THE IMPACT OF WAR AND OUTWARD MALE MIGRATION ON FEMALE HUMAN DEVELOPMENT IN EL SALVADOR

A Thesis
submitted to the Faculty of the
Graduate School of Arts and Sciences
of Georgetown University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the
degree of
Master of Arts
in Development Management and Policy

By

Elizabeth Marie McDermott, B.A.

Washington, DC
November 27, 2007
The research and writing of this thesis is dedicated to
Mom, Dad, Mary and Colleen who have provided
me with unconditional support from afar for so long;
to Tom who has been a steadfast source of motivation and love;
and to the Salvadoran women I have been blessed to know
who inspire by example
# Table of Contents

List of Tables and Figures ................................................................. iv

Introduction .................................................................................. 1

Chapter I: A Brief Look at El Salvador Today .................................. 3

Chapter II: Women’s Historical Roles in Development ..................... 14

Chapter III: Women in Post-Conflict El Salvador ............................ 38

Chapter IV: Salvadoran Women and Migration ............................... 62

Chapter V: Conclusion ................................................................... 93

References .................................................................................... 100
LIST OF TABLES AND FIGURES

Graph 1: Female Labor Force Participation throughout Central America 1985-2006… 6

Graph 2: Labor Force Participation in El Salvador – Male vs. Female 1985-2006 ……7

Table 1: Female Secondary School Enrollment Rate in El Salvador 1991-2005 …….5

Table 2: Salvadoran Immigrants in the Americas 1970-2000 ............................ 83

Table 3: El Salvador’s Male/Female International Migration Ratio 1996-2004 ……… 83

Table 4: HDI, Remittance, Poverty and Education Statistics – El Salvador .......... 85

Table 5: Remittance Expenses in El Salvador Separated by Gender ....................... 86
INTRODUCTION

The objective of this thesis is to examine the lives of Salvadoran women, their roles in development, and outside factors influencing those roles. Specifically this investigation seeks to address the question: What is the impact of outward male migration and the post-conflict context of El Salvador on female human development?

I do not begin with the assumption that Salvadoran women have just begun to participate in development due to outward male migration and the post-conflict situation; instead, I begin by acknowledging that women are and always have been paramount to development in El Salvador. I hypothesize that improvements in women’s human development are partially due to outward male migration and the post-conflict situation.

In order to most clearly discuss the lives of Salvadoran women left behind by male migration in this post-conflict society, I have organized my work into three theoretical chapters complemented by a discussion of empirical evidence related to this topic. Chapter I discusses the current situation in El Salvador, includes an explanation as to why I chose women from this society to be the basis of my analysis, and discusses the female human development indicators most relevant to women from that country. Chapter II includes a literature review regarding women’s historical role in development as well as an explanation as to why I chose to use the Human Development Indicators.
and Amartya Sen’s ideas to form the basis of my development argument. Chapter III includes a discussion of women in post-conflict societies and relates this discussion to the development literature. Chapter IV includes an in-depth look at those who have been left behind by migration, as well as an empirical discussion regarding how migration directly affects female human development in El Salvador through the use of statistics such as: migration ratios, remittance data, and female labor force statistics.

Recently, migration literature has taken a deeper look at the lives of women after their perspectives had been largely overlooked for years; however, the literature still lacks an in-depth look at the lives of women who been left behind by migration. This thesis does not propose to fill all of the holes within the literature, but rather seeks to add to existing theories by providing a specific discussion regarding the lives of Salvadoran women who have been left behind. These women provide us with an excellent example as male migration out of El Salvador has increased within recent years, but also add an interesting perspective to the literature given that this country is classified as a post-conflict society.

Finally, chapter V provides a conclusion regarding what the current migration trends and the post-conflict situation mean for women’s lives today in El Salvador. The conclusion addresses the original research question: What is the impact of outward male migration and the post-conflict context of El Salvador on female human development?

1Throughout this thesis I understand development to be measured by the Human Development Indicators of education, adult literacy and life expectancy as well as by Amartya Sen’s definition of development as improved access to opportunities.
CHAPTER I: 
A BRIEF LOOK AT EL SALVADOR TODAY

It is arguable that El Salvador has been in a state of conflict since the massacre known as “La Matanza” in 1932, when the military murdered between 10,000 and 30,000 mostly indigenous peasants within weeks (Tula 1994, 191). Since that day, a seemingly constant state of repression has reigned in the small country. The civil war that rocked Salvadoran society from 1980 to 1992, and claimed the lives of over 75,000 people is still visible on the faces of countless Salvadorans, and the gang violence that currently threatens the population has created a sense of terror that seems to rival even that which was present during the war (ibid, 182). Recently named the most violent country in the Western Hemisphere, homicide claims the lives of an average of ten people daily in El Salvador (Henríquez 2007). The tiny nation is wrought with gang violence carried out by two of the world’s allegedly most dangerous gangs – MS-13 and 18th Street.

The Peace Accords, signed in Mexico in 1992, brought an end to the civil war but never provided the sustainable security that was promised, and the country today is exemplary of anything but peace (Tula 1994, 181). The Salvadoran people continue to suffer not only in a culture afflicted by violence, but from a persistent poverty that plagues the nation.

This thesis will address the current situation of Salvadoran women as they struggle to survive amidst a blanket of violence in a supposed ‘post-conflict society’ that is currently experiencing an exodus of its population, especially men. With a
background understanding of violence, migration and poverty – what I argue are the three
most pertinent issues regarding Salvadoran society today, we will explore here the
traditional role of women within development and the status of women in post-conflict
societies, followed by a general look at women left behind by migration, and then move
to a specific discussion regarding Salvadoran women.

To begin it is important to note that males and females lead extraordinarily
different lives in El Salvador. Salvadoran women earn a national salary that is 23.4%
less than men and they have an average household income that is 10% less than that of
males (UNDP 2005, 336). 32.7% of remittances sent home by migrants are sent to
female-headed households in comparison to the 17.3% sent to male-headed households
(ibid, 349); those remittances make up 42.4% of total income for female-headed
households and 27.6% of total income for households headed by males (ibid, 349).

A Brief Look at the Human Development Indicators in El Salvador

Before examining the factors affecting women’s lives, a brief examination of the
human development indicators of most relevance to women is warranted.

Life Expectancy

A person’s right to live a long and healthy life is regarded as an integral part of
development. According to the World Bank, female life expectancy in El Salvador has
risen consistently since 1985. In 1985, a Salvadoran woman could have expected to live
for 66.3 years. In 1995, that number had risen to 71.92 years, and in 2005 a woman could expect to live 74.45 years (World Bank 2005).

**Literacy Rate**

Data regarding female literacy in El Salvador is somewhat scarce. However, according to the numbers, female literacy has also risen in recent years. In 1992, 71.28% of the adult female population in El Salvador was literate. By 2004, that number had risen to 79.25% (World Bank 2005).

**Education**

Measured here through secondary school enrollment rates, education is inarguably paramount to development. In 1991, the secondary school enrollment rate for females in El Salvador was a dismally low 27.8%. That number rose consistently until 2004 when it reached 64.06%. In 2005, the number had fallen slightly to 63.7% but still exemplified a marked improvement from just 14 years earlier (see Table 1).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>27.8</td>
<td></td>
<td>50.41</td>
<td>52.98</td>
<td>55.1</td>
<td>57.96</td>
<td>61.02</td>
<td>64.06</td>
<td>63.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: World Bank 2005
Female Labor Force Participation

Another topic that warrants closer inspection is the female labor force participation rate in El Salvador. While this indicator is not a sole determinant of development, it is an economic measure which helps to explain the current situation of Salvadoran women.

It is interesting here to view female labor force participation rates across Central America and compare El Salvador to the rest of the region (see Graph 1). While female labor force participation rates have risen slightly in the last few years throughout the region, the only country that has surpassed El Salvador in terms of numbers of females currently involved in the labor force is Honduras.

Graph 1:
Female Labor Force Participation throughout Central America 1985-2006

Source: World Bank 2005
Also worth examining are female labor force participation rates in comparison to male labor force participation rates in El Salvador. As is reflected in Graph 2, while female labor force participation rates have risen within recent years, male labor force participation rates have declined.

**Graph 2:**  
**Labor Force Participation in El Salvador – Male vs. Female 1985-2006**

![Graph showing labor force participation rates for males and females in El Salvador from 1985 to 2006. The graph indicates a decline in male participation and an increase in female participation.](source: World Bank 2005)

Without delving too deeply into the topic, the declining male and increasing female labor force participation could be explained for a variety of reasons including El Salvador’s export led production in which females are disproportionately hired for factory work while males are often left unemployed, the decline of the agricultural sector in El Salvador which largely employed males, and the abandoning of the
Salvadoran labor force by males in exchange for strategies of migration, etcetera. Thus, females may be participating more in the labor force both due to the availability of jobs as well as the male exodus from certain labor sectors in favor of migration. These topics will be further explored in coming chapters.

_A Brief Look at the Current Context of Violence in El Salvador_

El Salvador today is arguably a turf war between MS-13 and the 18th Street gangs. While the formation of the gangs is debated, many claim they were formed by Salvadorans in the United States fleeing the war in El Salvador in the 1980s. Once these refugees arrived in Los Angeles they were forced to defend themselves against other L.A. street gangs made up of varying ethnicities. After the signing of the Peace Accords in 1992 marked the end of the civil war, many of the members of MS-13 and 18th Street were deported from the United States back to El Salvador and released onto the streets. Unfamiliar with the place they were supposed to call home, as many of them arrived in the United States as small children, they resorted to gang culture and formed social support networks based upon norms they learned in the gangs in L.A. Formed originally as a means for young men to feel at home in a place they knew little about, the gangs have since morphed into a violent social group that holds extreme levels of power in El Salvador and throughout Central America. The country has become a battlefield between the two violent groups and no citizen is free from the fear they invoke within the culture. Currently recruiting young boys as new members daily, the gangs show no sign of
disbanding. In many communities, when a boy is of age he is approached and threatened by gang members – he has the option to join the ranks of one of the gangs or die for refusing to join. While it is obvious that gangs are responsible for a large portion of the violence in El Salvador, I will not make the same mistake others have and attribute all of the country’s violence to gangs. Unfortunately, the violence in El Salvador is attributable to more structural problems than simply the existence of a gang culture.

The State’s Response to the Gang Problem

In an attempt to address the war that the gangs have created within their midst, the central government passed a law known as ‘Plan Mano Dura’ in July of 2003; in November of 2004, ‘Super Mano Dura’ was passed as a means of ‘upping the ante’ (Revista Envío 2003, 1). The goal of both policies was to eliminate gangs and violence from El Salvador. Under the law, anyone who had a tattoo or who was at any time or for any reason suspected of being in a gang, could be arrested for up to three months. Not only a flagrant violation of human rights, the government simply is not capable of prosecuting all of the suspected gang members arrested by Salvadoran law enforcement. During the first month following the implementation of Plan Mano Dura, only 30% of those arrested were convicted and imprisoned due to a lack of evidence (ibid, 7). If not arrested and immediately released, the most likely scenario is that prisoners are released after a short stint in jail - what has been referred to as a three month crash course in gang violence, only to be released onto the streets and arrested again shortly thereafter.
These government policies have not lowered the crime rate nor the homicide rate, which has risen consistently since the implementation of ‘Plan Mano Dura’ according to unofficial government data, and El Salvador is currently more dangerous than it was years ago (Pearce 1998, 590). While El Salvador today is faced with countless issues that threaten the security and well-being of the nation, it is undeniable that two of the principal issues are violence and steady poverty - 40.9% of the population lives below the poverty line (UNDP 2005, 481).

The Current Face of Migration in El Salvador

Given the situation described above, it is not surprising that hundreds of people leave the country a day in search of a better life abroad. Some may leave voluntarily, but most are fleeing; whether they are fleeing violence or poverty, they are fleeing just the same. Immigration, often ‘irregular’ or ‘undocumented’, has become the only form of survival for many.

While global statistics that effectively measure the Salvadoran population living abroad do not exist, it is estimated that close to 3.3 million Salvadorans currently live outside of their home country; in other words, one of every three Salvadorans no longer lives in El Salvador (UNDP 2005, 38). While statistics from the 1970s estimated that around 73,641 people emigrated from El Salvador, statistics from the year 2000 estimated that between 887,000 and 2,750,000 Salvadorans had chosen the route of migration (ibid, 35). Migrants constitute more than 20% of the population and hundreds of people
continue to leave the country a day searching for a better life elsewhere (UNDP 2005, 6). Salvadoran culture in too many communities has been morphed into a reality where the lack of ability to stay at ‘home’ creates a culture of people who are waiting to leave; this negatively affects not only developing ideas of identity but also discourages work towards local development that does not involve migration. Salvadoran women who have been left behind by migration are left to deal with and live in a country where violence is surging, children have few positive male role models, and hope too often rests on money that may or may not ever arrive.

*Gendered Aspects of El Salvador’s Migration Trends*

Before the civil war in El Salvador began in 1980, there were more Salvadoran female immigrants (55.9%) in the United States than there were males (44.1%). With the beginning of the war, immigration from El Salvador to the United States began to be dominated by men and has continued in that form since. In 2000, 80% of Salvadoran migrants in the United States were under the age of 44 and within that population there were 20% more men than women. Within the Salvadoran immigrant population over the age of 44 in the United States, there are 40% more women than men (UNDP 2005, 334-335). According to Eekhoff, “One of the most notable changes in Salvadoran family life due to migration has been the shift from male to female-headed households. In 1992, 26% of households were headed by women, in 2004, the number had jumped to 32%” (Andrade-Eekhoff 2006, 4).
The increased dangers of female migration, the fact that it is often easier for male than female Salvadoran immigrants to find jobs in the U.S., the belief that women belong in the domestic sphere, and the black market created by restrictive migration policies can all lead to the development of household strategies in which men migrate and women stay behind. Situations in which females are left behind by migration will be further discussed in chapter IV.

Due to the increase in migration out of El Salvador, and the fact that in the majority of cases in recent years it is the women who are left or stay behind in the home country, it is extremely relevant both socially and theoretically to investigate not only migration trends out of El Salvador, but to focus research efforts on women who have stayed behind (UNDP 2005, 335).

