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THE URBANIZATION AND LIBERATION OF
WOMEN: A STUDY OF URBAN IMPACT ON
GUAJIRO WOMEN IN VENEZUELA

By

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Abstract: The majority of urban studies assume that urbanization effects both sexes in more or less the same way. This paper attempts to correct this picture by investigating the impact of urbanization on indigenous women in Latin America, taking the pastoral Guajiro of Venezuela as an example. The discussion focuses on three critical areas: 1) educational and occupational opportunities; 2) kinship and other social networks; and 3) the marital relationship. Relevant material from studies on women and urbanization in other parts of the world is used to gain deeper understanding of the effects of urbanization on women in general.

While the Guajiras are unique in some ways because of their matrilineal/pastoral background, they share with other indigenous women in the cities the loss of important traditional support systems without regaining new opportunities and resources in a world oriented towards and dominated by males. Cross-cultural data indicate that women respond to these losses in very different ways. A potential for improving the Guajira's situation is seen in strengthening her economic position, which must be linked to a new form of social bonding among women.

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INTRODUCTION

Urbanization is usually thought of as a "modernizing" process (Inkeles and Smith 1974:13-14) that is "broadly similar" for both sexes (ibid 311) and one that gives people "more freedom of choice" (ibid 4).

Indeed, women in various parts of the world seem to have seen the road to the city as the road to liberation (cf. Little 1973; Whiteford 1977). Outside observers have taken a similar view. Baker and Bird, for example, in their interesting and valuable discussion on "Urbanization and the Position of Women" (1959) state that "urbanization has in general offered women a greater degree of personal choice and individual activity; and it has offered them personal rewards in personal status" [emphasis added]. The authors acknowledge that "this is not an unmixed blessing, since it exposes [women] to an extreme insecurity" (ibid 115) caused by the breakup of the kingroup, but disregarding class distinctions, they believe in the triumph of individualism as it flourishes in the city: "Women who, by their personal achievements and by their new, or potential status as equal partners in the self-regarding domestic family, are coming to expect a parity of status with men" (ibid 120-121).

A look at the description of "modern man" in a recent study not only reveals the male bias in this type of research but also casts doubt on the real opportunities for women in the new urban centers:

The more modern man is quicker to adopt technical innovation, and the more ready to implement birth control measures; he urges his son to go as far as he can in school . . . and he permits his wife and daughter to leave the home for more active participation in economic life" (Inkeles and Smith 1974:313).

I have chosen a group of indigenous women in Latin America, the Guajiras from Venezuela, to examine the generalizations. The Latin American context is of special interest here since this continent has one of the highest urbanization rates in the world (Bradfield 1973; Olien 1973:285). Although there are many studies of urbanization, urban migration and urban sprawl in Latin America, the documentation of women's role and place in this process remains insufficient (Arizpe 1975:585),² and we still rely on generalizations made on the basis of male samples (cf. Inkeles and Smith 1974). This is an especially regrettable oversight since in Latin America more women than men migrate to urban centers (Arizpe 1978; Boserup 1970). This is an interesting phenomenon, differing from the situation in Africa or Asia (Boserup 1970). In Africa, for example, the trend is reversed, and more men than women have migrated to the towns and cities (Boserup 1970; Little 1973; Youseff 1974). While such differences can be partly explained by the colonial past of the continents and the differing roles of the sexes in the African and Latin American rural sectors (cf. Boserup 1970, chapter 10), we are far from understanding fully the role of men and especially women in the migratory process.

Since adaptation to city life can only be understood in terms of the migrants' past experiences,³ we must consider the ethnic background of the migrants before exploring their lives in the urban context. In my discussion of the impact of urban life on Guajiro women, I will attempt to explain how their cultural background leads to the particular problems that they must face in the city. The Guajiro provide an especially interesting and important case in this respect. Because they are the largest ethnic minority in Venezuela (Ministerio de Educación 1978), their integration into the national culture is a vital issue. Since women in this society are influential, they could well provide a model for larger social participation. We must thus pose the question of how this traditional background could be put to use to help solve the problems of Guajiro women in urban settlements.

Comparisons with women undergoing urbanization in other parts of the world will show that, while the situation of the Guajiro women is unique in some areas, they share some fundamental difficulties with women who are involved in urbanization experiences in other parts of the world.

THE EXAMPLE OF THE GUAJIROS⁴

The Guajiros who live under aboriginal conditions (cf. Wilbert 1972) are cattle herders. Arawakan speakers, they belong to one of the largest linguistic groups in South America. In spite of almost 500 years of contact with Spaniards and other Europeans, they have kept their language and essential elements of their economic and social structure intact. Massive urban impact has brought decisive changes within the last twenty to thirty years. Before this time, the Guajiros were only "visitors" in their contacts with western culture; they borrowed certain traits, attitudes, and objects, but they resisted successfully attempts to structurally change their society.

