That is, the women's emancipation model is looking to change structures or patriarchal domination for both successful revolutionary ends, as well as positive post-revolutionary situation(s) for women. The woman-in-the family model sees women as instrumental in achieving a successful revolutionary outcome, but loses concern for women when that "immediate" goal is achieved. Interestingly, however, Moghadam doesn't theorize why revolutionary movements opt for one model over the other.

Lobao analyzes both structural and social structural barriers, and factors which encourage women's participation (*incorporation*) in Latin American guerrilla movements. She addresses

three main questions with her work: what factors differentially affect Latin American women's participation as compared with men's? How does social-class affect women's ability to participate? And what does a gendered division of guerrilla labor look like (Lobao, 1990: 180-81)? Lobao argues that the major barriers to women lie in "the structural constraint of women's role in reproductive activities and traditional ideological constraints (patriarchal attitudes) that define women's roles" (Lobao, 1990: 183). Reproductive activities become inhibitors to full incorporation as women are expected to rear the children, tend to the home, and are socialized solely to manage these activities. The lack of autonomy provided women through the Latin American prototype of the patriarchal family can prove quite restrictive. Though women maintain considerable control within the private (domestic) sphere, men generally control public activities. This restraint is compounded by the legal status of women "in most Latin American civil codes . . . based upon *patria potestas*, the patriarchal right of the father to control his family" (Lobao, 1990: 182).

Lobao also looks at what facilitates women's participation in Latin American guerrilla movements. Her conclusions are two-fold, pointing out that

changes in the political nature of guerrilla struggle and the diffusion of feminist thought have encouraged more recent guerrilla movements to recruit women at a time when Latin American women are becoming increasingly more receptive to [the] need for their own liberation (Lobao, 1990: 185).

In other words, because Latin American guerrilla movements are embracing a strategy of prolonged war it has become necessary to guarantee women's incorporation into the left. The incorporation of women has also been facilitated due to the elaboration and dissemination of feminisms. She addresses the organizational characteristics of guerrilla organizations which encourage women's participation. The articulation of "strategic gender interests" (Molyneux,

1985) is necessary, she argues, to involve women. Women's "immediate needs" such as domestic provisions and public welfare need to be addressed (Lobao, 1990: 186). Similarly, relations between men and women within the guerrilla organization cannot be underestimated as an influential cause of joining or leaving a guerrilla organization.

Additionally Lobao analyzes the impact of class differences upon women's participation. She suggests that middle class and often elite women (and men) are likely to support revolutionary movements. Middle class women, due to a lack of familiarity with the daily experience of survival, may be less tenacious political fighters than working class women, though they tend to have less barriers to conventional or alternative politics. Middle class women are less vulnerable to the repercussions of imprisonment or job loss which tend to be very tangible inhibitors to activism for working class or poor women. Similarly, middle class women need not be consumed with income generation as are working class women, thus freeing measurable amounts of time for activism (1990: 188-89).

Lobao offers a brief discussion of the division of labor within guerrilla movements. From the outset, she points out that guerrilla movements challenge social order, and even if participation of women is minimal it is relevant given that traditionally, the militaries of Latin American states are closed to women⁴. Guerrilla armies, however, are part of the same patriarchal society which they are attempting to restructure; thus, the culture of sexism is not automatically eradicated. Women are more likely to find themselves in support rather than full combat positions. However, these support roles can be strategic.

⁴ Interestingly, while in Guatemala this summer I did see a few women in the military patrolling the streets.

⁵ See Shayne, 1997.

Karen Kampwirth's theories are closest to my own⁵. The thrust of her argument is that in a number of Latin American countries feminism is an unintentional result of guerrilla movements. Her argument is multifaceted. To begin with, she suggests that the recent "upheavals in Nicaragua, El Salvador and Chiapas were all made possible, in part, by previous shifts in gender relations" (1997: 2). Additionally, though feminism was not an intentional by-product of such guerrilla organizing, she asserts that it is surely not surprising as feminists and guerrillas have certain similarities. According to Kampwirth, "guerrilla struggles aim to transform social relations, to reduce economic and political inequality, in short, to turn the world upside down. Feminist struggles might be described in the same way, qualified only by the addition of the phrase, 'between men and women'" (1997: 4). Kampwirth also points to the narrowness of un-gendered theories of revolution for suggesting and/or assuming that peasantry is synonymous with men. In other words, Kampwirth is asking what happens to a guerrilla movement that has full support of peasant men, but not women? Quite simply, she suggests, such a scenario is not possible. Additionally, and most similar to my own assessment is Kampwirth's analysis that former women guerrillas often become the leaders of feminist movements both because they are skilled organizers, but also as they have experienced that though the revolution may have ended, their positions as women have not necessarily improved. In other words, a lack of gendered analysis on the part of the guerrillas leads to a feminist consciousness in the post-revolutionary period. Kampwirth also suggests that "feminism that developed in relation to guerrilla mobilization are characterized by their holistic nature (seeking to transform societal structures as well as ideology)" (1997: 9).