While statistics prove that currently in El Salvador the women most often remain in the home country, little investigation has been done on their role in society or local development. Some argue that within the phenomenon of migration, the burden or charge of development falls on the shoulders of those who have not migrated. Others hold that migrants are largely responsible for development in terms of the sending home of remittances. It is essential to further investigate the role migration plays in development as well as the effects migration has on those who are left behind.

The extensive literature regarding the changing of gender roles for Salvadoran women who have immigrated to the United States, is complemented by scarce data within the academic arena about the change or lack of change of gender roles for women.
who have stayed in El Salvador (UNDP 2005, 360). In order to attempt to fill this hole in
the research and to analyze and attempt to understand the situation of these women, it is
important to first take a look at history.
CHAPTER II: 
WOMEN’S HISTORICAL ROLES IN DEVELOPMENT

The definition of the term “development”, and the role of women within development, has been debated for decades. While previously seen as mere recipients of some of the benefits of development or even victims of its evils, women have recently begun to be viewed not only as participants in development but as essential actors within it. While I will address women’s role in development throughout history and today, I will begin by addressing the general concept and definition of development in order to provide a basis for analysis.

Definitions of Development

As one of the most heavily debated topics in current academic thought and research, development has been defined in countless ways throughout history. One could argue that the measure of economic growth dominates the discussion in regards to development. Gross domestic product and gross national product are statistics that have been used with great frequency in research as the sole means of measuring the level of development within a particular society. Liberal neo-classical economics is generally regarded as responsible for maintaining economic growth as the primary goal and meaning of development (Kabeer 1994, 13). Recent analyses of development have attempted to ‘dethrone’ this idea of development and replace it with concepts and ideas that respect economic growth as a means for development but deny that this type of
growth should be regarded as its sole end. This concept is reflected in Amartya Sen’s idea that economic growth does matter because of the benefits that people enjoy throughout the process of that growth, making economic growth a means to development rather than an end (A. Sen 1983, 753-754).

_Beyond Economic Measures_

Amartya Sen and Joseph Stiglitz, two well-respected academics of our time, agree that development is concerned with what people can or cannot do and the control that individuals have over their own destinies. Sen bases his analysis on the entitlements that people have and the capabilities that those entitlements generate; he believes that the process of development can be viewed through the expansion of these individual capabilities (ibid, 754-755). Stiglitz bases his analysis on the widening of individuals’ horizons and the reduction of their sense of isolation; he views education as the core of development (Stiglitz 1998, 5; 23). The ideas of these two authors are complemented by the writings of others who respect economic growth as a factor in development but do not place it on a pedestal as development’s sole objective.

These two different ways of looking at development – that of a measure of economic growth versus a transformation of society and increase in the capabilities of individuals – have been referred to as a narrow versus a broad perspective of development. The so-called narrow perspective is seen as a planned process through which there will be an improvement in economic growth, while the broad perspective...
involves the transformation of society as a whole (Kabeer 1994, 69). Feminist thinkers are largely associated with this broad perspective of development, as they believe that the oppression and exclusion of women occurs through various societal structures rather than solely the economy.

The Feminization of Poverty and Women's Work

In the past few decades it has become obvious to scholars and politicians alike that women in our world are suffering from what has been referred to as the ‘feminization of poverty’. During the United Nations Decade for the Advancement of Women, from 1975 through 1985, it was determined that women make up half of the world’s population, they perform two-thirds of the world’s working hours, they receive one-tenth of the world’s income, and they own one-hundredth of the world’s property (Peet 1999, 164). These findings, as well as the organized movements of Northern and Southern feminists and the UN Commission on the Status of Women, demanded a more in-depth look at the role of women in our world, especially in regards to the role of women in development in ‘third-world’ countries (Tinker 1997, 33). Virtually every development organization established programs and projects with a specific emphasis on the current situation of women in an attempt to improve the economic and social aspects of their lives (Peet 1999, 164). The main idea of these programs was that women’s problems stemmed from their insufficient participation in economic growth; however, what they failed to take into account was that women were participating in economic growth, but in
ways that were difficult or impossible to measure (ibid, 164). Women’s activity in four
general areas: subsistence production; informal paid work; domestic production and
related tasks; and volunteer work, was not considered productive or was overlooked by
economic analysts, because it did not generate wages (Benería 1997, 112). Women’s
work was, and often continues to be, invisible or regarded as natural and of little value
because most tasks were performed within the household and thus not seen as productive
or as a direct contribution to the economy (Nisonoff 1997, 178).

The participation of women in the informal labor sector adds to the difficulty of
measuring the economic impact of female labor. Women in the countryside and the cities
of ‘developing countries’ are especially vulnerable to unemployment and thus create
employment for themselves in the informal sector. While formal sector employment is
defined as that which offers regulated wages, pensions and benefits, informal sector
employment does none of the above. The informal economy in which women
participate, most often consists of jobs in the preparation of goods for sale in the market,
domestic service, sub-contracting and home production; this informal economy does not
provide a sufficient number of secure, stable, well-paid jobs for all the women that seek
them (Nisonoff 1997, 182).

The informal characteristic as well as the domestic, non-public aspects of
women’s labor have been said to have a direct impact on women’s social status and
influence. According to Marxist-feminist scholarship, as men become more involved in
production for exchange in capitalist societies, women’s work takes place increasingly
within the domestic sphere. Many scholars have argued that the more women are involved in the public, or non-domestic sphere, and can define themselves through that labor, the greater their status and influence within their communities. In other words, the historic division of labor by gender has caused men to excel and women to be left behind in various societies (Charlton 1997, 12).

According to feminist theorists a traditional gender-based subordination has existed for many years in varying cultures in which women are typically the ones who suffer. These types of traditions have limited not only women’s control over resources such as land, but have also imposed what was alluded to above – sexual divisions of labor. As previously addressed, within this division women’s work is often respected less and holds lower status or perceived societal importance. These labor divisions also restrict women’s movement not only through the labor force, but through society as a whole (G. Sen and Grown 1987, 26). Theorists argue that a historical oppression of women demands that their viewpoints be widely acknowledged today – the basis for the argument that it is necessary and valid to view society from the vantage point of the poor and oppressed.

**The Vantage Point of the Poor and Oppressed**

It has been argued that the perspective of poor and oppressed women is not only a unique manner from which to view the effectiveness of development programs, theories and strategies, but that this perspective also carries with it a power to analyze that is
supremely different from analysis from any other vantage point. This argument for the inclusion of the voice of the ‘third world’, poor, oppressed woman is championed by Gita Sen and Caren Grown who provide three reasons as to why these women’s voices should be held paramount within the study of development. First, these two authors note that it is natural to start with the perspective of women when setting goals for development as women make up the majority of the poor, underemployed and economically disadvantaged in most societies. Second, women’s work, which dominates the provision of basic needs (such as the responsibility for water, health care, child-rearing, etc.), is vital to the reproduction and survival of human beings in all societies. Finally women’s work in trade, services and technological industries is widespread in many societies, and thus the effect of development on these sectors is largely felt by women and the economies dependent upon these industries (G. Sen and Grown 1987, 23-24). From this broad idea that development should be viewed from the perspective of poor and oppressed women, we move to a more specific review of the literature in which five schools of thought regarding women and development have been established.

In 1983 Buvinic argued that approaches to women in development could be classified as welfare, anti-poverty and equity; in 1989, Moser suggested efficiency and empowerment as two additional classifications (Kabeer 1994, 4-5). Welfare and efficiency have since become the two dominant approaches in direct opposition to one another, while the other approaches have been placed within the two classifications on the conceptual spectrum (ibid, 5). The existing literature regarding women and the
concept of development can be divided into five main schools of thought: Women in Development (WID); Women and Development (WAD); Gender and Development (GAD); Women, Environment, and Alternatives to Development (WED); and Postmodern and Development (PAD) (Peet 1999, 179). A recent emphasis has been placed on a new concept referred to as gender mainstreaming. While each school of thought will be addressed here, special attention will be given to WID, WAD, GAD and gender mainstreaming.

Women in Development

Many see Esther Boserup’s publication of Women’s Role in Economic Development (1970) as the beginning of the concept of Women in Development (WID) (ibid, 179). Boserup’s general argument was that, “women workers are marginalized in the process of economic development because their economic gains as wage workers, farmers and traders are slight compared to those of male workers” (Benería and G. Sen 1997, 45). Thus, Boserup argued, policies must be redirected to address these inequalities so that women could more fully experience the benefits of modernization (ibid, 45).

First used by the Women’s Committee, of the Washington, DC, chapter of the Society for International Development as a way to call attention to the situation of ‘Third World’ women, the term ‘women in development’ came to embody the idea of bringing women into the development process (Peet 1999, 180). WID subscribed to the liberal
neo-classical idea of development as a linear process of economic growth, with the problem being that ‘Third World’ women were left out of this process and thus rendered invisible (ibid, 180). In 1993, Caroline Moser named five variations within the WID school of thought which reflected policy changes in western development agencies: the welfare approach, which focuses solely on women’s reproductive roles and views population growth as the primary cause of poverty and thus supports programs to control it; the equity approach, which called for gender equality; the antipoverty approach, which focused on meeting people’s basic needs and enhancing women’s productive roles through work in which they earned wages; the efficiency approach, which stressed women’s reaction and response to the debt crises of the 1980s and women’s response to the restructured economies; and the empowerment approach, which emphasized grassroots organizing and women’s need to transform oppressive laws and structures from below (Visvanathan 1997, 20). In each of these approaches, women were portrayed as victims (Peet 1999, 181). Rather than question existing social and power structures, WID worked within them, thus never inquiring about the history of female oppression and ignoring the inequality of responsibility and value that existed between women’s and men’s work (ibid, 181).

WID was largely criticized for its focus on poverty rather than oppression; its lack of consideration for race, class and culture; its exclusive focus on women rather than gender relations; its failure to question structural issues; its sole focus on productive work and disregard for reproductive activities; and in general, its non-confrontational approach.
(ibid, 182). WID scholars were also criticized for portraying ‘Third World’ women as backward, vulnerable and in need of help from the ‘First World’. This school of thought further institutionalized the hierarchical division of knowledge and thus power as ‘First World’ women and development agencies sought to provide solutions to ‘Third World’ women’s problems. Rather than rethinking development theory, WID scholars simply tacked women on to the already existent theory of development.

WID largely ignores ideas that development and change cannot be imposed from the outside but must come from within (ideas which will be discussed in greater length shortly). By attempting to impose change not only from the outside but almost solely through economic means, WID ignored traditional, oppressive gender structures within society. As will be shown shortly with the case of El Salvador, development strategies based solely on economics lack the holistic approach necessary to affect lasting change. Current migration trends and the post-conflict situation will be discussed in coming chapters as examples of issues outside of economics which also have significant impacts on women’s lives. While WID can be referred to within these examples as both situations gave women power through increased financial responsibilities, the school lacks the holistic discussion necessary to explain women’s role in development.

*Women and Development*

While the basis of WID was that women should be brought into modernization, Women and Development (WAD) argued that women were already part of the
development process and it was precisely women’s link with modernization that had impoverished them (Peet 1999, 183). Focused on relations between women and men rather than just on women themselves, WAD has its historical roots in dependency theory and neo-Marxist approaches (ibid, 183). WAD held that women were involved in global capitalism and modernization, but the problem was how they were involved – for example as a cheap labor source in factories run by multinational corporations (ibid, 183). Within this school, Gita Sen and Caren Grown of DAWN argued that the perspective of poor, oppressed women provided a means to analyze and judge development programs that had never been considered before, for the simple reason that these women ‘knew’ poverty (Peet 1999, 184). This idea mirrors the thinking of Naila Kabeer in her book, *Reversed Realities: Gender Hierarchies in Development Thought*:

This idea that development theories and practice should start from the vantage point of the poor Third World women should not be taken to imply that somehow this figure is more knowledgeable than all others, but rather that she offers the viewpoint from below, a viewpoint that can help to realign development paradigms more closely to ‘the real order of things’. Nor should it be taken to signify that only the dispossessed women of the Third World matter, but rather that without a structural transformation of the lives of the poorest and most oppressed sections of all societies, there can be neither development nor equity (Kabeer 1994, 81).
While WAD viewed women’s public and private work as central to the maintenance of society and addressed structural problems that maintained inequality, WAD was criticized for not taking into account social relations of gender within classes or the patriarchal structures within production; the sole concern with women’s productive role and thus disregard for women’s role in reproduction; failure to address relations between gender roles; the assumption that the improvement of women’s position would accompany the equalization of international structures; and the continued grouping of women as a single unit without regards to race, class or ethnicity (Peet 1999, 186; Visvanathan 1997, 19).

As will be shown shortly, the imposition of a collective identity not only denies individual capabilities, but restricts action towards the imposed goal. Similarly, by taking a solely negative view of women’s role in the productive sector, WAD denied the benefits women could potentially gain through their roles in production. As we will see in the following chapters, women do benefit from their roles in the productive sector and Salvadoran women in many ways exemplify those gains.

*Gender and Development*

The school of Gender and Development (GAD) developed in the 1970s at the Institute of Development Studies amongst women interested in using gender relations between men and women as the vantage point to analyze women’s subordination within the development process (Peet 1999, 187). In their report entitled, “Gender and
Participation”, the BRIDGE organization cautions that operational frameworks of development tend to treat women and men as two completely different groups in opposition to one another based on their sex alone. Often these frameworks present women as having not only different interests but also competing claims with men (Akerkar 2001, 3). BRIDGE argues that these types of frameworks isolate women and men and refuse to acknowledge the social relations they experience together that are important to both men and women’s well-being (ibid, 3). Based on this analysis, GAD’s approach, which acknowledges the importance of gender relations, is essential whereas the approach of WID and WAD, which treats women and men as two completely separate and often competing groups, can be harmful to both sexes.

Another principal difference exists between the schools of WID and GAD – whereas WID accepted the sexual division of labor, GAD rejected this division arguing that it caused men and women to become dependent upon one another. GAD further argued that the allocation of tasks should be changed in order to debunk the idea of a sexual division of labor (Peet 1999, 187). Nalini Visvanathan argues that “the outcome [of GAD] is an analytical framework that emphasizes gender relations in both the labour force and the reproductive sphere…the GAD model adopts a holistic approach and treats development as a complex process influenced by political and socio-economic forces” (Visvanathan 1997, 23). While previous schools of thought failed to address differences among women that stem from class, race, creed and ethnicity, GAD addressed and accepted these differences. This school used gender relations rather than women as the
main category for analysis and argued that women’s roles in society could not be viewed separately from gender relations (Visvanathan 1997, 187). Within Gender and Development theory, “women [are] seen as agents of change rather than as passive recipients of development assistance, [GAD also] stresses the need for women to organize themselves for a more effective political voice” (ibid, 19). We will return to the concept of agency shortly.