Women have significant and influential position in tradition Guajiro society. Matrilineal descent and a tendency towards matrilocality give them certain advantages compared to women in western industrial society. Only women receive a specialized, formalized education (Watson-Franke 1976), and women can, like men, gain influence in the social, economic and religious spheres (Watson-Franke 1975).

In the 1930s, the Guajiros started to move in larger numbers to the city of Maracaibo. This was probably related to the growth associated with the oil boom, though it is not clear whether the triggering factor in the beginning was the worsening of living conditions in their home land, the Guajira peninsula, or the lure of "easy" city life. From the beginning, the Venezuelan government observed with concern the growth of slum areas around Maracaibo and, in the early 1940s, founded the barrio of Ziruma. In the hope of solving uncontrolled urban growth, Ziruma was meant to be a homestead for Guajiros coming to the city (Dupouy 1958). But the numbers of Guajiro immigrants increased (Guzmán 1963), and new and ever larger barrios sprang up around the edges of the city, especially in the northern and western areas. Thus, the Guajiros began to be part of the immense

rural-urban move that has been changing Venezuela during the last several decades. In 1936, for example, two-thirds of the country's population lived in rural areas, whereas, by 1961, two-thirds lived in urban areas (Peattie 1968:22-23).⁵ Today, Venezuela has the highest urbanization rate in Latin America (Margolies 1977; Suárez and Torrealba 1979). The exact number of Guajiros living in urban areas is unknown, but given the high rural-urban mobility in the state of Zulia, where the Guajiro population is concentrated, we can assume that a major percentage of the approximately 50,000 Guajiros in Venezuela (Ministerio de Educación 1978) live in urban settlements.

Why do Guajiros migrate⁶ to the city?

They move, as a rule, a) for economic reasons or b) because of social conflicts.

a) More men than women leave the peninsula because of economic difficulties, which means that the Guajiro do not follow the typical Latin American pattern according to which women are active in initiating migration (Boserup 1970; Whiteford 1977). Most married women whose husbands migrate stay behind or later follow their husbands to the city. Exceptions are young women who go to work in the city to supplement the family income. This is usually looked upon as a temporary situation and the family expects them to return for good after a few years of work. Frequently, such women work only several months in the city, spending the rest of each year back in the peninsula.

Guajiro women have a central and, at the same time, flexible economic position in their society which might be one of the reasons they are less active in initiating migration.

b) Escape to the city allows an individual to start a new existence outside the boundaries of the kinship system with all its obligations. Life in the city is the choice often taken by males who come into conflict with tribal law. It should be added, however, that the arm of tribal justice and revenge sometimes reaches a delinquent even in the anonymity of the city; indeed, the aggrieved party may even kill an innocent member of the culprit's group who lives in one of the urban barrios. In the past, law offenders lived as social outcasts in the central mountain range of the Guajira peninsula. For a woman, migration to the city may be an escape from an intolerable marital situation or from her family's attempt to force her into an unacceptable marriage.

Under what particular set of circumstances do Guajiro women actually migrate to the city (cf. Watson-Franke 1972)?

1) One possibility is that the woman migrates to the city with her parents. In this case, she usually leaves the peninsula at an early age. Women in this group, as a rule, become more accepting of city life and tend to denounce tribal customs and values more than do women who arrived as adults.

2) Other women travel with cousins or siblings to the city to visit relatives. Such excursions often end in a life-long stay when the girl falls in love with a man from the barrio.

3) There is a rather small group of women who follow civilizados to the city. These men are Venezuelans or foreigners on visit or on work assignments in the Guajira. They live with Guajiro women in common union or make a payment to the woman's family, thus complying with tribal custom. Most of these men leave the peninsula after their occupational responsibilities are fulfilled, taking the woman with them, or, in some cases, leaving her behind. Such a union leaves the woman very isolated if she follows the man to the city or to another part of the country. She is often abandoned later on and will experience a succession of similar relationships.

4) A larger number of women follow their husbands to the city. If they take up permanent residence in the city, they suffer from much isolation. Not only are they separated from their kindreds, they are often separated from their husbands because of men's work and leisure time proclivities outside the home.

5) Those who take up only temporary residence in the city seem in many ways to be better off than those who leave the Guajira peninsula permanently. This, it might be added, is a common occurrence. These women spend most of their lives divided between the Guajira and the city barrio. They visit the city for several reasons: to meet with the husband, from whom they receive money and food from the city; to market their weavings; to call on a relative; or to seek medical help in cases of very serious illnesses where the tribal curer refused treatment because of the difficulty or hopelessness of the case. Children of such unions, as a rule, grow up in the peninsula. This means that, in such cases, the urban experience is only an interlude without strong structural consequences for the family. Such marital separations are probably much more acceptable to the Guajiro wife (and her husband) than they would be to a western couple. Traditionally, Guajiro men travel a great deal, spending time on their business and visiting their matrilineal relatives. In the tribal culture, at least, women have their relatives to look to for support and company, and so do men.