There is somewhat of a disjunction here as gender and revolution theory speaks predominantly to the causes of women's participation in revolutions. Lobao's ideas relating to barriers and openings to women in Latin American guerrilla movements are very poignant. Structural confines compounded by ideological beliefs regarding women's roles as mothers and domestic caretakers have certainly inhibited the full incorporation of a great many women, thus leading to the feminist consciousness of which Kampwirth speaks. Similarly, working class and poor women, though often more class-conscious and ready to mobilize, have had less time due to domestic work, paid labor, and security risks. On the other hand, middle class women did join opposition groups in significant numbers, and have stayed to help lead the feminist movement, again, often related to facing fewer daily obstacles. These barriers are relevant to the relationship between women in the resistance movement and the growth of women's/feminist movements. That is, women who wanted to fully incorporate with the guerrillas but could not have not forgotten that their involvement was often minimized or even squelched.

Lobao's analysis of the factors which encouraged women is also useful. The changing nature of the guerrilla movement to a prolonged war movement was certainly applicable in the case of El Salvador. By default women were *needed* if the war was to continue. However, if women were simply needed as bodies, what does this do to their revolutionary agency and political ideology which mobilized them to struggle? The factors which encouraged women were often simply tactical on the part of the revolutionary organizations inevitably leading many women to feel a sense of betrayal after the war, another key factor illuminating a relationship between guerrilla struggles and feminism.

Moghadam's argument regarding the "women's emancipation model" also proves very relevant to the question of revolution and feminism. In discourse and often in practice guerrillas

or revolutionary leaders may be committed to "the emancipated woman." The tension, however, between discourse and unfulfilled goals in the post-revolutionary period is another potential boost to the incorporation of women revolutionaries into the feminist movements. Though this theoretical juncture is helpful, Moghadam does not go far enough in her representation of women revolutionaries as self-conscious actors. She suggests that, for different reasons, both of her models of revolution view women as instrumental. Implicit in the assumptions behind her models is that women accepted these roles. This however only serves to belittle the indisputable significance of gender, and women, to the revolutionary process.

Karen Kampwirth however, pushes these questions in a provocative and new direction. By offering that feminism and guerrilla organizing are parallel endeavors she suggests a feminist outcome in a post-revolutionary context is "normal." Similarly, she suggests that unquestioned gendered roles in an otherwise egalitarian setting will inevitably lead to a feminist consciousness. Again, similar to my own analysis, she finds that such a contradiction is not benign when we are focusing on a group of cultural agents already skilled as organizers. The similarities I hold with the aforementioned scholars are significant. However, the work of all three women begs the question: how can revolutionary movements intentionally lead to feminism? That is, how might we begin to speak about feminism in the post-revolutionary context in a conscious way, rather than as an unconscious backlash? In other words, what is the relationship between revolutionary movements and feminism in a critical and self-conscious way?

Latin American Feminisms

Scholars such as Stephen (1994; 1997), Kampwirth (forthcoming), Westwood and Radcliffe (1993), Jaquette (1994), Chinchilla (1993; 1992), and Molyneux (1985) have addressed Latin American feminist movements, both from a regional perspective as well as by individual

nations. This work is broad in scope and method. The questions which are central here often address the now classic polemic of gendered versus strategic demands. Maxine Molyneux introduced this debate in 1985. She suggests that women organizing for basic needs, without explicit attention to gendered inequalities and structures that perpetuate such are simply fighting for "gendered demands." This was in contrast to the women organizing consciously to challenge gender systems of oppression, thus with feminist agendas. These women, according to Molyneux were putting forth "strategic demands." That is, are Latin American women organizing to meet basic needs which are simply the result of a gendered division of labor, (i.e. child care) and thus "practical demands," or are they actually organizing to counter systems of patriarchy, thus "strategic demands?" This paradigm has since been criticized for the pejorative light in which poor women's struggles are inevitably placed. (See Amy Lind, 1996).