GAD was also the first school of thought to acknowledge the responsibility and role of the state in promoting women’s emancipation, thus acknowledging the argument that, “however weak the government of a Third-World state may be in some spheres, [it] is still most often the key factor in determining whether development occurs, how it occurs, and who benefits from it” (Peet 1999, 188; Charlton 1997, 9). While some theorists criticized Gender and Development theory and argued that GAD still held on to modernist tendencies and continued to view poor women as a single group, it has been viewed by many as the most realistic theory regarding women and their role in development (Peet 1999, 188).

In the discussion regarding the lives of Salvadoran women that follows, GAD seems to be the most accurate way of viewing women’s role in development. I continue my argument in line with this school of thought that true, sustainable development requires agents of change, and that the breakdown of the division of labor (and consequently the public versus private sphere dichotomy) in El Salvador has had a direct impact on the female human development indicators for that country.
Women, Environment and Alternatives to Development

The school of Women, Environment and Alternatives to Development developed in the 1970s amidst women who sought to draw connections between male control over nature and men’s control over women (ibid, 188). Known as a radical feminist approach, theorists within this school argued that science and development were projects of Western patriarchy and were killing nature; as victims of the violence of patriarchal development, and in an attempt to protect nature and preserve their sustenance, women resisted development (ibid, 189). Sustainable development was essential within the WED perspective (ibid, 190). As I view this as an extraordinarily radical approach and means of explaining women’s role in development, I feel that this brief mention of this particular school of thought will suffice for my purposes within this discussion.

Postmodernism and Development

The Postmodernism and Development (PAD) perspective criticized GAD for representing ‘Third World’ women as the “other” and WID for portraying women as victims, sex objects and cloistered beings. Scholars in the PAD school claimed to accept and understand differences between women, and also believed in the power of discourse to foster dialogue. They believed this type of dialogue could empower ‘Third World’ women to articulate their own needs and create their own agendas (Peet 1999, 191-192).
Gender Mainstreaming

A new concept has recently been established to address women’s role in development and some of the failures of the previous schools of thought; this new concept is referred to as gender mainstreaming. In 1995, all United Nations member states ratified the Beijing Platform for Action and committed to put forth efforts to achieve “gender equality and the empowerment of women”; gender mainstreaming was one of the mechanisms agreed to in order to help attain that goal (C. Moser and A. Moser 2005, 11). Following the signing of the Beijing Platform for Action, it is clear that many international agencies have put gender mainstreaming policies in place; however, the implementation of these policies and their effects is unclear (ibid, 19). The current problem facing the effectiveness of gender mainstreaming is that when terminology becomes accepted at a policy level, but is not properly implemented, it can serve to blunt demands for change in the sense that governments and institutions can say they have made changes and people have no reason to complain. Even if gender mainstreaming has not been properly implemented, if terminology has been changed, institutions can claim they have addressed the problem (Clisby 2005, 23). In 1997, the UN Economic and Social Council defined certain parameters which form most definitions of gender mainstreaming today. The following is one such definition:

Mainstreaming a gender perspective is the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all and at all levels. It is a strategy
for making women’s as well as men’s concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality (C. Moser and A. Moser 2005, 12).

It is obvious that this definition creates some lofty goals for organizations and institutions which can be compromised by a lack of financial and human capital resources, as well as the conflict between gender equity and the neoliberal goal of efficiency (True 2003, 371). In contrast to many other concepts, rather than seeking to remove barriers to women’s equality with men, gender mainstreaming recognizes gender differences and seeks to work through them (ibid, 369). While the two schools of thought are similar, the switch from gender and development to gender mainstreaming in the 1990s reflected an attempt to promote institutional change in the ‘developed’ as well as the ‘developing’ world (ibid, 370).

Critics of gender mainstreaming view the concept and the new language used as having the potential of further marginalizing women’s concerns just when they were beginning to be recognized by world governments and international institutions. Supporters of the new concept claim that gender mainstreaming will help make governments more efficient and democratic as well as promote strong economies, competitiveness and growth (True 2003, 370).
The Feminist Perspective

The feminist perspective on modern development theory views “development as a conscious practice, as a set of policies, [which] alters gender relations in favor of men, shifting resources to the male sphere of control, making women more vulnerable to disasters, whether natural or social in origin” (Peet 1999, 192). Feminist discourse has been widely praised by many while stringently criticized by others.

Chandra Mohanty provides two critiques of western feminist discourse. Her first critique is the analytical assumption of women as an already constituted group with similar or the same interests regardless of their class, ethnicity or race. She argues that this type of assumption implies a notion of sexual difference that can be applied universally as well as cross-culturally. Mohanty’s second critique involves the implication within feminist thought of a homogenous notion of the oppression of women as a group which thus produces the image of an ‘average third world woman’ who is “ignorant, poor, uneducated, tradition-bound, domestic, family-oriented, victimized, etc.,… in contrast to the (implicit) self-representation of Western women as educated, as modern, as having control over their own bodies and sexualities, and the freedom to make their own decisions” (Mohanty 1997, 80). Mohanty believes it is essential for feminist thinkers and writers to remember that,

The power to set an agenda, to arrive uninvited in a country for a brief period of time, to tell people how they ought to feel and think about their sexuality and their bodies, to assume the right to rescue other people’s
children, and to use this experience as a yardstick of one’s own freedom, constitutes standard procedure in the cultural production of imperialism (Volpp 2001, 1209).

Other criticisms of modern, western, feminist thought address the use of concepts such as household strategies, community solidarity and common identities. In modern day development discussions, households are often treated as if they have a logic and interests of their own, or in other words, as an individual entity possessing interests similar to that of a person. Similarly any individual behavior or action exhibited by a member of a household is seen to be motivated by household interests, when the behavior may in fact be self-motivated and not at all in the interests of the entire household (Wolf 1997, 119-120). This type of analysis “reflects a romanticized view of automatic and inevitable mechanical solidarity between members of poor families. Such an approach assumes that cohesion and coherence rather than conflict are at the basis of intra-household relationships” (ibid, 128).

Scholars from a neoclassical economic or Marxist economic background often subscribe to this idea and believe that the competitive spirit, struggle, and economic self-interest inherent in capitalist development never enter the household (ibid, 129). This assumption of automatic solidarity often carries over into community analysis or development projects based around community relations. These types of development programs often fail to recognize that “communities are not homogenous entities with monolithic interests. A community focus obscure[s] the differences between the interests
of societal groups and their articulation” and instead assumes the same type of automatic solidarity that is inherent in the assumption of inevitable household strategies (Akerkar 2001, 7). A third similar concept used by western feminists is the idea that all women share a common identity as females and that each woman possesses thoughts, interests and desires similar to, if not the same as other women, solely on the basis of her sex (Peet 1999, 163).

This grouping of women together into one group sharing traits, hopes and goals is often mirrored in the creation of opposition between groups of men and groups of women. While the sexes are grouped together in male and female groups they are often placed at opposing ends or pitted against one another. I believe it is essential for modern feminists to heed the advice of Teresa de Lauretis in an attempt not only to treat women as different from other women, or men as having separate interests and characteristics from other males, but also to ensure that women and men are not arbitrarily based in opposition based solely on their sex at birth. “To pose the question of gender as arising from a fundamental sexual difference between men and women has the effect of universalizing gender opposition, and makes it impossible to articulate differences among and within women” (Volpp 2001, 1181).

A final critique that I have chosen to address is the common criticism that many feminists regard women as passive receivers of the benefits of development, modernization, or favorable government policies or programs, rather than viewing them as active agents of development. Many argue that women’s problems will be solved only
when men and the policies and programs they control change, rather than when women become agents of change. Paulo Freire shares this criticism in his book *Pedagogy of the Oppressed* when he states:

This, then, is the great humanistic and historical task of the oppressed: to liberate themselves and their oppressors as well. The oppressors, who oppress, exploit, and rape by virtue of their power, cannot find in this power the strength to liberate either the oppressed or themselves. Only power that springs from the weakness of the oppressed will be sufficiently strong to free both. Any attempt to “soften” the power of the oppressor in deference to the weakness of the oppressed almost always manifests itself in the form of false generosity; indeed, the attempt never goes beyond this (Freire 2003, 44).

While a seemingly radical viewpoint on oppression, Freire may be onto something. If history is any indicator, western feminists may be waiting around for generations if they see the liberation of ‘Third World’ women as blossoming the moment men, and the institutions they control, change.

Given the option of defining women’s role in development in so many different ways through numerous schools of thought, I tend not to subscribe completely to any specific school but rather borrow ideas from each concept as well as from the writings of Amartya Sen, Joseph Stiglitz and Paulo Freire. I base my ideas regarding female human development on the concept of agency developed by Sen.
Amartya Sen’s Concept of Agency

According to Sen, an agent is “someone who acts and brings about change, and whose achievements can be judged in terms of her own values and objectives, whether or not we assess them in terms of some external criteria as well” (A. Sen 1999, 19). Sen’s writings address the ‘agency role of the individual’ not only as a member of the public sphere but also as a participant in economic, social and political actions and aspects of life. In other words, a woman is an agent of development if she acts and brings about change and can judge her own achievements based on her own values and objectives. These ideas will form the basis for all discussions regarding development throughout this text. They will be combined with the Human Development Indicators of life expectancy, school enrollment and literacy in order to portray a conceptual definition of development that goes beyond measures of income and economic advancement.

According to Sen, women’s role in development has transformed from an idea of women as passive receivers of welfare assistance to an idea of active women as development agents. “No longer the passive recipients of welfare-enhancing help, women are increasingly seen, by men as well as women, as active agents of change: the dynamic promoters of social transformations that can alter the lives of both women and men” (A. Sen 1999, 189). While women are no longer viewed as passive receivers of welfare assistance, the well being of women is obviously still extremely important and paramount to development. In fact, one of the main reasons Sen believes one should focus on women’s agency is because of the capability that agency has to remove certain
iniquities which decrease women’s well being (A. Sen 1999, 191).

With Sen’s ideas as a basis, I also take into account Freire’s belief in critical reflection, the aim of which is “for local people to be able to represent and analyse information about their livelihoods or other issues, and make their own plans” (Akerkar 2001, 2). I am a firm believer in this concept, also shared by Liberation Theology, that change must come from below, or from the people who are in fact experiencing that change. I am in agreement with Stiglitz that a change in the way of thinking represents the heart of development, and because people cannot be taught how to think, change, and therefore development, cannot be imposed from the outside (Stiglitz 1998, 16). Stiglitz also addresses the idea that exogenous donations can often create hierarchies (ibid, 16). I believe this concept can be further expanded to include exogenous ideas, policies and norms. Anything imposed from the outside creates hierarchies within. While I do believe that change must come from within, and that individuals must become agents of development, I also acknowledge the all too prevalent existence of the violence of oppression within our world.

According to Freire, “Any situation in which some individuals prevent others from engaging in the process of inquiry is one of violence. The means used are not important; to alienate human beings from their own decision-making is to change them into objects” (Freire 2003, 85). The type of oppression Freire speaks of alienates human beings from their ability to become agents of development. Violent oppression suppresses and denies the entitlements that Sen believes each human being is born with,
and thus does not allow for the capabilities, which stem from those entitlements, to develop. In other words, oppression robs a person of her dignity and her capability to make decisions regarding her own life and destiny. Policies and programs within world governments and international institutions are necessary to ensure that this type of oppression does not occur in any way, with special attention given to ensure that the oppression of women does not occur solely on the basis of their sex.

According to Joseph Stiglitz, new development strategy sees the transformation of society as the principal objective of development (Stiglitz 1998, 12). As has been discussed above, this transformation of society requires a change in gender relations and hierarchies that currently exist within the world’s diverse societies. This transformation not only demands the erasure of all forms of oppression related to gender, but also deems it imperative that women are viewed as essential actors in productive as well as reproductive spheres. Women are, and have been for centuries, agents of change within social, economic and political arenas. For far too long women, especially women in the ‘developing world’, have been plagued with an existence and forced to experience life while “being present and yet not visible, being visible and yet not present” (Macedo 2000, 26). There is overwhelming evidence that when women get the opportunities that men have enjoyed for centuries, they are equally as successful in making use of these opportunities as men are. It is time that women’s extraordinarily important role in development not only be acknowledged, but respected, whether it be through the school of Women in Development; Women and Development; Gender and Development;
Women, Environment, and Alternatives to Development; Postmodern and Development; or gender mainstreaming. It is time that women are able to experience and enjoy both being present and visible.

**A Summary of Women’s Historical Involvement in Development**

In summary, women’s contributions have historically been overlooked in many measures of development due to the fact that their labor in the domestic sphere is often viewed as natural and does not generate wages, and to the fact that women’s work in the informal sector is extremely difficult to measure. However, new ways of measuring development which view access to opportunities and capabilities as a basis for measurement rather than economic figures, promise to accentuate the integral role women have played in development for centuries. The measures of development espoused by Amartya Sen promise not only a recognition of women’s involvement in development, but also a means to measure changes in female human development in El Salvador in recent years.
As previously discussed, the Salvadoran people continue to suffer today from an historical affliction of violence. Here I will address the current situation of Salvadoran women as they struggle to survive amidst a blanket of violence in this so-called ‘post-conflict society’. We will briefly explore here the traditional status of Latin American women and then move to a specific discussion of Salvadoran women and the content of their lives for the past 80 years – as wives, mothers, combatants, refugees, and human rights activists. I posit that through the fulfillment of their traditional roles as women, Salvadoreñas have not only changed the fabric of society in terms of repressive gender structures, but that their actions during the war largely determined the place they hold in society today and the current increase in female human development indicators.