These various patterns indicate that urban migration seen as a whole is not an abrupt step, but takes place as a gradual movement. Some Guajiros never make it all the way to the city but build a rancho somewhere along the highway to Maracaibo.

Those who make it to the city arrive in a large downtown terminal or get off a bus in one of the barrios at the outskirts where public services are not available or are available only to a very limited degree. Eventually, most Guajiros settle miles from the bustling core of city life. In this environment, the woman finds herself almost in total isolation. While she might live with relatives during the first days in the city, crowded living conditions do not allow for overnight guests for very long. The family will therefore soon have to move to their own place, building their own "house" out of cardboard, tin, or blocks if they have some money. If the husband is

employed, he is absent all day. If he works outside of Maracaibo, he may be gone for weeks or months at a time. While Guajiro women are accustomed to the frequent absence of husbands in traditional life, they have at least enjoyed since early childhood the comfort and closeness of their matrilineal relatives around them. In the city, however, the woman is surrounded by other women who find themselves in the same situation as herself. Feeling frightened and insecure, she may become hostile and uncooperative. Eventually, he may drift away. He may find a job elsewhere or he may take up with a younger woman who is not encumbered by children.

To assume that city life liberates implies the belief that the city offers true equality and better opportunities for all. To know whether a Guajira is indeed liberated when she lives in the city, we must compare her new and old situation and determine what advantages and disadvantages urban life offers her.

The mere fact that Guajiro women do not ordinarily initiate migration for economic reasons is interesting, for it is an indication of the significance and effectiveness they possess in their own society. Guajiro women have access to and control over property equal to that of men, including the all-important cattle, and they are actually at an advantage in acquiring property because of their weaving skill. A woman can always make a living through her weaving, while man has nothing left in the peninsula if his animals die. The woman is more flexible because she can exchange her weavings for animals or for money.

As mentioned earlier, in some cases Guajiro women leave their husband to escape kingroup pressure. But after several years in the city, they begin increasingly to see what they have lost, and what they have gained no longer seems so important. Feelings of nostalgia, remorse and bitterness are strong among many of the female barrio dwellers. Ray's remark that "Venezuelans do not share the nostalgia typical for urban arrivals in other countries" (1969:23) is certainly not true for the majority of the female migrants from the Guajira, who keep saying that they will return to the peninsula one day. But for the majority, for many reasons, this day never comes.

What do Guajiro women gain by living in an urban environment?

Cities are ideally the centers of economic and cultural opportunity. In the city, one can enjoy theaters, interesting shops, and beautiful streets and buildings, and there are employment opportunities that will give one the means to take advantage of such surroundings.

To understand how the Guajira is integrated into this new world and how she uses it, we will look at certain crucial aspects of her life, such as: 1) educational and occupational opportunities; 2) kingroup and other social networks; and 3) the marital relationship. Relevant material from studies on women and urbanization in other parts of the world will be used to gain a deeper understanding of the effects of urbanization on women in general.

Educational and Occupational Opportunities

In tribal Guajiro society, girls receive more education and training than boys. Only girls undergo a long period of formalized learning. This institution, known in Guajiro as majayüraá (or encierro in Spanish), prepares the girl for her life as an adult woman; in Guajiro terms this means being an economically independent, self-reliant person who is in control of herself and her life situation (Watson-Franke 1976). Starting with puberty, the girl is put in seclusion. This might last from two to five years depending on the socio-economic status of the family. The teachings focus mainly on weaving and sex education, including the preparation and use of contraceptive medicines. Thus, through her education, the Guajiro woman controls her productive and reproductive potential.

Migration to the city interferes severely with the continuation of this institution. Limited living space makes it difficult, if not impossible, to keep the girl secluded. Outside influences often instill a negative attitude toward this custom in girls: "I do not want to be locked up like an animal. Who needs that anyhow -- making belts and bags -- that is something for the 'mujer de antes'" -- such as comments often voiced by young girls. The need to attend school in the urban area also conflicts with traditional education. Girls are embarrassed to return to classes after they have remained in seclusion for several months. They know they are behind the other students and fear their classmates' ridicule.

Guajiro mothers are frequently in conflict as to which path to choose. The majority of those who were raised in the tribal tradition will make a compromise, secluding the girl for only several months or even weeks. The shortened process is explained as the necessity to combine the traditional teaching with the modern school education. While the mother, judging from her own situation, may realize only too often that the traditional teachings do not have the same effectiveness in urban life that they had in tribal culture, she will often forcefully insist on an encierro, even in shortened form, if only to make herself believe that the traditional world is still viable. The defensive character of these attitudes is often apparent (Watson 1976). Tribally oriented women often voice negative remarks about arejuna (non-Indian) women in general, pointing towards their lack of education as compared with the Guajira. A Guajira cannot believe that a woman will be successful as a woman unless she has been enclosed.