Additionally theorists addressed the innovative organizing strategies of Latin American women as they coalesce under the guise of "traditional gendered" roles while creating a highly radical climate for "strategic demands." For example, Schirmer (1993), Stephen (1994; 1997) and Fisher's (1993) analyses of the motherist committees. The analyses put forth here are often feminist assessments of "non-feminist" groups. That is, the motherist committees have rejected the term "feminist." Their work tends to fall under the guise of "human rights" and they are very creative in both their use of symbols as well as explicit support from the Catholic church. Similarly, these groups have capitalized on the revered sense of mothers and family in the Catholic context to draw attention to the gross human rights violations to which their loved ones have been subjected. As mothers, wives, and grandmothers the motherist groups have also been extremely proactive in eradicating the public/private split. This by-product of their organizing is rather ironic as they are utilizing their "private" personas, (family member) to traverse the "public"

realm; however, none of this is done with feminist intentions. Society, nevertheless is forced to reconcile the feminist fallout generated by human rights violations leveled against a "non-gendered" group.

Another body of literature addresses the relationship between revolutionary movements and feminist movements (Randall (1992), Chinchilla (1993), Stephen (1997), Kampwirth (1997), and Shayne (1997).) In this case, the analysis is a somewhat cynical one: the aforementioned, to varying degrees, address not simply the roles of women in revolutionary movements but their treatment by their male compañeros. They argue that women revolutionaries are not only trained in the field, but are often subjected to inegalitarian practices within the context of "socialist" (or egalitarian) struggles. The contradiction often leads to a sense of betrayal and thus a catalyst to Latin American feminisms, or, what I call "revolutionary feminism"⁶. The backlash here is against revolutionary movements rather than repressive dictatorial regimes which have no promise of social justice for women.

The literature on the emergence of feminism in Latin America has been quite influential in my own theorizing. For the most part I reject the "gendered" versus "strategic" demand as not only a false polemic but also a Western middle-class construct not as suited to Latin American feminism as academic discourse would imply. The discussions of disrupting the private/public distinctions have proven quite useful to my analysis of revolutionary feminism in Latin America. That is, the mothersist groups did not organize as "feminists" yet their strategic presence was

⁶ This term should not be confused with the United States version of "*revolutionary feminism*" associated with militant separatist Valerie Solanis. Revolutionary feminism, I am suggesting, based on my discussions with feminists in El Salvador, is the notion that Latin American feminism is often born out of revolutionary struggles. Additionally, feminists in Latin America tend to see their battles akin to revolutionary struggles as they seek to completely transform society as it is currently known.

effective as a catalyst for transformative thinking nonetheless. And finally the literature regarding the relationship between revolutions and feminism has been quite useful. Though I placed myself in the "cynical" camp which suggests that sexism within socialist struggles leads to feminist consciousness, I also see other factors, many of which suggest more agency and pro-action on the part of women, rather than simply reaction.

Gendered Revolutionary Bridges

My own research has led me to theorize what I have come to term *gendered revolutionary bridges* (1997). Through the case of El Salvador I argue that women played strategic roles in that revolutionary movement. Women in the resistance movement (guerrillas, union, human rights, and war time women's movement activists) served a strategic role as gendered revolutionary bridges. First, these women were able to bridge gaps between civilians and the opposition by capitalizing on Salvadoran society's social construction of gender. That is, unincorporated civilians, I argue, were more likely to support and/or join the resistance movement if it was introduced to them (intentionally or not) vis-a-vis a woman organizer. If women revolutionaries, in all capacities, had been truly understood and "utilized" for this revolutionary capacity, I argue that the Salvadoran opposition would have been a more broad based and cross-classed coalition, and thus a more successful revolutionary endeavor⁷.

With respect to feminism, however, gendered revolutionary bridges play another distinct role. Women serving in the capacity of gendered revolutionary bridges, whether as union activists or guerrillas are also blurring the ever present distinction between the public and private spheres. It is quite often this vulgar separation of the public and private spheres marked

⁷ See Shayne, forthcoming (May 1999.)

by the elevation of the public (men) and the devaluation of the private (women) which perpetuates sexism even in the most revolutionary of societies. However, if women were fully accounted for agents in the Salvadoran, and indeed other revolutionary movements, we would see the erosion of the public/private dichotomy. Women would thus be empowered not only as revolutionaries through this process but respected political subjects in a gendered sense. Thus, the social construction of gendered roles would be destabilized. Needless to say, this process would inevitably effect men and their status in society; that is, pre-revolutionary gendered roles would be altered, thus feminism would be a natural byproduct of such movements rather than a reactionary backlash.

In short, it is incumbent that theorists and practitioners of revolution (feminist or not) take into consideration the role of women in both the *pre and post*-revolutionary process. I argue that women's needs -- "practical" or "strategic" -- will not fall away even with the success of socialism. Rather, the full incorporation of women into such revolutionary movements can not only help to secure positive outcomes in the structural sense of revolutionary movements, but egalitarian society's in the post-revolutionary era as well.