The Domestic Versus the Public Sphere

A stringent dichotomy between the domestic and public spheres has traditionally formed a part of various societies in Latin America. Historically, women’s ‘proper’ place has been in the domestic sphere or the home. Some authors argue that this fervent distinction between the two spheres stems from the strong attachment to the family still found today in Latin America – an attachment that is less visible in the more ‘industrialized’ countries (Safa 1990, 366). Helen Safa notes that women in Latin America continue to value the family because their roles within it are never
questioned; women’s thoughts, opinions and values are always legitimate as long as they are speaking as wives and mothers (Safa 1990, 366). The legitimacy gained by women through their place in the domestic sphere is reflected in the phenomena of *machismo* and *marianismo*.

The two concepts have largely affected Latin America and continue to play a large part in society and politics today. “*Machismo*, an idealized stereotype for men, involves being strong, dominant over women, and sexually virile. *Marianismo*, the counterpart for women, involves being like the Catholic image of the Virgin Mary: virtuous, sexually pure, subservient” (Lips 2003, 400). Women have been relegated into the domestic sphere because of their ability to reproduce. They are expected to raise the children, care for the home, and not venture into any activity that does not directly involve either one of the two. Due to the subordination of women, they participate in nearly all non-domestic spheres of life to a lesser extent than men do (Reif 1986, 147-148). Latin America has fallen victim to this type of gender stereotyping for years. Historically, women in the region have suffered the stereotype of being domesticated, uneducated, less than knowledgeable about the political structures of their countries and weak.

While some argue that Catholic images of the Virgin Mary have been used by repressive states to control women through portrayals of mothers as obedient and self-sacrificing, it is also argued that *marianismo* gives women power (Stephen 1995, 811). “The domestic sphere represents the single area in Latin society where females are
acknowledged experts, and women operate relatively autonomously and exercise considerable authority, particularly over children, within this area” (Reif 1986, 148). Due to their control over the household, women wield a certain type of power through “emotional coercion,” in that they control the family members.

Thus, while marianismo can be damaging to women, one positive side of the argument is that within and through marianismo, women have directly affected change in the history of their countries through the power they wield within the household. “While women have only recently participated in large numbers in the ‘public sphere’ of revolution and protest, they have constantly influenced politics through their position in kinship networks and their political socialization of children” (Reif 1986, 150).

As was mentioned earlier, the respect and legitimacy felt by women within the domestic sphere, may be one reason the distinction has remained so strong. Various authors have argued that when women’s roles within the traditionally private sphere are challenged, females act to maintain their status (Stephen 1997, 11). This sense of ‘female consciousness’ in which women fight to maintain their internalized roles as domestic providers and caretakers has been used by many to explain groups such as ‘mothers of the disappeared’ (ibid, 10-11).

Arguably, groups of ‘mothers of the disappeared’ have been allowed to survive based on the fact that these women are not challenging their designated roles as mothers and are thus viewed as less threatening to those in power (Hunt and Posa 2001, 41). These women have made appeals to the government based on the “most conservative
aspects of feminine identity” and have therefore been permitted to proceed (Feijoó in Stephen 2001, 58). These types of public displays of mothering allowed women to redefine rather than reject traditional roles as they were still fulfilling their domestic sphere roles as mothers, they were simply doing so publicly (Stephen 2001, 60; Safa 1990, 367).

As mothers and wives, women were attacked by the military when their loved ones were captured and disappeared (Leslie 2001, 52). As traditional defenders of life, women were drawn into the public sphere in an attempt to protect the lives they had nurtured within the home for so long (Stephen 1997, 11). It has been argued that once a political system becomes so highly repressive that it begins to threaten family life, women are drawn to public action in a type of natural defense of human rights (Aviel 1981, 173; Safa 1990, 362).

Once women, as wives and mothers, begin to publicly assert their anger and frustration with society, they begin the transformation of the domestic sphere and initiate a breakdown of the traditional dichotomy. “In moving their domestic concerns into the public arena, they [women] are redefining the meaning associated with domesticity to include participation and struggle rather than obedience and passivity” (Safa 1990, 362). According to various scholars, this dichotomy is especially challenged during times of crisis when women are pulled into the public sphere because the resources are needed (Campbell 2005, 377). While sometimes pulled or forced to participate in times of crisis, women also choose participation for various reasons.
Practical Gender Interests versus Strategic Gender Interests

Defined by Molyneux (1986), practical gender interests are “interests that emerge from an acceptance of cultural gender roles, including female subordination and the assertion of rights based on those roles” (Stephen 1997, 11). This idea is similar to that of women acting within and through marianismo. In contrast, Molyneux defines strategic gender interests as those “which are derived deductively and focus on strategic objectives to overcome women’s subordination, such as alleviation of the burden of domestic labor and childcare and the removal of institutionalized forms of discrimination” (ibid, 11).

Helen Safa argues in reference to women’s movements such as groups of ‘mothers of the disappeared’, that while these movements may have begun based on practical gender interests and reinforced female’s domestic roles, as women were acting within their roles as wives and mothers, interests may become strategic with the collectivization and politicization of these groups. Safa argues that these groups performing collective actions may lead to a greater consciousness of female subordination and thus a transformation of practical gender interests into strategic ones in which traditional gender roles are directly challenged (Safa 1990, 363).

This distinction between women who are fighting against traditional gender roles versus those who are fighting through them, breaks women into two groups in which the means of the struggle are different while the end goal may be the same (Stephen 1995, 807). Safa argues that regardless of whether interests are initially practical or strategic, women’s participation in social movement produces change in women’s self-definition
(Safa 1990, 363). She notes that this change will not allow a return to the original order based on traditional gender roles as once women have experienced this change in self-definition, they will continue to fight for their rights. Safa also acknowledges however, that this redefinition of women’s roles and rights must be accepted by society as a whole, rather than just by women themselves, in order to affect sustainable change (Safa 1990, 363). Safa additionally posits that even if women’s participation in various social movements is not “undertaken as conscious challenges to gender subordination, they show that women have broken out of the domestic sphere and that gender roles are changing” (ibid, 366).

These types of women’s organizations, formed in the 20th century, have been widely acknowledged by academics as demanding a new form of Marxism as they break from traditional Marxist theories in two fundamental ways. The first break comes when women collectively organize based on gender rather than class, and the second follows when women’s social movements confront the state rather than capital (Safa 1990, 355-356). As mentioned earlier, through the politicization of the private sphere, women have redefined rather than rejected traditional gender roles. The scenes of their struggles are homes and communities rather than the workplace (ibid, 367). Thus, while traditional Marxism is not completely rejected here, a new interpretation is needed (ibid, 367). Women are no longer willing to wait for class struggles to be resolved before they begin their fight for equality, and for many women in Latin America, war has been the deciding factor that has driven them to public participation.
Female Organizations Initiated Through Wars

“In order to survive the civil war in El Salvador, many people had to either organize or leave the country. Women organized for protection, to provide material and emotional support for one another, and to create basic institutional supports in the areas of health, work, and child-rearing” (Tula 1994, 217). According to Karen Kampwirth and Michael Foley, most of the social movements that are currently active today in El Salvador were formed during the war (Kampwirth 1998, 274; Foley 1996, 76). Organizing as women who were focused on issues almost exclusively related to their situations as mothers living in poverty, these women shared the following enemies with the rest of the Salvadoran population: the government, the military and imperialism (Vázquez 1997, 139). Through the sharing of a common enemy, these women were in many ways respected and supported by the rest of the population. Their situations called them to action.

The reallocation of resources in El Salvador brought on by the civil war added to women’s already heavy burden. While women’s level of economic activity expanded, their responsibilities within their families multiplied as a result of the increased absence of men. For all mothers, but especially those raising children alone, carrying out those roles was harder with the deteriorating economic situation and its accompanying crisis in health and education (Tula 1994, 197).

Maria Teresa Tula may be right when arguing that women were in a sense forced
to organize in order to survive the civil war; they were left with no other option than to participate collectively in the fight for their basic human rights (Tula 1994, 217).

However, while women often organize collectively around similar issues, it is important to acknowledge and respect the fact that each woman is an individual. Women organize and participate in political action for different reasons at different times.

*Women’s Organizations and Feminism*

As mentioned earlier, women have recently been found organizing as wives and mothers in a fight for human rights, collective consumption issues, and access to basic life necessities (Safa 1990, 361). However, their initial reasons for organizing and the goals behind their organization often differ. Reminiscent of the practical versus strategic gender interests discussed earlier, a similar distinction exists between feminine, feminist and antifeminist strategies of organization. Sonia Alvarez argues that feminine organizing “grows out of and accepts prevailing female roles and asserts rights on the basis of those roles, [while feminist organizing] seeks to transform the roles society assigns to women, challenges existing gender power arrangements, and claims women’s rights to personal autonomy and equality” (Alvarez in Kampwirth 1998, 259). Antifeminist strategies differ in the sense that while feminine organizing simply reinforces the status quo, antifeminist strategies develop in direct response to a threat to the status quo (Kampwirth 1998, 259). Arguably, the majority of women’s social movements in El Salvador were based originally on feminine organizing, with some of
them transforming into feminist organizations as the movements gained recognition and respect.

*The Salvadoran Case*

According to Maria Teresa Tula in her book, *Hear My Testimony*, Salvadoran women’s organizing can be divided into three stages between the late 1970s through the early 1990s. The first stage began with the founding of the revolutionary parties and some women’s organizations that formed as affiliates. Liberation theology and Christian base communities played a large role in this stage and will be returned to shortly. Also in this stage women emerged and began to be recognized as human rights activists. The second stage, in the mid-1980s, occurred during a resurfacing of social movements following a time of grave repression and took place amidst the restructuring of the social movement. The third stage, in the late 1980s and early 1990s, boasted the formation of a few women’s organizations with an explicit feminist agenda (Tula 1994, 206).

The two most well known Salvadoran women’s organizations are CO-MADRES and LAS DIGNAS (Stephen 1997, 4). CO-MADRES, founded in 1977, was one of the first groups in El Salvador to denounce the repression and human rights atrocities committed by the government (Stephen 2001, 55). The goals of the Mother’s Committee of El Salvador (CO-MADRES) were originally “1) an investigation into the fate of the disappeared, 2) punishment for those who have perpetrated the political murders, 3) amnesty for all political prisoners and 4) a dialogue for peace between the opposing
political forces” (Boler 1985, 547). While extremely careful to remain apolitical, the CO-MADRES did affect political change and were one of the few groups to remain intact and active throughout the entire civil war (Stephen 1997, 4). LAS DIGNAS are well known for challenging the authoritarianism of the left, as well as for educating the population about and building support for feminist goals (ibid, 4). “The organization has established a reputation over the years for independent analysis, as well as for effective advocacy and service related to women’s issues” (Weiss Fagen 2000, 2).

Joined by various other women’s organizations throughout the country, these two movements have been largely responsible for advancing women’s issues and affecting not only political change, but also change in traditional gender roles within the small nation. It is argued by many that the motivation to form these organizations, as well as the fuel for various women’s movements in El Salvador, stems from women’s experiences as leaders in Christian base communities. These communities, widely referred to as CEBs – comunidades eclesiales de base – formed during the war around the teachings of some members of the Catholic Church regarding liberation theology. Currently referred to as a radical teaching, liberation theology is widely credited for educating and empowering countless members of Salvadoran society in their fight against oppression during the twelve-year civil war.

Liberation Theology and Salvadoran Women

The 1968 Bishop’s Conference in Medellín, Colombia marked the beginnings of
the progressive Salvadoran Catholic Church as poverty and oppression were defined as sins and contradictions to the Christian faith (Tula 1994, 203-204). Based around the basic tenets of a right to life and human dignity for all people, liberation theology caused a social movement in Latin America which was one of the strongest of recent times in the region. As all forms of mobilization and organization against the state were prohibited by the Salvadoran government during the war, the church often provided the only legitimate blanket under which people could organize (Safa 1990, 358).

Christian base communities (CEBs), the foundations for education within liberation theology, aim at what Catholic social thought refers to as ‘integral liberation’ in which personal spiritual development is directly related to social and cultural changes. With the laity at the center of the movement, CEBs stressed women’s roles in the family as part of a larger common good. This type of thinking led to a “revalorization of the private world and concomitantly to a reinforcement of female dignity and authority” (Gomez et al 1999, 63).

Within CEBs, women were offered some of their first institutionalized leadership roles as ‘delegates of the word’. As ‘delegates of the word’, women could do everything priests could do except administer confession, communion, baptism, and marriage. These public leadership roles were fundamental for women and an essential beginning to female political activism (Tula 1994, 204-205). However, amidst this new participation in organizations and social movements, women were often confronted with a backlash of traditional values and the belief of many that a Salvadoran woman’s place was still in the
…simply participating in organizations is enough to produce a difficult domestic situation for women in El Salvador. As women become more involved in activities such as workshops, demonstrations, and meetings, they often cannot fulfill their duties as full-time domestic workers. They frequently have to ask their husbands and families to begin taking on some household responsibilities. Attempts to even slightly alter the traditional division of labor within the household can result in strong reactions from men and other women as well, such as mothers-in-law (Tula 1994, 211).

While women involved in Christian Base Communities were often criticized for abandoning their traditional roles in the domestic sphere, the situation of female combatants for the guerilla forces was often quite different. These women were accepted into the fight, and permitted to leave the domestic sphere and their place in the home, because they were needed to provide extra support for the rebel forces.

*Women and the FMLN*

It has been estimated that women made up 60 per cent of those providing any type of logistical support for the Farabundo Martí Front for National Liberation (FMLN), as well as 30 per cent of their armed combatants. The number of women involved with the FMLN made them one of the highest numbers of registered women in the history of Latin American armed conflict (Vásquez 1997, 139). This female participation in the armed
conflict transformed women’s roles as mothers of the nation to that of soldiers for the nation (Kumar 2001, 68). While it is arguable that war may break down patriarchal structures based solely on the fact that women are allowed to participate, women often experience some discrimination amongst fellow male combatants (Karam 2001, 8).

The sense of masculinity which is anchored in the very conception of wars and revolutions remains almost uncontested. A change in the role of men from breadwinners to combatants entitles them to more rights. But femininity sits uncomfortably with wars and conflicts. The change of role of the woman from housewife to a combatant is without clear precedence and has taken differing trajectories in different contexts. The move may provide a path towards equality but it can also cause a further decline in a woman’s status (Afshar 2003, 180).