A good example of this difference is the issue of birth control and the maternal role. Both Guajiro and national Venezuelan culture expect women to become mothers and to be "good" mothers. But what is a "good" mother? The Guajiro mother is a rather harsh and very strict disciplinarian with considerable economic and social powers (Watson 1968), and she is effectively supported in her maternal role through several tribal patterns and institutions. In the city, she is faced with the image of the suffering mother who can gain influence in the family through male children and through her own martyred personality, an image with which children quickly become familiar through the mass media and through textbooks.⁷ In this

environment, the mother's importance as educator of her children diminishes (Mosonyi 1975:640). In the traditional culture, the woman's power as mother is linked to the most basic control she possesses, namely that of her reproductive functions, which is a result of her education. In the city, this most significant control over reproduction is lost. Various factors are responsible for this change. It is usually difficult for her to return to the mountains and collect the plants used for contraceptive medicines. The ideological background of urban life discourages and even punishes the search for an application of such knowledge. The influence of Catholic doctrine must also be considered as an influential factor. The role of the Catholic church in bringing about social change in Latin America and, thus, changing women's life styles is a very complex topic (Turner 1971) which requires more space than is available within the scope of this paper; thus I will limit myself to a few short remarks.

Both Guajiro and Catholic philosophy condemn abortion. The Guajira who aborts is severely punished (Watson-Franke 1978). But Guajiro culture provides the woman with the knowledge to avoid contraception without limiting her sexual activity and gives her the right to apply such knowledge. She is actually expected to plan and distribute her productive and reproductive powers effectively and wisely. The Catholic position of denying women "artificial" control over their reproductive potential has not been changed but was actually reconfirmed by John Paul II in his first speeches after he was elected Pope. The Guajira moving to the city enters a context that has been partly formed by values that have their root in Catholic doctrine, and consequently the knowledge she has earned in tribal culture becomes taboo. The case of the Guajira is evidence that birth control is not necessarily a result of "modern development." Rather, the impact of urban values, like other processes of westernization, often means a breakdown of controls women have possessed as part of their tribal heritage.⁸

Of course, Guajiro girls attend schools like boys, and mothers actually encourage their daughters to study diligently -- an attitude they share with many Latin American mothers (cf. Safa 1974). Since educational institutions, including the university, are free in Venezuela, there is a real opportunity to learn. But few go beyond the sixth year of compulsory education, which is, as the Guajiro rightly remark, not an efficient equivalent to the encierro in tribal culture as preparation for adulthood. To judge from the rates of literacy, women seem to receive less formal education than men: Venezuela has one of the lowest illiteracy rates in Latin America, but of those who are illiterate, 75% are women (Colomina de Rivera 1976:79). Guajiro girls have to overcome additional difficulties in school since they come from a different cultural background and speak a different language.

Girls, then, are disadvantaged in their urban learning environment. Not only do they not receive an effective basis to master adult life, they also enter a world whose ideology is based on male-oriented values and emphasizes man as the initiator, leader, and provider. It is not possible to draw a comparison with other societies in this regard since there is insufficient

work on the education of girls in other indigenous societies experiencing urbanization.

The Guajiro woman is also disadvantaged with respect to occupational opportunities. In the tribal economy, women actively participate in the control of basic resources such as land and water and, like men, acquire and manage cattle, the most valuable source of wealth in the culture. Moreover, all women learn to weave, which is viewed as a profession by the Guajiro. Through this skill, they are economically more resourceful and flexible than the men.

Especially talented and gifted women can become weaving teachers, political negotiators, or shamans (the latter two positions also being open to gifted and talented men.) In each of these careers, the woman receives considerable wealth in exchange for her knowledge and her services and also gains high social prestige. Perhaps more significantly, Guajiro society expects even the average woman to be economically independent and self-reliant. It is she and not her husband who is responsible for the daily economic security of the household (Gutierrez de Pineda 1950:251).

In spite of several attempts on the part of governmental agencies, most Guajiro women in the city do not succeed economically. The young girls are correct when they claim that weaving skills do not help in the city. Though a considerable number of women make a meager living through weaving and crocheting, in urban areas it is an extremely unreliable source of income. Subsidized shops selling woven products made by Guajiras have attracted less interest and generated less cooperation than expected. Recent attempts by the government office in charge of Indian affairs to create weaving cooperatives in the barrios have met with little success. The women prefer to work by themselves in their houses rather than pool their efforts and work together in a center in the barrio. The lack of kinship bonds in such a setting, plus the hostility and mistrust prevailing in the barrio, are probably responsible for this lack of success. During the last ten years, many Guajiro women have fared poorly in these endeavours and have abandoned their textile skills altogether. They now prefer to work in markets that have sprung up in Maracaibo where they sell contraband merchandise from Colombia. This development may eventually lead to the total disappearance of weaving skills in the city.