Gender/Revolutionary/Bridges (a whole and its parts)

The role of gender

“Gender is the social construction of sexual difference. It is the outcome of struggles over the ways societies define and regulate femininity and masculinity” (Dore, 1997: 9) In El Salvador, as in most parts of the world, prescriptions regarding gender are fairly rigid. Women’s roles in El Salvador include (but are not limited to) child care (voluntary and not as abortions are illegal under any circumstance,) cleaning, cooking, washing clothes, ironing, and in rural areas collecting water. Additionally, women are often part of the formal and informal market economy

by working as street vendors, blue collar workers, or domestic etc in attempts to either supplement their husband's or life partner's low incomes, or, as is often the case to make ends meet as the sole breadwinner. The percentage of single mother households has skyrocketed in El Salvador⁸. Similarly, women are also expected to be readily available sexual partners for their companions, regardless of their own interest. In short, women's roles are restricted to the private sphere unless they are forced to enter the public domain for economic reasons, and even then, this entry is not welcome and must be viewed as a process which facilitates the well being of the family (private sphere).

The traditional roles of men are quite opposite. Their work is outside of the home, they generally take responsibility for little if any of the domestic tasks, often including the financial well being of their children, and the rate of infidelity and even multiple families on the part of men is becoming increasingly common place (personal conversations, San Salvador, August/September 1998). Thus, men dominate the public sphere while simultaneously disrespecting and even disrupting the private. Within the left, in some cases the post peace accord context has altered these roles slightly but more often than not, women's typical double burden has increased to a triple burden as they are now active in the feminist and/or women's and/or leftist movements. As María Mirtala López, a dynamic twenty eight year old current "assistant" FMLN deputy pointed out women and men both go to meetings.

But who are the first to leave the meetings? Is it the men? No. It's us women. It's from tradition, and it's because, I believe, that we have more responsibilities. We clean the house, go to the market, do the ironing, take care of the children, and various other things that the men don't even know

⁸ Irresponsible paternity is a priority to the contemporary feminist movement as evidence by the emergence of recent organizations and propositions to mandate child support directly from the paychecks of all public employees (personal interview with Vilma Vasquez, August 29, 1998)

how to do. So women have twice or three times as many tasks as men when we get home at night from work (personal interview, 9/2/98).

Is it unrealistic to think these patterns can be disrupted? Perhaps, but why put limits on the revolutionary or sociological imagination? If historical precedents have been set which prove that dictators as ruthless and powerful as Batista or Somoza can be overthrown by low-budget guerrilla armies than why should we assume that ways of thinking and doing, regardless of their political, cultural and historical life span do not also have the temporary duration of a given state? Simply put, what I am suggesting is the need to redefine revolution: theoretically and practically with serious attention to gender as a decisive variable in the ability to achieve a successful revolution while also measuring the post revolutionary transformations.

If we agree that the above description of gendered roles is indeed accurate for El Salvador (pre and post war) then how do those roles apply to *gendered revolutionary bridges*? Let's start with the revolutionary movements during the war. We have seen that women's roles are dictated by the private sphere even when entering the public. The socially "protected" realm of the private imbues women with the constructed images of demure and unthreatening. It is safe to assume however that the populace, both men and women, will be slightly more flexible to alterations in social relations during a civil war as daily life is turned upside down and people become everything from disoriented to resourceful to resilient. Practically speaking what we saw in El Salvador was this: for example, women made up one third of the FMLN (Stephen: 1997). What however was the type of work that these women did in the FMLN? Lorena Peña, currently an FMLN deputy, explains that she was an exception for women in the FMLN. She explains that she joined at sixteen and worked "with the urban commandos and did clandestine work with the popular sector. Later I worked in intelligence and political education and finally in 1981 I was the

central chief of different fronts of the war, including San Salvador. In 1990-91 I participated in the political diplomatic commission” (personal interview, September 5, 1998). In this manner Peña considers herself lucky to have been able to work with the FMLN for so long and in so many different capacities; a unique experience for most women in the FMLN. In other words, women held predominantly support positions during the war doing everything from cooking, to sewing uniforms, to making and transporting weapons, to health work, to operating the radios and communication, and political-educational work (personal interviews with Lorena Peña, Mercedes Cañas, Mercedes Peña, María Ofelia Navarrete de Dubon, Maribel Osorio, Morena Herrera, Gloria Guzman, Arecly López, Leti Mendez, Vilma Vasquez, Irma Amaya, and Marina Rios; August/September 1998).