Female FMLN combatants returning home from war could speak directly to the decline in status they suffered. It has been argued by many that fighting in the revolution provided women with not only education, but also a sense of increased self-confidence (Campbell 2005, 385). However, the positive characteristics gained by women during the fight are often accompanied by negative side effects, both mental and social, that women suffer upon their return home.

Women who had been separated from their children for years, returned to serve as their primary caregivers with no help from the state or the cause they had been fighting for – that of the FMLN. The war had also in many ways emphasized the traditional
divisions of labor. As the FMLN did not want children to distract the male combatants, they were forbidden from visiting their children or providing child support. Thus women who did not join the armed struggle became the primary and sole caregivers of their children and their husbands offered little to no support, as they were not obligated to do so (Vázquez 1997, 144).

It is possible that the positive self-confidence gained by female combatants in the struggle may have lead directly to negative side effects that could not have been prevented. It has been argued by feminist psychologists that public reactions to powerful women are frequently hostile and ambiguous (Lips 2003, 178). In many situations of conflict, women are reluctantly allowed into the struggle because of a necessity of resources, but then are pushed aside once the conflict ends (Campbell 2005, 379). “Once the period of ‘crisis’ is over, women are effaced from the public sphere and asked to reclaim their natural or ‘proper’ role in the private sphere. Likewise, their gender specific interests are placed on the back burner as consolidation of the new regime becomes the paramount concern” (ibid, 378). Often expected to return to the home after the war, it is questionable whether or not all of women’s efforts during the struggle will in any way contribute to their emancipation as women (Afshar 2003, 185; Sorensen 1998, 4). It seems however, that Salvadoran women who experienced life in refugee camps during the war did indeed benefit from levels of increased self-confidence and thus, one could argue, female emancipation.
Female Refugees

It is estimated that approximately 500,000 people left the conflict zones in El Salvador throughout the civil war and migrated towards San Salvador and other cities not experiencing the same levels of conflict felt in the countryside (Weiss Fagen 2000, 1). Approximately 20,000 of those people crossed the border into Honduras and lived in refugee camps and settlements run by UNHCR (ibid, 2); the two Honduran refugee camps were known as Colomocagua and Mesa Grande (ibid, 3). Funded by USAID, “Refugee Women in El Salvador and Guatemala: Challenges and Lessons of Reintegration” was a project aimed at understanding and sharing the experiences of refugee women from these two Central American countries. The findings of the study largely resembled those from studies of female combatants in terms of empowerment.

Through this study, it was found that the refugee camps provided women with opportunities for growth and empowerment that they had never felt before (Weiss Fagen 2000, 2). According to the researchers, “Despite the dramatic rupture from past experiences that exile caused, and the strains of life in refugee camps, women successfully assumed new roles and began to see themselves and their lives in a new light” (ibid, 2). It was determined that this opportunity for growth was made possible for various reasons including the presence of international nongovernmental organizations which encouraged individual growth and self-confidence, the fact that women were removed from traditional settings in their home country in which they were subordinate to male family members, and the fact that women largely outnumbered men in the camps.
because the men were often off fighting. Also, in direct relation to Amartya Sen’s ideas regarding development as access to opportunities, the refugee camps offered health care and educational opportunities to which El Salvador’s rural poor had never before been privy; almost all children – female and male – attended school; and adult women were given the opportunity to take literacy classes (ibid, 4). Thus, the location and environment of the refugee camps, coupled with the opportunities offered there, created an atmosphere in which personal growth was encouraged and apparently achieved.

Women in the refugee camps were often involved in many productive activities traditionally carried out by men, which allowed the entire refugee population to begin to view women in roles other than wife or mother (ibid, 4). “…nearly all [women] participated in some way in public life through workshops, committees, and other initiatives, becoming laborers, community leaders, and security guards. These pursuits in turn enhanced their self-esteem” (Weiss Fagen 2000, 4). While the status and self-esteem gained by female refugees during the war seems uncontested, this study found that women were incapable of maintaining what they had gained during the war once the conflict came to an end.

Upon return home from the war, women were once again faced with being solely responsible for domestic duties which only grew once they returned from the camps as family survival remained a daily challenge (ibid, 5). Male attitudes returned to pre-war ideas under which women were solely responsible for childcare and their roles in the home. It has also been noted that males devoted even less time to childcare and support.
after the war because they had grown accustomed to organizations in the refugee camps assuring that the basic needs of each family were met (ibid, 5). While male attitudes seemed to simply revert to pre-war ideas following the conflict, researchers argue that women themselves maintained the self-confidence and self-worth they gained in the refugee camps; they felt they had become different (ibid, 5).

Female interviewees who had returned from the camps recounted their experience as refugees as mostly positive (ibid 5). Researchers also noted that women who had returned “welcomed opportunities to meet and seek common solutions to shared problems. They do not willingly accept the small spaces the men expected them to occupy. Further, with regard to education, the women interviewed were adamant about their need for schooling for the girls as well as the boys in their families” (Weiss Fagen 2000, 5). The women, and their thinking, had changed.

Through their experiences as refugees, women made political contributions that were valued by the community as a whole, and performed productive roles in which they were viewed in positions other than wives and mothers. Through this process, women…

Became more assertive and gained self-confidence and awareness of their rights…there is evidence that the impacts of transformation on women will continue to be felt and to change the lives of future generations.

There are already indications in both cases that the younger returnees who came of age in the camps are seeking alternatives to traditional female roles (ibid, 11).
The violence of the war provided a time, a space and a reason for women to break from the roles they had traditionally held, and long-term change was produced.

_The Women’s Movement in El Salvador After the War_

Widely acknowledged today is the necessity for a specific attention to gender in peace negotiations. More and more international organizations as well as academics are acknowledging the fact that women and men must be involved in the processes of peace negotiation if there is any hope that they will succeed in the long run (de la Rey and McKay 2006, 142; 144). According to Elaine Zuckerman and Marcia Greenberg, sustainable peace requires a permanent transformation towards equality of traditional social norms (2004, 79).

While entire communities suffer the consequences of armed conflict and terrorism, women and girls are particularly affected because of their status in society and their sex. Women do not enjoy equal status with men in any society. Where cultures of violence and discrimination against women and girls exist prior to conflict, they will be exacerbated during conflict (Zeigler and Gunderson 2006, 173).

It seems apparent that in some ways, women who had joined the FMLN in the struggle were discriminated against when they returned back home. As women had no outlet to address psychological traumas following the war and had a difficult time reintegrating into society, they began to focus their attention on the discriminatory
practices within the FMLN (Luciak 1999, 54).

Salvadoran women began to build coalitions in an attempt to counteract the marginalization they had suffered in the peace accords (Luciak 1998, 44). Various women’s groups joined together and created a platform that they presented to the presidential candidates for the 1994 elections (ibid, 44). While the platform was agreed to by the two parties that received the most votes, the FMLN and the ARENA party, women’s demands were largely ignored. However, the women continued to fight and that fight continues today.

As discussed in the introduction, the current situation in El Salvador is grim. “…deaths by violence numbered 9,135 in 1994, falling slightly to 8,485 in 1995 and 8,047 in 1996, figures which exceed the yearly average of 6,000 deaths during the war itself” (Pearce 1998, 590).

While countless women today continue to participate in social movements and community organizations – activities that many allege have healing capabilities, the women still suffer (Leslie 2001, 54). As male migration rates increase daily and women are increasingly left behind in a nation plagued with violence and poverty it is easy to question whether there is hope.

Norma Vázquez wrote in 1997, that the war in El Salvador produced little long-term change in terms of gender equality and that women have in the long run gained little from the struggle (144). In 1994, Alvaro de Soto and Graciana del Castillo wrote an article chastising the United Nations, the International Monetary Fund, and the World
Bank for not working together to build lasting peace in El Salvador, and thus in effect deeming it an impossibility (69-83). According to an article written in 1999 by Ileana Gómez, “the continued weakness of civic institutions and the absence of viable programs to deal with poverty, unemployment, and economic inequality still threaten the emerging democracy” of El Salvador (53).

Following the war in El Salvador, women were in a sense trapped inside of a society blanketed with violence and hardships. According to the University of Central America in their ECA magazine, poverty has been the biggest challenge for El Salvador since the war (Baires and Vega 2005, 620). In 2002, 55.99% of women were working in the informal sector where they enjoyed no health benefits, no mandatory minimum wage and zero job security (ibid, 626).

One could use Alvaro de Soto’s phrase, “acute national crisis” to refer to the current state of affairs in El Salvador (1994, 71). It is easy to agree with Jenny Pearce’s analysis of Central America, in which she posits that while the region is currently free from ‘war’ it has yet to enjoy ‘peace’. In regards to her discussion regarding negative versus positive peace, it is painfully obvious that El Salvador enjoys neither. “Negative peace refers to the absence of violence and positive peace refers to the active construction of the ‘good society’ (equitable, just, etc.) where recourse to violence would no longer take place” (Pearce 1998, 589).

While there is frequently a negative picture painted of Salvadoran society, and unfortunately that picture often reflects reality, it is glaringly obvious to anyone who has
stepped foot on Salvadoran soil that there is still hope – that yes the people still struggle, but they have not given up the fight. In a recent interview when a young Salvadoran teacher was asked what one could do to raise international awareness about the current situation of her country, she responded, “Tell them we’re still here and that we’re still fighting.”

Up until now, there may have been no drastic sustainable change in traditional gender roles. It may still be believed by many that a woman’s place is in her home, but female activists have left their mark on Salvadoran society and they do not plan on abandoning the struggle any time soon. “Women’s economic struggles as wives and mothers, their health concerns, rape, battering, and legislative discrimination are now a part of the Salvadoran political spectrum, thanks to the relentless persistence of women activists” (Tula 1994, 201).

Summary of the Post-Conflict Situation’s Impact on Female Human Development

To reiterate, the war and the post-conflict situation that followed have had a large impact on female human development indicators today. Experiences during the war helped empower women and provide them with increased self-confidence through which they have reflected upon deserved entitlements and then fought for greater access to those basic human necessities. Arguably, the breakdown of the public versus private sphere dichotomy in El Salvador commenced when women began to publicly assert their anger and frustration with the government and society. These women were able to harness the
power that comes with the traditionally oppressive stereotype of marianismo and affect change through their place within that stereotype.

It was argued further that women had to organize during the war in order to survive. These organizations served not only as protection but also as a means of providing and receiving both material and emotional support. The Christian Base Communities, one of the most prominent forms of organization during the civil war in El Salvador, proved to be a means of empowerment for women through their roles as ‘delegates of the word’. For the first time, lay women were respected as leaders within the church – providing them with a sense of self-confidence and self-worth which was lacking in the past. Similarly, female combatants who fought with the FMLN during the war not only benefited from feelings of increased self-confidence but also from the education provided throughout the war effort. Female refugees enjoyed comparable benefits gained through their experiences in the refugee camps.

Before the war traditional gender roles were strictly defined, especially in what would become high conflict zones. Women were infrequently involved in productive work and most often remained within the home, it seemed unnecessary for girls to be formally educated, women did not hold public roles within the community or local organizations, and “being a ‘good woman’ meant accepting and never questioning male authority” (Weiss Fagen 2000, 4). However, the necessity of women as resources during the war and the fact that their political participation was encouraged and viewed as an essential component in a collective struggle, caused a break with tradition (ibid, 4).
In other words, the brutal experience of war was accompanied in many ways by a sense of female empowerment through the various roles that were fought for and held by women beginning with and continuing throughout the war effort. Arguably, the breakdown of the public versus private sphere dichotomy, the harnessing of power through marianismo, the establishment of female consciousness, leadership roles within the Catholic Church, and the increase in self-confidence and education gained by combatants and refugees, all began with the violence of the war. It is debatable whether or not these advances for women would have occurred without the war – however that point is moot here. The point of this chapter has been to emphasize the fact that the place women occupy in Salvadoran society today was largely determined by what occurred throughout history – especially the recent civil war.

The war partially led to increased female human development in the sense that through the war women were permitted to leave the domestic sphere, but also respected for their place within it; they began to organize in their fight for survival; and they gained increased self-confidence and self-worth through the leadership positions they held as combatants, refugees, church leaders, etcetera.

The war, in many senses, created more opportunities for Salvadoran women – opportunities which have given them the capabilities to become more educated, enjoy higher levels of literacy and lead longer, healthier lives.

As discussed, some studies have concluded that changes to traditional gender roles gained during the war were largely lost when the conflict came to an end as males
overwhelming reverted to pre-war ideas regarding women’s status within society. However, it was also established in these studies that experiences during the war were empowering for women and that the personal strides they had made in terms of self-confidence were maintained after the war. The current trend of high levels of outward male migration has brought these findings under a new light. If women maintained the self-confidence and ideas gained during the war and are only relegated into the domestic sphere by traditional thinking males, what happens to society as those males leave? Will the women regain control of the productive roles they filled during the war and in the refugee camps? Will they stray away from their places in the home as the men whose ideas supposedly keep them there begin to leave the community?

While traditional gender roles may be placed aside during conflict due to the immediate need for female participation in the public sphere, the question is whether or not that change will be sustainable following the conflict. The specific question we are concerned with here is whether or not the change in gender roles that women were able to achieve in El Salvador during the war has been sustained today. It is my hypothesis that the change in gender roles and society achieved during the war has been sustained in El Salvador partially due to the current trend of high numbers of outward male migration; this hypothesis will be explored further in chapter IV.
CHAPTER IV: SALVADORAN WOMEN AND MIGRATION

With a basic understanding of the current situation in El Salvador as well as the country’s history, we now begin an in-depth look at the women who remain behind in that country in the face of migration. I have argued that female organizing during the civil war in El Salvador led to a greater consciousness of female subordination. This conscious recognition of society’s repression upon female access to entitlements, led to a fight – frequently led by women – for the transformation of society. I will argue here that the transformation gained during the war has been partially sustained by high levels of outward male migration which has necessitated and allowed for women’s continued public involvement in society and a rise in female human development indicators.

Globalization and its Relevance to Migration

Joseph Stiglitz defines globalization as,

…the closer integration of the countries and peoples of the world which has been brought about by the enormous reduction of costs of transportation and communication, and the breaking down of artificial barriers to the flows of goods, services, capital, knowledge, and (to a lesser extent) people across borders (Stiglitz 2003, 9).