Domestic work is not seen as a desirable alternative by Guajiro women. Guajiro mothers, accustomed to keeping a watchful eye on their daughters, complain about immoral conditions in employing households, and older women often expressed resentment about the treatment accorded them by Venezuelan or foreign housewives.

The resurrection of the weaving skills and recognition of their economic value still seems to me to be one of the most desirable solutions since it would make Guajiro women once again self-reliant through using their cultural heritage effectively, as well as keeping alive one of the most beautiful indigenous crafts of Venezuela. Creating realistic financial opportunities for the purchase of working materials and the coordination of

production and marketing would make this possible. Problems of materials, production, and marketing are not unique to the Guajira weaver but are shared by indigenous women in other parts of Latin America who are engaged in home crafts production. Tzotzile women, for example, during the second Seminar on the Problems of the Indigenous Woman in Spring 1972 in Chipas, called attention to the economic problems associated with their work and asked for bank loans to purchase materials, and for assistance in selling their goods (Rendon 1975:589).⁹ Furthermore, the solution of economic difficulties must be accompanied by solutions for the problems of social adaptation that take the peculiar situation of the urban Guajira into consideration.

The Kingroup and Other Social Networks

It is usually assumed that kinship bonds have a limiting effect on the individual. Arguments focus especially on restrictions that traditional kinship-oriented social systems impose on women; thus, the city, with its diminished kinship obligations, theoretically becomes a liberating setting for women. But the traditional kinship organization regulates and limits the lives of all members, both female and male. It is the particular characteristics of the kinship system in question that determines whether the female's activities are indeed more restricted than those of the male. Seymour (1975), in her discussion of traditional and modern patterns in an Indian city, cites instances in which kinship ties drastically curb the activities and opportunities of males. At the same time, Seymour claims that the absence of kinship interference leads to greater sexual intimacy and equality. This argument deserves a closer look. Her view seems to be based on two assumptions: 1) that all kinship systems are male-oriented with exclusively vested male interests and, therefore, oppressive to women; and 2) that man as an individual will not oppress the woman. But this belief is built on the western illusion of the "free" individual. It is easy for the westerner who is accustomed to living in smaller, more "individualized" units to criticize the stifling effects of group pressures as they seem to exist in kinship-oriented societies. It is harder for us to recognize and acknowledge oppression on the individual level.

Young Guajiro women often concur with the position of the social scientist. They believe in the freedom of the individual spirit, and they frequently praise city life as a liberating experience. They wish to feel free of demands made upon them by relatives, free of arranged marriages, free to fall in love according to their own choices, and to live after their own inclinations (Watson-Franke 1972).

Urbanization as the promise of liberation is not a view limited to young Guajiras. Little (1973), for example, reports from Africa that Xhosa women desire to move to the city to escape the pressures exerted by the men and senior women in their villages. But the situation of these women differs significantly from that of the Guajira. Xhosa women live in a strongly male-oriented society with a patrilocal residence pattern. As a consequence, women have only limited access to property. In the city, if the woman is employed, she may very well be better off because her earned

wages are hers alone. The desire of Xhosa women to go to the towns has probably been strengthened by years of restrictions placed upon their movements by colonial governments; the British, for example, prohibited women from migrating to the towns and kept them literally as hostages in the villages until the men returned to the land.

By contrast, the Guajira comes from a strongly women-oriented environment. Matrilineal descent and frequent matrilineal living arrangements give her equal access to and control over all resources and allow her to a high degree control over herself as well.

Considering her background, can the Guajira be liberated in the city? Whiteford (1977) in a study of peasant women in a Colombian town claims that the urban environment liberates women. He equates liberation with the opportunity of taking initiative and being in charge. His study of Popoyán indicates that women have often initiated migration and have worked hard to make ends meet once they take up residence in the city. There are fewer family restrictions interfering with women's productivity in the city as compared to the village. Whiteford seems to agree with the assumption that women will be liberated if they are "allowed" to work without interference. Yet, on the other hand, we hear that women still experience more restrictions than men in their social lives.

Among the Guajiro women, opinions about the city are divided. While young women would agree with Whiteford and see the city as a place of opportunity and freedom, older Guajiras come to perceive the separation from the kingroup as a disaster rather than as liberation. Several of my informants actually listed the breakup of the kingroup as the most negative aspect of women's lives in the city:

The biggest change occurring in the city is that there is not so much family anymore. The women themselves do not want much family. They are only interested in their own children, or perhaps the closest uncle. In the Guajira, by comparison, there are the uncles, the aunts, all are family, the grandmother, the grandfather, they are all treated as equally important. There is respect and concern (female informant, ca. 60 years, barrio Ziruma, Maracaibo).