Two points need to be clarified here: all of the above work was and is indispensable to guerrilla warfare. It would be shortsighted to think that *any* of the above could have been eliminated, including even the nominally minor tasks like food preparation, as a guerrilla army can not perform the arduous duties of war if its’ collective brain and body are not regularly nourished. I don’t mean to romanticize these roles as clearly many would have been more appropriately filled by younger guerrillas, rather than female ones, simply to point out that they were necessary. The other point which needs to be emphasized is the commonality that the aforementioned tasks have. Much of the work that women guerrillas did required ongoing interaction with the bases, or civilians not directly in the FMLN. This was particularly true of education, political work, and transporting of weapons. Morena Herrera, ex combatant and current member of Las DIGNAS explained to me the complexity and indisputable necessity of political-educational work. She suggested that this work was fundamental to developing support among the populace because this was the way that unincorporated civilians actually learned about the struggle and came to embrace

it. She also explained that though educational work was seen as lower on the hierarchy of importance of guerrilla tasks, Herrera maintained that it was actually more difficult than combat as it took particular political communication skills which were not necessary for combat (personal interview, August 26, 1998).

In El Salvador there was a common saying “the people are our mountains,” since the country is rather flat yet mountains are necessary for guerrilla war. Leti Mendez, former coordinator of the women’s secretariat of the FMLN and ex-combatant explained to me that in El Salvador women and children were the mountains. Significant to the theoretical concept of gendered revolutionary bridges however, is Leti’s assessment that it was the women of the FMLN that fostered those relations with other women and children who in turn functioned as mountains (personal interview, September 4, 1998). In other words, women guerrillas, whether they did political-educational work or made tortillas for those in combat needed the support of the bases to receive entrance into communities of strategic value to the FMLN. Thus the women of the FMLN who served in the “support” positions were actually fertilizing the *mountains* in which the FMLN combatants were able to maneuver. If the development of these alliances was calculated military strategy rather than simply the coincidental result of sexist divisions of labor the FMLN would have had more mobility in the nation, thus more political-military advances during the war, and potentially a successful final offensive in 1989.

In short, the social construction of gender in the Salvadoran context put the majority of women combatants in positions where they worked with the bases. Similarly, these same gender paradigms led the base communities to be more open to the presence of women guerrillas inevitably building support for the FMLN and the revolutionary movement in general. This

gendered dynamic was unconscious, untapped, and under strategized; in retrospect, a revolutionary shame.

Revolutionary potential

In this section I want to expand the theorizing of revolutions by not only insisting on a gendered analysis in the making of successful revolutions but by applying a feminist analysis in the assessment of what makes organizations revolutionary. We have seen that women guerrillas have a revolutionary potential, that, as of yet has not been fully realized. Women guerrillas in their positions of support were actually constructing the metaphoric mountains that the FMLN needed in El Salvador. Unfortunately this unconscious process was not fully pursued thus thwarting the full revolutionary potential of women. Women played another revolutionary role in the popular movement. As suggested above political cultures of opposition and cross-class alliances are central to the making of successful revolutions (Foran, 1992). Political cultures of opposition are dynamic spaces which invite the full incorporation of women revolutionary agents. As Foran suggests, revolutions are made successful by, among other things, social movements above and beyond the parameters of guerrilla movements. As my research in El Salvador indicates, women were fundamental to these political cultures of opposition. In other words, if women revolutionaries in the popular (unarmed) sector of the revolution were acknowledged, encouraged, incorporated, and thus strategized for their full revolutionary potential we would have seen a broader resistance movement in El Salvador, and again, potentially the decisive factor to a successful revolution.

There are three particularly demonstrative illustrations of this phenomenon of women in the popular movement serving as what I am calling *revolutionaries*: The Committee of the

Mothers of the Disappeared (CO-MADRES), the Christian Committee For Displaced People in El Salvador (CRIPDES), and the National Association of Salvadoran Educators (ANDES). What these organizations share is three fold: they were all predominantly women (founders, leadership, and bases); as members of the popular movement (human rights and union sector) they served as *bridges* between the civilians and armed revolutionary communities; and finally, they were extremely combative organizations, which simultaneously challenged the government and military's repressive policies while throwing rigid gendered roles into a tailspin.