While it is correct that immigration policies make it more difficult for people to cross borders than goods, services, capital and knowledge, it is arguable that the
increasing ease with which the aforementioned “products” have crossed borders in recent times has aided in the surge of migration. Not only has globalization made it easier to send home remittances, easier for families to communicate from miles away, and cheaper to visit each other when they choose, but cultures and ideas have soared across borders as well. Through movies, television shows, music and the Internet, it is easier now more than ever for people to see how others live. While globalization has not necessarily been as kind to migrants as it has been to goods and services, one could argue that many, and perhaps all, aspects of globalization have led to an increasing desire to migrate.

A Feminization of Migration?

The increase of migration to developed countries is undeniable. “The number of people counted as living outside their country of birth has almost doubled during the last 50 years – increasing to 191 million in 2005” (UNFPA 2006, 116). “[T]his figure is projected to reach 230 million by 2050” (INSTRAW 2005, 64). “Of the 36 million who migrated between 1990 and 2005, 33 million wound-up in the industrialized countries” (UNFPA 2006, 6). “Today, women constitute almost half of all international migrants worldwide – 95 million” (ibid, 1); “some 51% of migrant woman live in the developed world, compared with 49% in the developing world. There are more female than male international migrants in Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, Oceania, Europe and the former USSR” (Population and Development Review 2005).

During the past couple of decades, the gender balance of international
migration flows has developed in response to factors such as immigration legislation, gender-selective demand for foreign labour, and changing gender relations in countries of origin. Different factors have often worked together to increase the share of women in migration flows. As a result, the feminization of migration has been recognized as a tendency at the global level (Carling 2005, 26).

While it is recognizable that there are far more restrictions on the movement of people than the movement of goods and services, the demand for migrant labor, especially female migrant labor, continues to rise in many countries across the world. Researchers hold that female migration has grown because refugee and family migration has increased *vis-à-vis* labor migration and because more women now migrate independently for work purposes (Carling 2005, 2).

While it seems that a feminization of migration is occurring based on the data discussed above, our concern here is the group of women who stay behind in the home country. In today’s ‘globalized’ world where communication and transportation have plummeted in price, it is easier than ever for people to maintain transnational relationships with family members across borders (UNFPA 2006, 2). However, as we have seen in the literature, this migration causes a disintegration of the family, which exists regardless of what caused migration in the first place (UNDP 2005, 290). This familiar disintegration has been blamed for anything from poor performance of children in primary education to a surge of violence in sending countries. The problem here is the
creation of a vicious, self-sustaining cycle in which people cannot remember if migration occurred because of violence or if violence increased due to migration (ibid, 310).

*Justification of the Use of the Female Perspective*

The justification of taking a closer look at migration from the female perspective stems from a statement by the United Nations International Research and Training Institute for the Advancement of Women that, “…it must be borne in mind that the empowerment of women and gender equality are a basis and an end of every notion of sustainable human development” (INSTRAW 2005, 20). If the effects of migration are not considered from a gendered perspective, any investigation of them is null and void, because migration holds extraordinarily different meanings for men and women. The research on this issue is lacking to the extent that there is an abundance of literature concerning female migrants, but the experiences of those who have returned or have not migrated at all are largely overlooked. According to the United Nations Development Program, it is essential to understand the impact of migration on households and communities, especially when migration trends worsen tendencies towards the feminization of poverty and the increase of economic dependence (UNDP 2005, 361). The feminization of poverty is largely reflected in the informal labor sector throughout Latin America.
The Informal Sector

In El Salvador today, as well as in many countries in Latin America, it is women who increasingly participate in the informal labor sector and suffer from the insecurity and lack of benefits described above that come along with that type of labor. Women left behind by migration are often forced to enter the labor force – most often informally – due to the insecurity of remittances and the fact that the money sent home is often less than they had hoped it would be (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 401).

One could argue that the outward migration of males contributes to the persistence of the informal labor sector. While largely a product of a consistent lack of employment within society, participation in the informal labor sector is also fueled by other factors. Women, who are left alone to care for children by their migrant husbands, must find work they can do from home or pay someone else to care for their children, which is often not a viable option. Left with work in the informal labor sector as their only option, the lack of job security that comes with that type of employment becomes compounded with the insecurity or inconsistency of remittances. These women are often caught in a situation where they cannot save money and are criticized for spending remittances on unproductive things or immediate needs such as food, clothing, education, housing and health (INSTRAW 2005, 32).

Women Left Behind by Migration

Various international migration theories help to explain the current phenomena in
El Salvador in which high levels of males are currently emigrating and females are increasingly left behind.

While there is no single, standard, all encompassing theory of international migration, various theories have been espoused within recent years, some of which can help explain the reasons males migrate more often from El Salvador than females. Referred to as “Neoclassical economics: Macro theory” by Massey et al. in their article regarding theories of international migration, this theory claims that international migration is fueled largely by supply and demand. In this theory, workers move from countries with a high supply of workers and low market wages to countries with a high demand for workers offering higher market wages. Proponents of this theory argue that this movement of workers will continue until equilibrium is reached (1993, 433). One could argue that this theory helps to explain higher levels of male migration than female migration – especially to the United States – as it is more difficult for Salvadoran migrant women to obtain work in the U.S. and they often earn lower wages than males once they have migrated (Asociación Equipo Maíz 2006, 42). Similarly, in the excess of supply versus lack of demand problem which currently exists in the labor sector of El Salvador, males have suffered from extremely high levels of unemployment. The example of labor migration to the U.S. is utilized here as 90% of Salvadoran immigrants migrate to the United States (UNDP 2005, 35).

“Neoclassical economics: Micro theory” holds that international migration depends on decisions made by individual rational actors following a cost-benefit analysis
of their situation. According to this theory, if movement promises a positive net return – usually monetary, people will migrate. In other words, people move to where their skills provide them with the most benefits (Massey et al. 1993, 434). In certain places in the “Developing World”, including El Salvador, export-led production has caused a feminization of the workforce in terms of factory employment. Women are disproportionately hired in factory work while equivalent factory-based employment is not available for under or unemployed males (Pessar 1999, 62-63). Thus, helping to explain why females remain at home and males leave. It is equally important to note here that rational actors within this theory also take into account costs of migrating – which are frequently higher for women. Given the fact that it is often easier for male migrants to find jobs than females and the fact that throughout the actual journey of migration, especially ‘irregular’ migration, women are exceptionally vulnerable to crimes against human rights such as rape and abuse (UNFPA 2006, 31), it is no surprise that females often come up short after a cost-benefit analysis, whereas migration may offer males the opportunity for a positive net gain.

Some authors criticize both macro and micro neoclassical theories arguing that they overlook “the existence of patriarchal kinship and gender ideologies that may constrain women from migrating regardless of the expected net financial gains from such relocation” (Pessar 1999, 56). The existence of these types of patriarchal ideologies may also help to explain why men migrate and women stay behind especially in societies based around traditional gender roles.
The “new economics of migration” theory rejects the idea of individual rational actors and instead argues that groups of people – usually families or households – make decisions together both to maximize income and minimize risk, both in relation to the labor market and market failures (Massey et al. 1993, 436). In other words, families choose together as a unit to send the family member abroad who has the greatest potential of earning the highest income as well as s/he who is susceptible to the least amount of risks in the migrant journey. Similar to individual rational actors, families often choose males to send abroad for the reasons previously mentioned. Families are often arguably influenced by engrained gender roles in which males are viewed as breadwinners and females are viewed as nurturers who must care for and maintain the domestic sphere. Critics of the new economics of migration theory argue that it largely ignores this ‘household political economy’. Historic systems of patriarchy in which male heads of households make final decisions for the family, may be hidden by this theory’s idea of implicit solidarity (Pessar 1999, 57). Societal and cultural norms may play a large part in the decision as to which family member should be sent abroad. Similar to the neoclassical theories, these ‘hierarchies of power along gender lines’ may help to explain why women are left behind by male emigrants from traditional societies (ibid, 59).

If one subscribes to the “Dual labor market theory” in which pull factors in receiving countries are more determinant of migration than push factors in sending countries (ibid, 440), the fact that it is often easier for Salvadoran males to find work abroad once again helps to explain higher male than female emigration ratios. According
to this theory, if the industrial societies to which Salvadorans are migrating – namely the United States – demand more male than female migrant workers, then more males will be prone to migration. This theory of migration is complemented with international policies and programs, such as the Bracero program of 1942 in which temporary workers from Mexico, mostly males, were sought to fill agricultural jobs in the United States (Pessar 1999, 62). These types of programs and policies not only ‘pull in’ male migrant labor but also encourage the development of migrant networks built around and sustained through male interests.

Also worth mentioning here is the “institutional theory” which posits that once destination countries begin to restrict the entrance of international migrants, but the desire and will of migrants to enter remains strong, a profitable niche is created for both entrepreneurs and institutions alike and a black market is created for ‘irregular migration’ (ibid, 450). Within this market, migration is financially more difficult for women as well as increasingly dangerous. Women face added difficulties when saving money for undocumented migration as they often work in the informal sectors and have lower wages, but also because they are less likely than males to be in control of the family finances (UNDP 2005, 316). For example, an undocumented trip from El Salvador to the United States can cost anywhere between $2,000 and $8,000, a sum nearly impossible for a poor woman who makes pupusas to save on her own (UNDP 2005, 336). This lack of ability to save the money necessary for independent migration often leads women to become dependents of male smugglers or migrants when they do choose migration.
'Irregular migration’ also poses added difficulties for women in the sense that, “unlike fathers and sons, responsibility for women’s migration and settlement could rarely be delegated to distant kin, friends, or a coyote – individuals who could not be confidently charged with the responsibilities of protection and control” (Pessar 1999, 61). In this sense, women’s migratory movement is more restricted than men’s because it depends on previously established networks composed of close family members (ibid, 61).

The increased dangers of female migration, the fact that it is often easier for male than female Salvadoran immigrants to find jobs in the U.S., the belief that women belong in the domestic sphere, and the black market created by restrictive migration policies can all lead to the development of household strategies in which men migrate and women stay behind.

It is important to remember, however, that women have been ‘left behind’ by both female and male migrants. Those women who stay behind when their spouses migrate are left to care for the house and take on extra work until they begin to receive remittances. They are also frequently left to pay the debt that has been acquired by their spouse’s migrant journey (UNDP 2005, 338-339). In a situation where other women are migrating, the women who stay must take on reproductive tasks and often care for the children who have been left behind. This positively increases female solidarity networks but also leaves these women with more work (ibid, 334).

As previously established, patriarchy as well as hierarchies of power and domination exist within Latin America and especially within El Salvador. The question
here is whether or not those hierarchies are changed when men migrate and women stay behind. According to Monica Boyd and Elizabeth Grieco, this question is directly related to the idea that gender is socially constructed, which means that “what constitutes the ideals, expectations, and behaviors or expressions of masculinity and femininity – will vary among societies” (Boyd and Grieco 2003, 2). It is paramount to take this variance into account in migration studies while also heeding the advice of feminist scholars to not group all women together into one group with equal interests (Volpp 2001, 1181).

A portion of the literature presented here deals with the negative experiences of women left behind by migration. The other portion discusses the positive, arguably empowering, effects that male migration has had on women’s lives. The literature concerning the experiences of migrant women acknowledges that many women suffer in migration processes, but it is unclear whether actual female migration is the cause of the suffering or the socially constructed gender roles and hierarchies within societies. This problem of causation versus correlation applies for women left behind as well. Any positive or negative change in women’s lives when men leave cannot be attributable solely to their migration - societal factors must also be considered.

The Positive Impact of Male Migration on the Lives of Women Left Behind

Much of the literature claiming positive repercussions for women who stay, holds that when men leave women must take on roles they have never had before. One of the most extensively researched aspects of the lives of women left behind is the fact that they
control and are able to decide how remittances are spent (UNFPA 2006, 30). Many argue that this type of control over finances gives women more autonomy and responsibilities (INSTRAW 2005, 35). Similarly, as we will see later in this chapter, remittances sent home by Salvadoran immigrants have a direct impact on the human development indicators in their home country providing Salvadoran citizens with increased access to basic human necessities.

However, according to Pierrette Hondagneu-Sotelo in a study of 26 families, remittances sent from migrant husbands were often less than their wives expected and the time of their arrival was unpredictable. Both of these factors caused women left behind to seek employment on their own – mostly in the informal sector – as they were also expected to continue caring for the children and needed jobs that would allow them to do so. A negative side to this aspect of the argument is that women seeking employment in Latin America often suffer from the stereotype of males being the primary breadwinner for the family. This myth has historically allowed employers to pay women lower wages than men – 75% less in Latin America and the Caribbean (Pessar 2005, 5). Women in Latin America are also often frequently defined as dependent in contrast to their independent spouses – this type of definition places women in the ‘family role’ rather than the ‘market role’ and makes it even more challenging for women to find sustainable, dignified work (Boyd and Grieco 2003, 5).

According to Hondagneu-Sotelo’s study, the jobs obtained by women in the absence of their husbands allowed females to provide a large portion of the household
income. They also gained new skills and learned to perform within multiple roles they did not occupy before. “A cluster of studies conducted in Mexico and among Mexican immigrant women in the United States suggests that these conditions foster women’s autonomy, esteem, and role expansion” (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 401). There is little acknowledgment here as to the fact that these new jobs taken on by women imply that they will now be performing what is commonly referred to as a ‘double day’. They are still expected to perform all of the duties they had before such as washing, cleaning, cooking and caring for the children, and this new job adds to the work they have always had. Hondagneu-Sotelo casually mentions that this type of ‘double day’ was causing numerous women to pursue migration themselves as a means of escaping the pressure of being the sole head of the household (ibid, 401). Thus while the opportunities for new types of employment and control of financial resources may empower women in some ways, it also largely increases their burden in others.

Patricia Pessar views this desire to migrate in a positive light, “While these new responsibilities increase women’s burdens, wives may also become sufficiently empowered to attempt to emigrate themselves, even against their spouses’ wishes” (Pessar 2005, 5). However, is the goal here that each gender becomes empowered enough to leave their home country? What does it imply for development if migration is viewed as proof of empowerment?