And women in other parts of the world have likewise experienced the negative consequences of weakening and dying kinship ties (cf. Safa 1974:60; Seymour 1975:766; Oeser 1969:86f).

How do the women cope with this new situation? As we have noted, weakening kingroup solidarity is not replaced by individual economic and social strength. Do women, then, substitute this loss with a new institution, with new social networks? Many young Guajiro women, and many social scientists, seem to believe that the easiest solution would be the substitution of the extended family by the nuclear family. But this would mean bringing about structural changes of such a fundamental and drastic a nature that they could not be accepted smoothly.

Guajiro women do not develop efficient networks outside the altered but still dominant traditional kinship system to help them cope with their new environment. This stands in contrast with women's behavior reported in other societies. Probably best known are the well organized associations to assist African women who move to the city. Women here can make use of traditional institutions, i.e., women's associations that existed already before the onset of modern urbanization (cf. Falade 1963; Little 1973; Sudarkasa 1973), especially in West Africa. In a planned housing project in New Guinea, women founded groups whose members gave each other financial assistance (Oeser 1969). And here I refer again mainly to women who come from a male-oriented social environment. Such organizations have not developed among urban Guajiro women. I observed only one exception, a group founded by Guajiro women who were members of a political party and felt that the party had to get involved in the problems of women in general and of mothers in particular. But this group mobilized very few women, and no other groups developed. Why is it that the attitudes of Guajiro women towards the formation of supporting associations differs from those of women in many other societies.

In West Africa, the market situation induces women to form bonds on the basis of professional interests rather than on the basis of kinship. But I do not believe that we can answer the question of why some urban women form associations and others do not by looking at the economic sphere alone. We must also consider the effects of the society's ideology.

In the patrilineal/patrilocai group, women come together as wives rather than as sisters. To form links with other women, they must reach out to strangers, who, because of patrilocal residence, are themselves strangers in a new village. Guajiro women, on the other hand, do not have this experience. Living traditionally in a matrilineage, Guajiro women are born into a support group. Through birth they acquire the right to be a part of a group which is, in turn, defined through them. They do not have to work at it. The pattern is predefined. This experience is consolidated by a strong matrilineal tendency in the residence pattern. To band together with strangers in the city to gain the support that, in the village, is their birthright would require some very basic changes. As I have noted earlier, changes of this nature generally take a long time.

Of interest in this connection are the Ijaw of Southeastern Nigeria. The northern group is patrilineal and has women's associations, while the southern Ijaw have an ambilineal system with strong matrilineal tendencies, and in this group, no women's associations have developed (Leis 1974). The patrilineal, male-oriented social structure might be one important factor that leads to female bonding in the northern group. A explanation based solely on economic/market factors is inadequate.

The situation in the New Guinea housing project mentioned earlier (cf. Oeser 1969) also differs very much from the Guajiro setting in Maracaibo. The Hohola Project brought families from different regions and language groups together. One factor that might have facilitated a certain amount of bonding among the Hohola women might be that Hohola is a planned urban

setting in which clubs and prearranged social activities were encouraged as part of the project. The government of Papua New Guinea has supported group and club activities in general, especially for women and girls, viewing them as instruments for spreading knowledge of "modern life styles" (Report of the Territory 1974). Again, the patrilineal background of the women in Hohola should be taken into consideration. Like the women in Africa, they have learned to reach out to women to whom they are not related through kin but with whom they are united through the common fate of being uprooted from their natal villages.

Most Guajiro women do not live in planned barrios, and each must find her individual solution to urban life. There is no doubt, however, that a new sense of female solidarity and bonding would help Guajiro women to cope with the many difficulties they must face in the city. The weaving cooperatives mentioned earlier would have a better change of surviving if there was such solidarity. In the light of this problematic situation, it would be interesting and useful to follow up the problem of female bonding outside the kinship system in various societies. Research on female bonding in general is not yet even in its initial stages. The common trend in the social sciences is to focus on male bonding as an outgrowth of the early hunting experience (cf. Tiger 1969; Lee and DeVore 1968; Goldberg 1973/74), and this has unfortunately hampered such research on women.

The Marital Relationship

Young Guajiro wives often express positive feelings toward urban life. A mother of two children living in Santa Barbara, to the south of Lake Maracaibo, said:

Here my husband is with me [he was employed in the city which is not a typical situation] and he helps me with the children. He is a father to my children. The men in the Guajira are not like that; they do not like their children.