In the mid 1980s when the popular movement had been frightened into partial submission, it was the CO-MADRES marching through the streets of San Salvador that literally reactivated the popular movement (Stephen, 1994). The imagery is worth envisioning: the numbers of disappearances, political murders, civilian casualties, and attacks against peaceful demonstrators were so high in the mid 1980s that people were afraid to take to the streets. The women of CO-MADRES however placed themselves in a multifaceted position; they served as both leaders of the popular movement by reclaiming the streets of San Salvador while also acting as the protectors that their maternal personas commanded. They marched in their black dresses and white head scarves, the perfect image of a simple mourning mother. Their "weapons" were their bullhorns, the lists of names and pictures of disappeared, and the perseverance to hold the government accountable for atrocities against their loved ones. In other words, to the unincorporated civilian, particularly other women who had lost their children, partners, or other loved ones, these women spoke to them and provided an empathetic and human face to what I would argue was actually a quite revolutionary project. Their methods were peaceful but they undeniably were part of a movement that sought "transformations of a society's state" (Skocpol, 1979: 4)

Another organization with a similarly unthreatening exterior and a truly militant core was CRIPDES. During the height of the war, in response to the U.S. backed aerial bombing campaign which resulted in estimates between 800,000 and one million refugees and displaced⁹ peoples (Stephen, 1994: 136) CRIPDES organized what they called repopulations. What this meant was organizing the refugees living predominantly in Honduras and within El Salvador to return on foot, in groups of several hundred, to their homes which were in the zones of FMLN control. In essence these repopulations sent a message from the ground up that even bombs couldn't separate Salvadorans from their revolutionary communities. The relevance of these highly successful actions to the overall revolutionary project seems apparent. What needs careful analysis is the significance of women to such superficially peaceful but highly revolutionary activity. In short, the organizers of CRIPDES were not simply bridging the alliance between the bases and the guerrillas but literally bringing the bases back to the FMLN, or as Leti Mendez implied, moving mountains.

According to María Mirtala Lopez, at nineteen (now twenty eight) one of the founders of CRIPDES, jailed on three different occasions for organizing such politically combative events, CRIPDES's leadership included many women. Similarly, she pointed out that the bases of CRIPDES, or the people that they were repopulating were predominantly women, children, and older people, as the men were often in the war or dead. Thus, it was predominantly women leading hundreds of other women across the hostile Honduran border on these arduous revolutionary treks. Women leaders and organizers were able to empower some of any wars most

⁹ Displaced refers to those Salvadorans living within the borders of El Salvador but in refugee camps, as opposed to refugees who fled to the United States, Canada, Europe, or Latin America, and throughout Central America and Mexico.

disempowered people, the refugees, as they were homeless and generally experienced severe and multiple personal losses.

Another organization central to the popular movement and composed predominantly of women was the National Association of Salvadoran Educators (ANDES). The role of women within the paradigm that I am outlining is slightly different to that of CO-MADRES and CRIPDES. ANDES has an historically very significant role in the popular movement. They emerged in the streets and thus as leaders of the popular movement on June 21, 1965, fifteen years prior to the official declaration of war from the FMLN. This was a foresight of militancy not to be underestimated, again, one which should be credited to ANDES' women founder and leaders. ANDES was founded by Dra. Melida Anaya Montes¹⁰, a woman who has been martyred for over fifteen years and commands much reverence and respect within the left and feminist movements of El Salvador. On June 21, 1965, 20,000 teachers and other workers burst onto the streets of San Salvador. They surrounded the Presidential Palace, forcing the government to take note of their demands, which included legal status as a union, and the announcement of the formation of the union to the people of El Salvador. In a sense, this union dominated by women due to the ratio of female to male educators in El Salvador, suggested to the civilian communities that the injustices were not going to cease unless the people organized together and fought back.

¹⁰ Dra. Melida Anaya Montes was later known as "Comandante Ana Maria" when she joined the FMLN and became second in command of the Popular Forces of Liberation (FPL.) She died at the hands of a male compañero who disagreed with her political strategy in the war, thus an "internal dispute." Her colleague committed suicide after killing her. Since that day Melida Anaya Montes lives on providing a great heroine for women ex-guerrillas, the women of ANDES who have a definite pride towards their founder, and the women of the feminist movements. Today one of the leading feminist organizations in El Salvador has taken her name "The Melida Anaya Montes Women's Movement."

ANDES' strike is historically significant, especially when noting the leadership of Dra. Melida Anaya Montes and the brave and dedicated women teachers who led other workers for this significant moment in the political cultures of Salvadoran opposition. For me the significance of ANDES to the revolutionary movement is twofold: historically they had the militant foresight to take to the streets in an extremely hostile climate not only to call attention to the injustices in El Salvador but to catalyze action from other Salvadorans, thus a bridge from the organized to the unorganized in the pre-revolutionary years. And significantly ANDES showed Salvadoran society that women could be militant leaders, without guns, thus galvanizing political cultures of opposition.