In her article, “Women and Migration: The Social Consequences of Gender”, Silvia Pedraza cites two studies that claim positive impacts for females left behind by
male migration. In a study by Caroline Brettell in 1988 of male emigration from Portugal to Brazil and Spain in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries, households became increasingly headed by women as men left society. Male emigration also caused women to marry at older ages. High rates of male emigration were concordantly met with higher rates of spinsterhood and illegitimacy – both of which ensured that women remained closer to their immediate families (Pedraza 1991, 311).

In her study in 1986, Barbara Engel analyzed the emigration of men in the late nineteenth century from the Kostroma province to the cities of Russia. Wives were found to take their husbands’ places as agricultural laborers and move in with their in-laws, tying them to the land and increasing work burdens. Moving in with their in-laws often reinforces existing gender hierarchies in some cultures as women and their spending and activities are constantly monitored by their husband’s families (Pessar 2005, 4). However, Engel argues that women’s lives were also made easier in the sense that they endured childbirth less often and their children survived more due to better nutrition and general health. She also argues that “the marriage relation itself may well have benefited as women acquired more control over their lives and a measure of dignity while the marriage became more of a partnership” (Pedraza 1991, 311). Thus, while it seems that male emigration may benefit women in some ways, it comes with costs as well.

*The Negative Impact of Male Migration on Women’s Lives*

The general “social effects of migration amongst others consist of change in
family composition, family separations and the abandonment of old people, child outcomes in terms of labour, health and education” (Markova, 7). One of the main arguments against the fact that new employment opportunities and financial responsibilities for women is empowering is the fact that remittances sent home by husbands combined with money earned by wives in the informal sector is just enough to keep the family out of poverty (Markova, 9). Thus, women do not wield control over a large amount of resources nor do they really have a decision about where money is spent. Rather, women must spend money on immediate needs such as food, clothing and housing and are really at no liberty to choose new expenses that the family did not have before.

In a study by Cecilia Menjívar and Victor Agadjanian of wives left behind in Guatemala and Armenia, the negative impacts of outward male migration seemed to outweigh the positive. Any empowerment or control that was gained by the women in the absence of their husbands seemed to be overrun by the control their husbands still exerted over their lives. Women frequently lived with their spouse’s relatives who monitored their every activity and men maintained control through the power of communication. The men chose when to call home and for how long they would speak to their families. Women interviewed noted that it was cheaper and simply easier for the men to call because they had more access to technology and money, but the study showed that this type of power reinforced relations of dependence. Men also called relatives and friends to check in on their wives (Menjívar and Agadjanian forthcoming, 10-11).
In addition, this study illustrated that women often threw themselves deeper into their already established roles within the domestic sphere and engaged in what has been referred to as ‘intensive mothering’. These women sought to prove they had fulfilled their roles and spent remittances well through properly caring for their children (ibid, 14). Returning to the concept of *marianismo* discussed earlier, this study found that because children are emphasized in processes of migration, women have central roles not only as mothers who possess control over the household but also as the figure who is able to foster and mediate her husband’s relationship with their children (ibid, 15). In this sense, women do have a large amount of power within the domestic sphere.

In direct contrast to arguments that have been made by those who highlight positive effects of male migration, this study found that women do not often step outside of gender role expectations. If the women interviewed needed something that was beyond their skills or did not align with traditional gender role expectations, they would consult in-laws, friends and neighbors – usually males – for help (ibid, 19).

Another aspect of this research highlighted the fact that women often formed networks and relationships among themselves when their husbands were away; however, these relationships and networks were disbanded when the men returned (ibid, 20-21). The conclusion of Menjívar’s and Agadjanian’s study highlighted factors that determine the effects of male migration on the women who stay behind. “These include limited job opportunities for these women, lack of access to secure and well-paying jobs for their partners in their migration destination, as well as sociocultural dictates and gender
ideologies of the contexts in which the migration takes place” (Menjívar and Agadjanian forthcoming, 22). The conclusion of the literature seems to be that while women may gain control in some aspects of their lives, they lose control in others and that loss may outweigh the gains.

Whereas women do fulfill some additional tasks when their husbands leave, neither the nature nor the scope of these tasks challenge the deeply entrenched gender inequality. In fact, on balance, the division of labor established through husbands’ migration further reinforces gender inequality. On the one hand, women still live in contexts with strong patriarchal norms and few opportunities for paid employment; on the other, men find themselves in milieus where they have relatively more access to resources-through work and technology. As a result, men’s role as breadwinners and primary decision-makers is further strengthened and amplified, as is women’s own subordinate position. Under such conditions, the women’s potential gains in terms of power and autonomy in the absence of their husbands are compromised, as geographical location intensifies gendered power asymmetries (Menjívar and Agadjanian forthcoming, 23).

In his article, “Families Across Borders: The Effects of Migration on Family Members Remaining at Home”, Alexis Silver uses the Mexican Family Life Survey to determine the effects of migration on the emotional well-being of migrants’ family
members. His results indicate that family members remaining in Mexico experience significant increases in depressive symptoms and feelings of loneliness when a close family member has migrated – especially a spouse or a child (Silver 2006, 2). These feelings may stem from the breakdown of an individual’s social support network which consisted of his or her family (ibid, 14-15). According to Silver, “females with spouses in the U.S. have the lowest predicted probability of reporting the lowest levels of loneliness, and the highest predicted probabilities of reporting all higher level categories of loneliness” (ibid, 38). This decrease in emotional well-being is paired with the previously discussed difficulties that women experience through male emigration, making the situation even more challenging for females.

*Household Strategies of Migration*

One last issue to be addressed is the theory within migration literature concerning household solidarity, or the idea that households behave as a unit. In recent years, households have increasingly been referred to as “bridging the gap between social and individual levels of analysis” (Kearney 1986, 347). There is an assumption of ‘household calculation’ in which family members decide together if a member should migrate and why (Hondagneu-Sotelo 1992, 395). This assumption implies group strategies with no individualistic intentions of any of the household members.

As previously discussed, households are often treated as if they have a logic and interest of their own, or in other words, as an individual entity possessing interests similar
to that of a person. Similarly any individual behavior or action exhibited by a member of a household is seen to be motivated by household interests, when the behavior may in fact be self-motivated and not at all in the interests of the entire household (Wolf 1997, 119-120).

These household migration strategies coincide with the recent theory of ‘new economics of migration’, in which individuals don’t make migratory decisions alone, but with the input of others involved - both to maximize incomes and minimize risks (Massey et al 1993, 436). In regards to El Salvador, men may be sent abroad due to already established networks of previous migrants that will be able to assist them in finding work, but also because the actual migration journey is more dangerous for women than men. Men also may be sent abroad to fulfill their traditional gender roles as ‘breadwinners’.

If one agrees with the theory of household strategies, it is obvious that the recent strategy for families in El Salvador is to send males abroad while women stay behind to care for the home and the family. It is debatable whether or not women are in agreement with this type of strategy or whether they would like to migrate abroad as well; it is also arguable that women initially agree to this type of strategy under the belief that they will one day join their husbands in the destination country.

*Migration and Development*

As promised, we now return to the discussion of migration and its implications for human dignity and development. While some define migration as a legitimate form of
hope for ‘underdeveloped’ countries, others hold that it is simply another means of exploitation in which workers and resources are torn from the periphery and brought into the center (Kearney 1986, 339). The side one takes in regards to this argument largely depends on the way in which he or she views development.

As discussed in chapter II, recent analyses of development have attempted to ‘dethrone’ the idea that development is measured solely through economic growth and replace it with concepts and ideas that respect economic growth as a means for development but deny that this type of growth should be regarded as its sole end. As previously established, I have chosen to refer to the latter definition of development in this thesis.

In a recent paper entitled, “Left-Behind Households of Filipino Overseas Filipino Workers”, Hector Morada stated that the findings of a recent study conducted in the Philippines concluded that, “Relative to the local counterparts, households where a spouse is an OFW [Overseas Filipino Worker] are better in terms of a number of socio-demographic measures [such] as education…” (2001, 21).

The results found in the Philippines seem to indicate that migration has increased development within society not solely based on economic growth but on social indicators as well. While these findings are relevant, as mentioned before they cannot be generalized across borders as each society and culture responds to migration and its effects differently. So how then can we speak of the situation of women left behind in El Salvador without speaking directly to the women themselves? With the context of El

81
Salvador in mind and the various experiences of women who stay already discussed, we
turn to some empirical evidence regarding the experience of women left behind by
migration in El Salvador.

*Empirical Evidence*

The Human Development Indicators will be considered here along with measures
of male to female immigration ratios, remittance data, and statistics regarding female
participation in the labor force. Migration ratios are used to convey the severity of the
situation in which men are increasingly migrating more than women. While this is not
ture globally, as most countries are experiencing a ‘feminization of migration’, statistics
are used here to illustrate the phenomenon of more male versus female emigration from
El Salvador. Remittance statistics are utilized to explore the effect of remittances on the
human development indicators. Statistics regarding female participation in the labor
force are used in order to show an increased female presence in the labor force, but also
to acknowledge that economic factors are a part of development. In other words, in
agreement with Sen, economic growth is a means to development rather than an end, and
will thus at the very least be acknowledged here in this fashion.

*Male to Female Migration Ratios and Remittance Data*

As previously discussed, beginning in 1980 with the civil war in El Salvador,
male emigrants began to outnumber female emigrants and trends have continued in that
manner since – reasons for this switch were established earlier in this chapter. In other words, while emigration alone has increased dramatically since the 1970s from El Salvador, a rise in male emigration has accompanied this increase.

Table 2: Salvadoran Immigrants in the Americas 1970-2000

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Immigrants</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1970</td>
<td>73,641</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1980</td>
<td>127,450</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1990</td>
<td>519,314</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>887,000-2,750,000</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNDP 2005, 35

Table 3: El Salvador’s Male/Female International Migration Ratio 1996-2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Year</th>
<th>Ratio</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1996</td>
<td>1.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1997</td>
<td>1.19</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1998</td>
<td>2.41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1999</td>
<td>2.49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2000</td>
<td>5.15</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2001</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2002</td>
<td>(no data)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2003</td>
<td>2.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2004</td>
<td>3.18</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNDP 2005, 39

In 2004, migrants from El Salvador sent back remittances to 22.3% of households in El Salvador, or 362,189 homes (UNDP 2005, 76). That year, remittances represented 16% of GDP (a rise from .3% in 1980 and 4% in 1989), (Villalona 2006, 28), 91% of the national budget, and 202% of government social spending (UNDP 2005, 6).
According to the United Nations Development Programme, remittances have an undeniable impact on the human development indicators in El Salvador. The insertion of Salvadoran migrants into U.S. society and the U.S. labor market generates countless benefits: migrants personal living conditions are improved in the U.S., the income of their family members in El Salvador is increased through remittances, their migration reduces the demand on public services such as healthcare and education in the home country, and alleviates the supply versus demand problem of the labor force in El Salvador (UNDP 2005, 74-75). The most immediate impact of remittances on the well being of those who receive them is their impact on family income (ibid., 76). The average receipt of remittances for the entire population of El Salvador is US$103 per person annually, while some regions, such as Chalatenango, report numbers as high as US$548 per person, per year (ibid, 78). In El Salvador, 72% of remittance receivers are women and 28% are men (Orozco et al. 2005, 33). 23% of those who receive remittances receive them from their spouse while 25% receive them from their children and another 23% receive them from their siblings (Orozco et al. 2005, 32). These statistics show that while women left behind are largely responsible for deciding how remittances are spent in El Salvador, that money does not necessarily come from a spouse who has migrated.

The impact of remittances on family income is visible in Table 4 under the column showing percent change of households living in poverty. The most change in poverty has been witnessed in the regions where the most homes receive remittances. This is demonstrated by the shading in Table 4 where the darkest shading represents
departments where over 25% of households receive remittances and poverty decreased by at least 15% while the lighter shading represents 25% remittance reception and a poverty decrease of at least 10%.

Table 4: HDI, Remittance, Poverty and Education Statistics – El Salvador

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>San Salvador</td>
<td>+.031 (.788)</td>
<td>19.8</td>
<td>-8.8 (24)</td>
<td>+.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Libertad</td>
<td>+.038 (.741)</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>-8.1 (28.8)</td>
<td>+.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sonsonate</td>
<td>+.051 (.716)</td>
<td>17.5</td>
<td>-12 (39.1)</td>
<td>+1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cuscatlán</td>
<td>+.045 (.714)</td>
<td>14.1</td>
<td>-3.2 (46.9)</td>
<td>+.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Miguel</td>
<td>+.038 (.709)</td>
<td>30.6</td>
<td>-14.7 (38.7)</td>
<td>+.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Santa Ana</td>
<td>+.036 (.707)</td>
<td>22.9</td>
<td>-7.2 (38.7)</td>
<td>+.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Paz</td>
<td>+.045 (.701)</td>
<td>14.7</td>
<td>-7.6 (40.9)</td>
<td>+.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Usulután</td>
<td>+.052 (.697)</td>
<td>27.9</td>
<td>-16.5 (44.3)</td>
<td>+1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>San Vicente</td>
<td>+.057 (.683)</td>
<td>16.1</td>
<td>-7.8 (55)</td>
<td>+1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ahuachapán</td>
<td>+.034 (.682)</td>
<td>14.3</td>
<td>-11.5 (45)</td>
<td>+.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chalatenango</td>
<td>+.068 (.680)</td>
<td>28.2</td>
<td>-24.4 (41.9)</td>
<td>+1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>La Unión</td>
<td>+.095 (.673)</td>
<td>47.5</td>
<td>-28.5 (35)</td>
<td>+1.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cabañas</td>
<td>+.081 (.656)</td>
<td>37.2</td>
<td>-20.5 (53)</td>
<td>+1.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Morazán</td>
<td>+.062 (.624)</td>
<td>34.2</td>
<td>-11 (55.3)</td>
<td>+.9</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: UNDP 2005, author’s calculations.