The break from the kinship is seen as a welcome opportunity to enjoy more intimacy within the nuclear family and to devote less concern to the larger kin group. A similar reaction has been reported from Mundurucu women in the Amazon Basin whose husbands left the traditional savannah villages and moved down to the river to collect rubber. In the migrant situation, men lived with their wives and children in nuclear families (Murphy and Murphy 1974). The women reportedly preferred the new arrangement (Murphy 1960). But is this a lasting feeling?

Seymour, in discussing the changes that accompany the process of urbanization, maintains that "urbanization per se need not produce the conjugal family type with close bonds between husband and wife but that the presence or absence of kinship networks is a critical factor" (1975:768). If kinship ties break down because of urban migration, it may seem that both spouses are forced to seek out each other's company to share difficulties and to solve problems in the city, but this does not apply with equal force to both sexes. Because men have greater occupational opportunities and

greater sexual and social freedom, they have greater opportunities to build new links. The women, who are forced to stay at home, must seek support from the husband and the children. Their need for communication within the home is the greater. This does not necessarily create a more harmonious nuclear family but may instead cause problems for the woman if her need is not met.

While many young Guajiras believe that the urban environment supports conjugal intimacy and, thus, a "better way of life," they may have a rude awakening when they grow older. As a rule, the older Guajiro women in the city have been abandoned by their husbands and consorts. If the woman still have active kinship links, or the children are working, she can rely on help from these relatives. She may earn a meager income with her own weaving and crocheting.

In this situation, the breakdown of the kinship system is crucial. There are no relatives to share child-rearing duties. There is no strong kinship to back a woman's claim against a neglectful husband. Hardly ever can a cobro, a payment of compensation, be enforced in the city for abandonment of a woman. Such a claim does not even make sense for Guajiras since, according to tribal custom, the woman is responsible for the economic upkeep of the household. Therefore, it seems as though the husband's contribution to the urban household, meager though it may be, is a sign of his good heart and his love rather than his social responsibility.

In the city, those family members who earn money gain influence. Often this is only the husband or the older children. The mother has practically no means to put pressure on family members to cooperate with her. In many cases, she uses emotional pressure to insure support from her children (cf. Watson n.d.). This is a traumatic experience for women because their socialization has accustomed them to equal access and control of tribal wealth. Furthermore, they have traditionally had opportunities -- thanks to their skills in weaving -- to improve their economic situations.

The decrease in women's economic control in the urban setting was also observed in the Hohola Project in New Guinea. These women had little control in their tribal societies (less than Guajiro women), but they now have even less. Men, on the other hand, gain influence from their jobs since they control wages. This leads to marital problems in Hohola:

Money was one of the most common areas of disagreement between husbands and wives . . . In several cases husbands threatened to withhold or bank money. This control of money was a new power for men, and emphasized a new kind of urban dependence of women on their husbands in contrast with a village economy where women generally had at least some control over basic food resources (Oeser 1969:79f.).

The man in Hohola sees his new position as one of power and uses it as such. Not only does he threaten the woman with economic sanctions, he also makes use of banking, a new technique of economic management, to directly or

indirectly exclude women from equal economic participation. Safa (1974:60) reports the same from barrio dwellers in Puerto Rico where men gain influence in their families by being employed and stabilizing their occupational situations.

In general, tribal women who come to the city with an employed husband must face a situation that is already familiar to women in our culture: they have less economic control than they did in the past and less than their husbands. If the husband is unemployed or has left the family, the wife must carry the sole responsibility. To call this situation liberating just because the woman is now "in charge," is a bitter irony; she does not automatically have control of the situation because she earns money. In many ways, she may be more helpless than ever before. She might have to become dependent on the earnings of her children. The female-headed family may be an adequate transitional solution to contemporary family life in the urban setting if women are prepared for it. Otherwise, the costs for women are extremely high. The type of female education found in traditional Guajiro society, with focus on birth control and economic independence but geared to urban life, would be the ideal preparation.

The plight of Guajiro women living along with their children is serious, but one should not forget the hardships of Guajiro families in which the husband is employed, since the tribal male starts at the bottom of the occupational ladder. Moreover, there is great potential instability from the beginning. In part, this is an outgrowth of the absence of a positive family role model in the city for Guajiro husbands (Watson-Franke 1970; Goitez 1977). As a matter of course, the Guajiro male meets Colombians and Venezuelans who follow the pattern of serial common unions, leaving their families behind and creating new unions. Coming from a very different socio-cultural background, the Guajiro man needs an explanatory introduction to his new environment. But what should he be introduced to? The model just mentioned, and one he usually follows, creates numerous problems. The middle-class family model is no true alternative, as Colomina de Rivera (1976) demonstrates in her book on women's position in modern Venezuela. In this middle class model, men ideally receive an income high enough to buy the productive time of their wives, who then are obliged to use this time to make the husband's leisure periods more effective. This is done, according to the popular media, through weaving fashion-clothes, preparing gourmet food, developing a sophisticated sexual performance, and socializing "his" children according to the latest psychological theories. For the female Guajiro migrant, this is also a ludicrous model; her husband, if she has one, does not earn the type of money to make this possible. Thus, neither of the models available in the national culture provide solutions.