In short, what I am suggesting in this section is that similar to the role of women in the guerrilla movement, women of the popular movement held extremely strategic positions. Again, the fact that these roles were gendered was unconscious, though I would suggest that the women of CO-MADRES, CRIPDES, and ANDES were aware of the revolutionary significance of their actions and their organizations. Thus, if women were actively placed in such strategic positions rather than ending up there by default (i.e. CO-MADRES were made up of mothers, CRIPDES of refugees who tended to be women, and ANDES teachers who also were disproportionately women,) the popular movement of the Salvadoran and subsequent revolutions would be undeniably strengthened by the alliances from a gendered militancy that felt and appeared "safer" for the unincorporated civilians. In other words, women have the strategic ability to expand and develop political cultures of opposition, a necessary condition to successful revolutions¹¹. I argue

¹¹ See Foran, 1992 for a discussion of the five necessary conditions to a successful revolution: 1) dependent development, 2) personalistic dictator, 3) political cultures of opposition, 4) internal economic downswing, and 5) world-systemic opening.

that this alliance fostered only through gender is one which is severely under recognized and thus under utilized with a potential to transform revolutionary movements from mere attempts at power to successful seizures of the state.

Bridges to feminism

Thus far we have seen the role of gender in developing specific and strategic roles and alliances within revolutionary movements, the underutilized potential of women revolutionaries, both armed and unarmed, and the way gender served as a bridge between civilians and guerrillas; in short we've looked at the role and potential of *gendered revolutionary bridges* during a war. In this section I would like to expand the notion of the *bridge* and speculate about how post revolutionary societies may be strengthened if revolutionary movements were to embrace this theory and strategy that I have outlined thus far.

As suggested above, gendered roles tend to be quite restrictive, however there is often more space for alteration during periods of extreme social upheaval like revolutions. As I have shown thus far women transcend the private and public spheres. We might assume that a woman guerrilla who is assigned the task of sewing uniforms or cooking meals is simply a reified manifestation of gendered roles within a revolutionary context. To accept this, however, is to dismiss the agency of the women who opted to join the FMLN, regardless of the status accorded to their position. Similarly, it dismisses the fact that they have chosen to shed their non-politicized feminine identity for that of militant woman, or guerrilla, regardless of the gendered nature of the tasks assigned. Similarly, we must not forget that participating in a guerrilla army, regardless of whether on the frontlines or in the "kitchens" necessitates leaving one's home and entering a wholly new territory. This move is perhaps the most extreme manifestation of crossing the border from private (individual) sphere to public (collective) sphere. This transformation

should not be underestimated as the likelihood of long term alterations of the social constructions of gender is significant. That is, as men and women become accustomed to these changes returning to pre-revolutionary patterns is often both untempting and difficult.

Related to this are the transformations which happen in the family unit and the long term effects that changing role models have upon children. For example, young girls and boys who are raised by a mother who only cleans, cooks, and tends to the family, while the father is involved in paid labor receives the message from their parents that women are expected to do unpaid domestic labor and men paid work, while not helping with the family. But what happens when the same children are raised by revolutionaries? As young boys and girls see their mother participating in a guerrilla army, whatever the capacity, they see that women do leave the homes for the public sphere, and in this case, for reasons quite contrary to social norms. They also may see their parents side by side in a guerrilla army which sends the unconscious message to the children that equality between genders is not an impossibility. In other words, a revolutionary family, though at times disruptive, also has the long term potential of providing children with new images and understandings of gender that they may then incorporate into their adult lives. This process might be understood as the micro long term effects of gendered revolutionary bridges.

We can see other examples of the merging or more appropriately *bridging* of the private and public spheres by turning to the women in the popular movement. The women of CO-MADRES for example have often been interpreted as perpetuating the gendered divisions in society by putting forth their motherhood in political spaces. This critique however is flawed on several grounds. First, it suggests again that the women had no agency in their decision to join the CO-MADRES and use that space to intentionally project their motherhood. It also suggests that the CO-MADRES were unaware of the political effectiveness of their tactics to capitalize on

the benign and even sacred image of the mother. Again this assumption strips the CO-MADRES (and all of the militant motherist groups in Latin America) of their political savvy. I would suggest that a feminist reading of the CO-MADRES is that they too took their private lives and forced them into the public sphere, thus destabilizing the divisions between the public and private sphere.