The impact of remittances on family household income is undeniable, but what is also visible is a slow increase in the human development indictors (see Table 4), with the greatest increases exhibited in those areas that receive the most remittances. As shown in Table 5, this relates directly to the fact that remittances are most often spent on the provision of basic human needs, making up for deficiencies in local income.
The increase in the human development indicators is largely dependent upon who receives remittances and how they choose to spend them. Table 5 shows how remittances are spent in El Salvador. The graph is split by gender due to the fact that 72% of remittance receivers are women and 28% are men, thus largely impacting how remittances as a whole are spent within the country (Orozco et al 2005, 33). In a survey conducted by Manuel Orozco, et al., remittance receivers were asked how they spent remittances and were allowed multiple responses; the four most repeated responses were food, clothing, education and housing – basic needs. Money spent in these areas directly relates to a rise in the human development indictors as they largely reflect access to and provision of these basic needs. Medicine is the one category which seems to underrepresented here. Low mention of this category could have to do with the fact that money sent for medicine is sometimes viewed as money sent in emergencies and thus would not be mentioned by remittance receivers in a survey in which they were asked how they generally spend remittances.

Table 5: Remittance Expenses in El Salvador Separated by Gender

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Expense</th>
<th>% Response by Gender of Receiver</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Male</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Food</td>
<td>85.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Clothing</td>
<td>46.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>48.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Housing</td>
<td>35.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Business</td>
<td>14.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Savings</td>
<td>28.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Medicine</td>
<td>10.7</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Data from surveys by Orozco et al., 2005, author’s calculations.
As reflected in Table 5, education, inarguably an integral part of human development, has been largely impacted by remittances. According to Cox-Edwards and Ureta in a study in 2003, the probability that a child from a rural home in El Salvador that receives US$100 in remittances drops out of primary school is 56% less than the probability that a child from a home that does not receive remittances would drop out. The probability is 24% less for children from urban areas (UNDP 2005, 104).

As has been exemplified here, remittances have a positive impact on the human development indicators for all those who remain in El Salvador, not just women left behind. My argument in chapters III and IV has been that the human development indicators, especially for women, have risen partially due to the empowerment of women (which arguably began during the war) and outward male migration (with has opened up spaces for women in Salvadoran society, sustained increases in self-confidence gained by women during the war, and provided an increase in well being through the sending home of remittances). In other words, while it has been exhibited here that remittances do positively contribute to human development they are not the all-encompassing solution to El Salvador’s problems. The receipt of remittances has been accompanied by multiple changes in Salvadoran society which have positively contributed to human development, especially for females. The increase in female participation in the labor force is another societal change that has contributed positively to development.
Female Labor Force Participation

Employment entails far more than simply the receipt of an income, and thus one could argue that employment benefits females (psychologically, socially and in terms of gender equality and increased self-confidence) equally, if not more than, the basic receipt of remittances (A. Sen 1999, 94). The female labor force participation rate in El Salvador has been well documented since 1985, but has not risen as consistently as the other development indicators. At 47.96% in 1985, the participation rate rose to its height at 53.46% in 1990, and then wavered until 2002 when it again began a steady rise. In 2005, the female labor force participation rate had almost reached its height once again at 50.4%.

Interpreting the Data – Male-Female Migration Ratios and Female Labor Force

Female life expectancy, the female adult literacy rate, the female secondary school enrollment rate, and female participation in the labor force have all risen consistently in recent years in El Salvador, with the exception of the miniscule decline in female secondary school enrollment rates between 2004 and 2005. This has all taken place alongside of the increase in male versus female emigration ratios.

It would be incorrect here to immediately assume that correlation equals causation and that male emigration is solely responsible for the rise in female human development indicators. However, we have empirically established that a correlation between male to female migration ratios and the human development indicators does exist. We have also
established that remittances, sent home by migrants, positively impact the human development indicators. One last empirical test can be performed here using male to female migration ratios and female labor force statistics – the only two variables for which enough data is available to perform a statistically significant test.

After performing a bivariate regression analysis, there is a very strong statistically significant relationship (sig=.01) between female participation in the labor force of El Salvador and the ratio of male versus female emigrants. Regression analysis shows that an increase of one in the male to female emigration ratio relates to a 2.77% increase in the percentage of female participation in the labor force. These results show that the ratio of male to female emigration accounts for a proportion of the growth (20.6% based on r squared) in the percentage of female participation in the labor force. While other factors such as GDP growth (sig=.000) and the fertility rate (sig=.000) are also very strongly related to the percentage of female participation in the labor force and are responsible for a large proportion of the growth in that percentage, male migration forms a part of the explanation. In other words, male emigration does statistically help explain the rise in female participation in the labor force of El Salvador, and thus a portion of development.

Summary

As mentioned earlier, the violent environment that exists in El Salvador threatens the well-being of all of its citizens, not just women left behind. However, it does impact the lives of those women in ways that set them apart from women in other countries. For
example, the culture of fear that comes along with a violent atmosphere may discourage women from working outside of the home causing it to appear that women’s place in the domestic sphere does not change when men leave. The lack of trust that accompanies fear may also inhibit women from forming networks or relationships with their neighbors.

The poverty that pervades life in this country has influenced women’s experiences in specific ways, but, as has been discussed, poverty has been in decline in recent years partially due to the large amount of remittances sent home by Salvadoran immigrants. This decrease in poverty rates has been met by an increase in the human development indicators. Female participation in the labor force has also risen, with employment providing women with an added increase in self-confidence. This increased participation has occurred due to a rise in export led production, a sector in which women are hired more frequently than men, but also arguably because the exodus of men has opened up space for increased female participation. While the difficulties in the lives of Salvadoran women cannot be rectified solely through the outward migration of their spouses, that migration seems to have had some positive impact on female’s lives.

As argued in chapter III, the civil war in El Salvador while brutal and inexcusably violent, did provide some positive experiences for women. As female combatants, church leaders, refugees and human rights activists, women experienced increased levels of self-confidence through which they gained the abilities to fight publicly for better access to basic human necessities and rights. While it has been noted that males reverted
to traditional ideas regarding gender roles after the war, females maintained their increased self-confidence and partially held onto the idea that a transformation of society had occurred – at least for them.

The outward migration of males from El Salvador has largely contributed to an increase in the numbers regarding female human development in the sense that it has allowed women to renegotiate traditional power relations and hierarchies of power; it has aided in the breakdown of traditional gender roles in the sense that it has allowed women to take on new roles which extend from the social to the financial realm. As has been argued, women have more control over household finances when their husbands migrate as well as have the ability to decide how remittances are spent. These new roles have led to increases in female responsibility and autonomy and thus caused an increase in female empowerment.

This increase, which partially stems from the migration of males, has allowed women to reflect upon the entitlements they were born with – the right to an education, literacy and a long and healthy life. The reflection upon these entitlements accompanied by the self-confidence and self-worth gained during the war have encouraged women to fight for their rights and opportunities and thus led to increases in human development indicators. Arguably, many of the opportunities women have today were recognized and fought for by women during the war. The outward migration of males has further allowed for this type of reflection upon deserved opportunities, as well as opened up spaces and further enhanced women’s capacity to become more involved in development.
Put simply, the ideas women gained through the war (and often had to keep private following the conflict) have been reignited, reaccepted, and sustained in Salvadoran society through the outward migration of males.
CHAPTER V:
CONCLUSION

The objective of this thesis has been to examine the lives of Salvadoran women in regards to recent increases in female human development indicators. Specifically this investigation sought to address the question: What is the impact of outward male migration and the post-conflict context of El Salvador on female human development? I did not attempt here to prove theories through the use of empirical data, but rather sought to explain empirical data through the discussion of post-conflict and migration theories.

Throughout this thesis I understood development to be measured by the Human Development Indicators of education, adult literacy and life expectancy as well as by Amartya Sen’s definition of development as improved access to opportunities. As previously discussed, Sen and Joseph Stiglitz agree that development is concerned with what people can or cannot do and the control that individuals have over their own destinies. Sen bases his analysis on the entitlements that people have and the capabilities that those entitlements generate; he believes that the process of development can be viewed through the expansion of these individual capabilities (A. Sen 1983, 754-755). Stiglitz bases his analysis on the widening of individuals’ horizons and the reduction of their sense of isolation; he views education as the core of development (Stiglitz 1998, 5; 23).

Based on these two definitions of development, Salvadoran women have witnessed greater human development in recent years. Increased access to
education, higher literacy rates, and the lengthening of female life expectancy, have all directly impacted women’s opportunities in El Salvador. In line with Stiglitz’s thinking, women’s horizons have been widened and their sense of isolation has been reduced through their increased access to education. In line with Sen’s thinking, the opportunities Salvadoran women enjoy have increased and they are now capable of accomplishing more. It has been my argument throughout this thesis that outward male migration, compounded with the post-conflict situation in El Salvador, is partly responsible for the increase in female human development reflected in the human development indicators.

Female organizing during the civil war in El Salvador led to a greater consciousness of female subordination. This conscious recognition of society’s repression of female access to entitlements, led to a fight – frequently led by women – for the transformation of society. This transformation gained during the war has been partially sustained by high levels of outward male migration which have necessitated and allowed for women’s continued public involvement in society which has led to an increase in female human development indicators.

Based on the empirical data presented in the introduction and chapter IV, a rise in the female human development indicators has occurred in recent years. In El Salvador women are living longer, more women are literate, and more women are going to school than ever before. These phenomena have been met with a similar increase in female participation in the labor force.
In chapter III, I argued that women’s situation in El Salvador today has been largely affected by the civil war that the country suffered from 1980-1992 – and posited that it is possible that the conflict brought with it something other than suffering. I have argued that female participation in the war (whether as combatants, refugees, human rights activists or consciousness raisers) gave Salvadoran women power. It was imperative that someone fill the holes in the ranks of the FMLN, imperative that someone speak out in the name of human rights and dignity, and crucial that someone fight for the future of the children. These women did just that – they fulfilled vital roles in society and were respected for doing so.

El Salvador is currently not in a state of war; however, it is arguable that the conflict continues. The country is a violent terrain both in the literal sense that ten people die daily from homicides, and in the sense that the violence of poverty and economic suffering continues (Henríquez 2007). The roles these women have played in the past are still paramount to daily Salvadoran life and survival. Some women continue the fight for human rights while others have turned to community consumption issues such as access to potable water and fair prices for transportation. No matter the cause, the fight continues.

Thus, the post-conflict situation in El Salvador has impacted female human development in various ways: through participation during the war, as combatants, human rights activists, etc., women gained a certain sense of empowerment which would have been difficult to attain any other way; the necessity of resources during the war
allowed women to move out of their roles into the non-domestic sphere and some of them to maintain that status after the war; and finally the war allowed women to harness the power that comes with marianismo.

The war allowed women to become more involved in development in the sense that through the war they were permitted to leave the domestic sphere, but also respected for their place within it; they began to organize in their fight for survival; and they gained increased self-confidence and self-worth through the leadership positions they held as combatants, church leaders, new roles in the refugee camps, etc.

The war created more opportunities for Salvadoran women – opportunities which have given them the capabilities to become more educated, enjoy higher levels of literacy and lead longer, healthier lives.

*Outward Male Migration and Female Human Development*

As I have discussed, outward male migration directly affects women left behind in various ways – not only through the sending home of remittances and their consequent positive impact on female well being. Another large impact of male emigration is that it opens up more space for females. While this has been previously determined, I also acknowledge the danger in implying that the only reason why women are accepted into certain positions as community leaders or into certain job sectors is because men are leaving. This not only binds female capacity to males but also implies that women would never have achieved these positions or filled these roles if men had never left in the first
place. This is neither my belief nor what I intend to describe here.

As noted earlier, women begin to move out of the boundary of the home as they are forced to take on tasks once fulfilled by their husbands. Women must interact with the community in previously unnecessary ways – this extends from new financial responsibilities to the acquisition of new social roles.

Thus, outward male migration leads to an increase in female human development for various reasons: as men leave more spaces are opened up that allow increased female participation, in the absence of their husbands women often begin work in the non-domestic sphere for the first time as well as take on new social roles that he once filled, and females are often in control of household finances including remittances. These new roles have led to increases in female responsibility and autonomy and thus caused an increase in female empowerment.

This increase, which partially stems from the migration of males, has allowed women to reflect upon the entitlements they were born with – the right to an education, literacy and a long and healthy life. The reflection upon these entitlements accompanied with the self-confidence and self-worth gained during the war have encouraged women to fight for their rights and opportunities and as such have led to an increase in human development indicators. As I have argued, many of the opportunities women have today were recognized and fought for by women during the war. The outward migration of males has further allowed for this type of reflection upon deserved opportunities, as well
as opened up spaces and further enhanced women’s capacity to become more involved in development.

Final Thoughts

While violence would seem to restrict growth in the human development indicators, the measures have instead risen for females. As the empirical data shows, more Salvadoran women are literate, go to school and live longer than they have in the past – all of which increase women’s life opportunities and thus their capabilities to affect change and control their own destinies.

Are these recent trends due to the opportunities created for Salvadoran women during the war, which gave them the capabilities to become more publicly involved in society in a fight for basic human rights? Or is this recent rise in the female development indicators due to the outward migration of males, which has allowed for further reflection and action regarding deserved opportunities? My conclusion is that both of these phenomena come together to define and explain the lives of Salvadoran women today. The existence of these two major themes – high levels of outward male migration and the post-conflict situation – highlight the reasons El Salvador was chosen as the basis for this investigation. While I have argued that male migration and the post-conflict situation are vital to describing the increase in female human development indicators, I acknowledge that they are necessary but not sufficient explanations to depict this growth. Countless other factors such as gross domestic product, free trade agreements, inequality, and
fertility rates come together to determine how women can and do lead their lives.

More qualitative research is obviously needed to be sure of the conclusions drawn here. Salvadoran women need to be interviewed in the future so that their voices are expressed and heard in an investigation into their lives. However, this is a beginning, a theoretical basis from which one could begin a more in-depth qualitative study.

Throughout this investigation, history has proven itself paramount in the sense that the war created opportunities for Salvadoran women which they previously did not experience. Those opportunities gave these women the capability to become publicly involved in society and add numbers and power to the struggle for basic human rights. The recent trend of outward male migration has allowed for increased female reflection upon their entitlements and the opportunities they deserve. Improved access to opportunities, met with increased capabilities and reflection upon entitlements have not only permitted but encouraged women to fight for their basic rights – access to education, adult literacy and the ability to live a long and healthy life – and a rise in the female human development indicators has occurred.
REFERENCES


100


Pearce, Jenny. 1998. From civil war to ‘civil society’: has the end of the Cold War brought peace to Central America? *International Affairs* 74, 3: 587-615.