CONCLUSIONS

Urbanization does not start in the city. It begins in the villages or in the tribal environment. The values and patterns developed in these settings strongly influence the behavior and, thus, the adaptation process of the immigrants. It is of utmost importance to study the cultural backgrounds of female migrants to understand the problems they have in

adjusting to the urban situation. The wide variation in tribal societies must be taken into consideration. Research has demonstrated that people from matrilineal, matrilocal societies are especially strongly affected in such a situation as compared to members of patrilineal cultures. As Gough (1961:649) has pointed out, this is because of the "different reproductive and authoritative roles of men and women" in the two systems. As wives and mothers of heirs, women in patrilineal systems are partly incorporated into their conjugal kingroups so that the elementary family represents and functions as the social minimal segment that survives the initial phases of urbanization. By contrast, women and men are more involved in their respective kingroups in matrilineal systems than in the group of either spouse. The male-dominant nuclear family in the urban context cannot incorporate these patterns so typical for the matrilineal setting. This means that people face slightly different problems in the city depending on their tribal backgrounds. It is clear that women and men experience these changes of urbanization differently, and this difference is probably accentuated when the migrants are from matrilineal groups.

The Guajiro woman in the city loses her essential support systems: 1) the institutionalized educational system for females known as the encierro; and 2) the strong links to her relatives based on matrilineal kinship. While we know very little about female education in other preindustrial societies, we have evidence that the breakdown of kinship ties causes problems for women wherever people enter the cities. This paper shows that women's reactions to the loss of their support systems differ widely. Comparative studies of female bonding are necessary to understand these reactions better and to find ways that will help women to overcome their isolation in urban centers. As I have pointed out, the life of western women in the modern industrial environment is not necessarily a good model since women in this environment are also isolated.

For Guajiro women to adapt successfully to the city in the sense of becoming independent, self-reliant beings, they must be encouraged to regain their traditional values of self-reliance and independence. Supporting female solidarity and developing groups not based on kinship would be a first step in this direction.

NOTES

- 1 This paper was originally published in the journal Antropológica (Vol. 51, pgs. 93-117). Permission to reprint it here has been granted by the publisher, Fundacion LaSalle, Instituto Caribe de Antropologia y Sociologia, Caracas, Venezuela.
- 2 During the last years this has, slowly, begun to change. International Women's Year, especially, led to a series of publications of women in Latin America in general (Henríquez de Paredes et al. 1975; La Mujer Campesina 1978; La Mujer Indígena 1975; Secretaría de Educación Pública 1975). One of the first as well as most interesting and revealing documents on women's life in the fast growing cities of Latin America comes from a woman, Carolina Maria De Jesús (1959), herself a slum dweller, made living conditions in this environment known to the world through her diary. While her report gives an intimate account of the daily hardships in the favelas of São Paulo, Carolina's life is atypical in that she escaped the poverty of the slum, thanks to the worldwide success of her book. The majority, however, remain in their condition and only a few will succeed in joining the "real" city.
- 3 Jelin (1977), for example, in her discussion of female migration in Latin America, considers the important factor of age, but does not refer to the migrants' ethnic identity and its effects.
- 4 Data presented here are mainly derived from fieldwork carried out in Venezuela by the author during the last ten years.
- 5 The case of Maracaibo makes this growth dramatically visible: in 1917 Maracaibo had a population of 40,000. In the early seventies this number had increased to more than 700,000 (Robin 1973?).
- 6 The terms "migrate," "migrant," etc. in the context of this paper refer to the rural-urban movement only without reference to the migrants' national identity.
- 7 Colomina de Rivera (1976:149) quotes the following description of "mother" given in a textbook for primary school: "Mamá es la mártir y esclava de la casa. Sufre mucho por sus hijos a causa de su gran amor por ellos, pero si ella ve que sus hijos le corresponden, se da por bien pagada."
- 8 A study conducted among women in Caracas confirmed the position that urbanization was encouraging birth control (Centro Venezolano de Población y Familia 1970:119): "La vida urbana disminuye la actitud que favorece un gran número de hijos." However, this result does not describe the situation of the recent indigenous urban woman. As the Guajiro case and other examples demonstrate, urbanization creates various setbacks for women and it leads to losses of important traditional knowledge without automatically opening doors to new

opportunities and new knowledge. It seems that these women are barred from fully participating in urban life for a long time.

- 9 For more discussion of the economic problems of artisan women in México see Annelies Pietri, Seminario sobre Impactos del sistema urbano sobre el campo del Tercer Mundo, a source which was unfortunately not available to me.

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