The same could be argued of CRIPDES just in a less explicit fashion; that is, the organizers did not project their femininity as part of their agenda, yet the gendered ratio of organizers and those repopulating should not be overlooked. To demographically analyze the make up the repopulated communities we would see that for the most part they were single mother families. These women, were forced into the public sphere as their “private” lives were literally destroyed by bombs and war and in response they publicly refused to accept that reality by recreating a new private life which was organized collectively and with looser gendered roles. If nothing else, the communities were predominantly women which did not eliminate the tasks that men had previously done but simply necessitated some alterations in the former gendered division of labor on the part of women. As discussed above, inevitably these changes would also effect the young girls and boys being raised in these communities with entirely different gendered role models¹².

Similarly, the women of ANDES also transgressed these previously rigid boundaries. Though it was the gendered division of labor in society that accounted for the majority of the teachers of ANDES being women this of course did not preclude them from being militant

¹² As discussed above, revolutionary parents can have quite an impact on their children and how these relations will challenge the future. One nineteen year old woman I interviewed was in her mother’s womb as her mother was incarcerated and tortured. The daughter was thus raised by a

activists. Significant to ANDES is Dra. Melida Anaya Montes. Her place as a revered leader in the revolution, both in the popular struggle and later with the guerrillas, and now a martyred name which directs the feminists, has deeply effected the women of ANDES and CO-ANDES (the women's commission of ANDES). These women maintain a certain pride that is distinct from the other organizers to whom I have spoken. The public significance of Dra. Melida Anaya Montes, even long after her death, has helped keep the women of ANDES and CO-ANDES in the public sphere.

What I am suggesting is again two fold. Women served the role of gendered revolutionary bridges during the war which we have already seen had much untapped potential. In the post war context the bridging of the public and private spheres which I have outlined above is a fundamental first step in the creation of not only a revolutionary society (according to Skocpol's definition) but an egalitarian society where feminism coexists as an accepted ideology rather than as a point of division and distrust. In short gendered revolutionary bridges can increase the likelihood of achieving a successful revolution, but equally if not more important, if respected and not resisted gendered revolutionary bridges can begin to transform masculinity and femininity in a society even before the revolution has triumphed. Thus a triumphant revolution would then be one which alters the basic class structures of the state and the patriarchy with which women must wrestle even in the most "revolutionary" contexts.

Conclusions

Can we really say that a revolution is successful if over half of the population's structurally subjugated position at best remains the same or at worst has regressed since before the

revolutionary woman whose example has led her to operate in Salvadoran society as if she is accorded the same opportunities as any man.

revolution? If we do call a revolution sociologically successful in this context what does it say about our definitions? Mustn't we acknowledge the lack of justice provided women? As I said initially, regardless of Skocpol's definition, for me a revolution is not successful if the subjugated position of women is not challenged, accounted for, and altered through the revolutionary process. This observation feels painfully obvious yet here it is nearly the beginning of the twenty first century and we still find ourselves discussing and debating such apparently intuitive observations. Does this mean we expand the definition of a successful revolution? For example, "rapid, basic transformations of a society's state, class, (*and patriarchal*) structures ... accompanied and in part carried through by class (*and gendered*)-based revolts from below" (Skocpol, 1979: 4) [emphasis added]. I read this definition and feel it is more accurate but even here we are leaving out the fundamental divisions in society based on racial and ethnic differences. If we start adding isms will the definition become too unruly and the number of successful revolutions drop even more? Is that really something we should be concerned with -- the quantity rather than quality of successful revolutions? It seems wholly overdue to start analyzing the post revolutionary societies and question whether *all* people's lives are actually improved by such often violent and bloody turmoil. To incorporate a racial analysis is unfortunately beyond the scope of this paper. However, I would submit that racial and ethnic minorities could play similar roles as revolutionary bridges (see Foran, 1998) as I suggest women can.. Thus, I am arguing that we need to expand our definitions and start assessing the post revolutionary periods beyond a simple class analysis. Again this feels an obvious observation to share but from analyzing recent revolutions it seems necessary to advance.

Theoretically the full integration and utilization of *gendered revolutionary bridges* would lead to more successful revolutions while simultaneously building more egalitarian post

revolutionary societies. Though most do not continue to argue that with the erosion of class stratification we find all other injustices eliminated as well, the sociology of revolution has been slow in addressing the next part of the equation. That is, if Marxism can not bring full social justices than what can? After many, many discussions with revolutionary feminists in El Salvador, ex guerrillas, feminist leaders, mothers of CO-MADRES, teachers, and daughters and sons of women revolutionaries I have grown to feel confident that *gendered revolutionary bridges* are the most viable option we currently have of simultaneously challenging gender and class oppression. For me this relationship is anything but inconsequential and I hope that this paper serves to move us towards a more holistic vision and theory of revolution which is both practical and liberating.

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